

## ICANN and Volunteers

As a multistakeholder entity, ICANN is heavily dependent on volunteers. How it treats and rewards these volunteers is a measure of both how it understands this relationship, and how it respects the individuals who are contributing to ICANN's success and credibility.

It should be noted that ICANN "volunteers" come in many forms. Some are paid to participate (and very well paid!). Others do so by taking paid leave from their jobs, or using their vacation time away from their families, or by giving up paid assignments to participate. The variety of volunteers, and their levels of reliance on ICANN, does have some import with what I am presenting here.

Much of what I will be presenting will cost ICANN money, but it pales in comparison to the value of the time that many volunteers contribute, and it is this volunteer participation that gives ICANN the credibility to claim that its multistakeholder model deserves the respect of those who would choose to take control of the Internet. For some items the cost is minimal. A significant number of the issues relate to travel but that is not surprising when travel issues are the prime mechanism under which most active volunteers directly interact with ICANN. Unlike the support of volunteer policy activities, ICANN does not seem to appreciate the benefit it reaps and ostensibly views volunteer travel purely as a cost-centre that must be controlled.

The issues range from those which can affect the vast majority of ICANN volunteers, to those that are likely only applicable to AC/SO Chairs and perhaps the Chairs of other major efforts.

Overall, if I consider the sum of all recognition of volunteers in ICANN, I have to say I am not impressed. For the vast majority of volunteers, the only real recognition they get from the Organization is when they step down from a position, they get a pretty certificate in a blue folder - if they actually attend their final meeting. The Ethos and similar awards are great, but by their nature they can focus only a very few and serve to highlight how little we publicly or privately recognize others.

**Much of what I will am raising here has already been brought to the attention of ICANN management, most of it in writing, and with little effect. I am one of the ones making earlier suggestions, but I am far from alone.**

I will also note that I am entering my last year as ALAC Chair. My involvement is likely to ramp down, and if action is taken on any of the issues I raise, I am not likely to be a major recipient. It is my care for the institution that is driving this, not self-interest.

I'll start with something that is an absolute given for many organizations – a lapel pin featuring the ICANN logo. The cost is low, and it would allow people to visibly affiliate with ICANN when not present at ICANN. Moreover, it is a conversation starter that gives the ICANN volunteer an opportunity to share information about ICANN. Pins could be given out to select volunteers, all who occupy positions within AC/SOs, or simply included in the ICANN bag given out at meetings I have seen all variations in other non-ICANN groups. At one point, ICANN also gave out lapel pins with its logo and a notation of how

many meetings people had attended. They were awarded to those who had attended more than a few meetings (perhaps 20?), with gradations of either five or ten meetings. I believe the last time this was done was at ICANN30 in Los Angeles (the meeting at which Vint Cerf left). My former university gave out such pins with a little gemstone denoting the number of years. I suspect ICANN simply wrote the number on the pin (a supposition, since I never received one).

Another category of benefit and appreciation to volunteers are professional development courses. Although the “Leadership Training Program” developed within At-Large and now operating ICANN-wide is a good start, it is far too little in scope, timing and the number of people involved. We regularly put people into positions that they do not have the skills to do, and we presume they will manage. Other organizations I have been affiliated with sent people on one-week “mini-MBA” courses designed to give them a variety of skills required in their work. When this is done in a volunteer environment, many participants later credit the courses with helping them get promoted in their day-jobs – a real benefit.

You already spend a fair amount of time with ICANN volunteer leaders at various levels, and I am delighted to see that this has grown from the original 15 minute Fika<sup>1</sup> (which always seemed to run over) to the current 45-minute schedule. Although you and other senior ICANN staff need to be cautious with your time, I cannot stress how valuable such opportunities can be. During my tenure as ALAC Chair, I have had the honour and pleasure of meeting with Steve Crocker prior to each meeting. The meetings range from a quick 45 minute breakfast or lunch to longer sessions when time permits, including one leisurely dinner. They have largely been just one-on-one private discussions with no pre-set agenda and allow me to raise issues that I think are important. They are among the most useful and effective times I spend at ICANN meetings. Since Steve has continued these uninterrupted from when they started with Olivier as ALAC Chair, I have to presume he has found them beneficial as well.

As I mentioned earlier, travel issues are high on many (but not all) travellers’ minds. For those who would go to ICANN meetings regardless of ICANN funding (and did for many years before there was such general travel funding available), it is not a big issue. If ICANN is willing to pay, many will take it. But for some of us, where no ICANN funding means no ICANN meetings, this issue is of greater import. I will hasten to add that contributions to ICANN are possible without travel, and indeed, I and many others devote immense amounts of our time to ICANN teleconferences. But for most people, without the at least occasional “taste” of ICANN directly, working remotely becomes more difficult. And without a reasonable indoctrination in person, working only remotely is a fool’s effort, particularly for those in At-Large where there is no direct or indirect connection or benefit to our “real lives”.

Before going on, I will note that we do have the occasional “ICANN tourist”, those who are mainly in it for the travel. They contribute little and take every opportunity to see the sites and skip meetings if they think or hope no one will notice. But there are not many of those. But there are far more of us who fly in, work, and leave, often trying to minimize the number of days away from work and family. And on the rare occasion where we may take a day or two adjacent to the meeting to be a tourist, we do so openly and without expecting ICANN to foot any of the additional costs.

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<sup>1</sup> When I first heard the word, I presumed it was somehow related to that name of one of my favourite restaurants, Bakfickan. Research into both names has since corrected my poor assumption!

There have been many debates over volunteer travel policy in ICANN, and I have been involved in more than a few of them with a long succession of ICANN financial and human resources officers over ten years. The one common theme is ICANN's desire for simple rules that apply universally to everyone, something that I think is an oxymoron.

I must say that things have gotten somewhat better over the last years. There are not QUITE as many battles over selecting particular flights of schedules. But when they do happen, they are just as stressing for the volunteer. In one case (for the upcoming ICANN60 meeting), there were days of to-and-fro to agree on schedules, with ICANN trying to force itineraries which would be physically crippling and cost the volunteer hundreds of dollars extra on un-reimbursed expenses, all to save the costs of one or possibly two night's hotel room. Although the matter was eventually and reasonably settled (albeit at increased cost to ICANN because of the delay), the comment from that person, who puts in an incredible number of hours on behalf of ICANN, was *"it does make one feel so valued for one's volunteer time both at ICANN Meetings and intersessionally"*.

Travel is one area where ICANN can show its appreciation for those of us who are truly dedicated to ICANN. ICANN already acknowledges this by providing business class air travel (for suitably long trips) for Board Members and for AC/SO Chairs. Even in this case, non-Board volunteers are at a disadvantage. Board business class travel is for all trips taken on behalf of ICANN. For Chairs, it is only for travel to ICANN meetings (that is not what the policy actually says, but that is the way that ICANN staff have chosen to interpret it). But it is not just in the mode of travel that distinctions are made. Board members, presumably like senior ICANN staff, set their arrival and departure dates to suit their business needs. AC/SO Chairs are given prescribed dates. An AC/SO Chair is entrusted with managing a critical ICANN resource, which implicitly commits large sums of ICANN funds to be used, presumably in intelligent ways, but they are not sufficiently trusted to say that they need an extra hotel night to ensure that they can do their job properly.

AC and SO Chairs are not the only ones who dedicate significant efforts to ICANN. In recent years, we have invented new structures such as Specific Reviews (formerly AoC Reviews) and CCWGs. The people who lead these efforts also put in impressive amounts of their personal time and effort (and for those who are employed, of their employers' time). Since these structures have traditionally not had formal funding and travel rules, they have been governed by the same travel policy document as AC/SOs. Except for the most part, although they are governed by the policy which says that Chairs travel in business class, they do not. Usually. Occasionally they seem to be exceptions, although how or why is unclear. Occasionally a Chair is given business class. And for some groups all members fly in business class all of the time (the WHOIS Expert Working Group was one such group, as is the ICANN Technical Experts Group). Policy that is implemented sporadically, without any understood pattern, is quite reasonably suspect, and the hypotheses of why there is uneven implementation do not enhance credibility or engender a feeling of being truly appreciated among those who are not "favoured".

Although perhaps not politically correct, age is also an issue that should be considered as a factor. I can only talk about it from a very personal point of view, but I suspect I am not alone. I estimate that over my career, I have flown about 1.5 million km on long-haul flights (>5000 km), much of it in economy. It

was never the most rewarding experience, but it was doable. I am now at a stage where, even though I do not currently have a documented medical disability, it is just too hard on my body (I will not fly long-haul economy for personal travel for the same reason). Occasionally I can upgrade flights at a modest personal cost, and am willing to do so, but that simply is not an option for most trips. (As you might imagine, this will be a consideration on how I may stay involved once I step down as ALAC Chair.)

The last travel issue is, I think, a great example of how ICANN addressed similar issues, one by being reasonably accommodating and understanding traveller issues, and the other with inflexibility. If a flight is scheduled to arrive early in the day, ICANN generally reserves the hotel room from the previous night. That allows the traveller to get their room immediately on arrival, and not have to wait for the official check-in time which can easily be 3 pm in many places (and enforced!).

However, when a departure is scheduled for late at night into the morning hours, ICANN offers no respite. If there are meetings during the day, an early morning (or at best noon) check-out will be required. ICANN does nothing to facilitate a late checkout, or pay for a ½ or full day extra. Or even provide a few rooms which one could reserve to take a shower and change cloths before leaving for the airport for what is often a 25-30+ hour trip.

I will end by going back to the example of Board members. Board members are volunteers, but are granted a wide range of benefits. In addition to those mentioned already, they often receive special transportation services, have access to the staff room (as a place to meet, confer with staff or access facilities such as printers) and catering areas at ICANN meetings, all of which are off-limits to most of us, receive financial compensation, and are treated with a certain deference by ICANN staff. I do not begrudge any of this. But I believe that ICANN needs to realize that there is an entire spectrum of levels of volunteering and there need to be suitable recognition (and benefits) that are commensurate with the contributions. Board membership is an easy line of demarcation, as are AC/SO Chairs, but the contributions of others are at times as high or higher, and these need to be substantively recognized.

There are a host of other aspects to this that I could go into, and potential “rewards” that would be valued, but four pages is enough to start this discussion. I look forward to continuing it in various venues. If there only one legacy I could leave to ICANN, I would like it to be that ICANN truly and demonstrably values the contributions that its volunteers make.

**Alan Greenberg**  
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