

## **Non-Commercial Stakeholders Group**

*Representing the interests and concerns of  
non-commercial Internet users in domain name policy*

### Questionnaire Response from the Non-Commercial Stakeholders Group

#### **1. What guidelines does your group have for supported travelers? How do these differ from the ICANN Community Travel Support Guidelines?**

The NCSG currently does not have its own guidelines for travel support. For the allocation of travel slots for NCSG EC, it is our existing practice that one slot is allocated to the NCSG Chair, and each of the two NCSG constituencies decides which one of their representatives will attend the ICANN meeting. They inform the Chair of that decision.

#### **2. What aspect of the current ICANN Community Travel Support Guidelines work well for your group?**

The NCSG is very appreciative of the travel support that ICANN offers us. As a network of individual and organisational academics, Internet end-users, and civil society actors representing the interests of non-commercial registrants, we represent a broad cross-section of the global Internet community, and are volunteers in the truest sense of the word. We volunteer at ICANN because we care about the Domain Name System, and we have no financial incentives to be here. Accordingly, with no employers to reimburse our travel and no alternative funding sources to cover our travel, we have limited means with which to participate in the meetings that we need to be present at in order to fulfil our chartered mandate and to legitimise the multistakeholder model. The simple truth of the matter is that the multistakeholder model would not function without representation from civil society, and ICANN's travel support for active volunteers is crucial in many cases.

#### **3. What specific area of the ICANN Community Travel Support Guidelines affect your group the most?**

We feel very strongly that ICANN should continue to provide targeted funding to support and retain volunteers who are productively contributing to ICANN community activities.

As a community of volunteers, the current travel support policy does not provide us with the resources to bring our most active and valuable voices to each meeting. This is because the resources allocated to us are neither sufficient (in terms of sheer number of slots) nor adequate (in terms of actual provision). We believe there should be a common travel policy for all ICANN funded travelers who are active participants in ICANN policy work, whether they be ICANN board members, ICANN senior management, or community members, and that there should be a reasonable increase in the number of travel slots that ICANN funds to bring those actively engaged in policy work to ICANN meetings.

We are volunteers with professional and personal obligations outside of ICANN. We are not compensated for the time that we spend in working groups, reviewing documents, or building our constituencies. Air travel, and our recovery from it, represents a significant burden for many of our members, but it is something that we tolerate, even though it unnecessarily absorbs more of our time than we would like. But this does need to change. Our members need to be able to work from the moment they land in a city and a face-to-face meeting

begins, and on long-haul flights, they also need to be able to work productively while traveling. We are not looking to travel to meetings in opulence, but we would like to be able to travel to meetings in reasonable comfort and at reasonable cost to ICANN.

We feel very strongly that the current travel guidelines do not support us in our endeavour to be at the top of our game from the minute we arrive in a city for a face-to-face meeting. The current policy typically sees travelers authorised to arrive in a city on the day before a meeting begins. In practice, however, this means traveling for up to 14 hours in an economy-class seat, arriving at the hotel after midnight, and needing to be up by 6am to make our first breakfast meeting. This means that our volunteers do not have the opportunity to have a full night of rest before the meeting begins. Furthermore, it is well documented that frequent economy-class travel has a negative impact on one's health and wellbeing, including increasing one's risk of developing deep vein thrombosis or a pulmonary embolism, among other conditions. Our jetlag is exacerbated by the fact that we are required to travel on the cheapest ticket available, often at the least convenient hour of the day, in economy, on tickets that typically cannot be upgraded with miles.

We respectfully ask that ICANN consider making reasonable adjustments to the community travel guidelines to ensure that participants are able to travel to meetings at reasonable cost and in reasonable comfort. We suggest that ICANN allow travellers to arrive at least 12 hours before the start of the working day so that they get enough rest. We understand that for some travelers this may require that ICANN purchase an additional night of hotel. Travellers from rural regions who, in order to attend a meeting must combine several modes of transportation, require a reasonable degree of flexibility in arrival time to recover from journey. In addition, a policy that permits travel in a premium cabin under justified circumstances such as the distance and hours spent on the aircraft, or at least an option (upon request) to book a ticket that a traveller can upgrade using their own miles, would significantly improve the current situation. Many travelers may decline the option to travel in a premium cabin but the option should be available. We understand that travel in a higher class of travel might raise the overall cost of community travel support to ICANN, so we suggest that the relief be targeted at those with no other means of financial support to attend a meeting, and be aimed at long-term volunteers with at least two years of proven active involvement in the ICANN community, in order to avoid overspending. We also provide other suggestions on how travel expenditure could be reduced later in our response to this questionnaire.

Finally, while there has been significant improvement considering visa support (and we thank you for that), we would like to ask Constituency Travel to sustain this effort with regard to issuing all the documents, including hotel booking confirmations and itineraries, in a timely manner. We would also ask to provide support on information about per-diem or fellows stipend allocation timely, and other possible means for money transfers. The community has members from countries where the banking system may not help them identify these orders easily and ICANN staff can help swiftly.

**4. What area might be added to the ICANN Community Travel Support Guidelines to provide additional support to your group?**

Our participants travel frequently and have many professional and personal obligations outside of ICANN. They need to be able to work on the day of arrival in a city. ICANN's current travel policy does not provide relief for frequent travelers and does not consider the impact of air travel on one's health, safety, and time. The relief that we believe would be appropriate is, as explained above, being able to arrive at least 12 hours before the start of the working day (as opposed to simply the night before), and having the option under certain circumstances to travel in a premium cabin.

We would also like to ask that the travel guidelines be updated in order to fully reimburse reasonable expenses related to obtaining visas. In many cases, particularly for travelers in less urban areas, the supported travellers have to take a train or fly to another city to apply at the embassy or the visa centre. In some cases these costs are higher than the visa fees themselves and are certainly beyond the official USD 200 lump sum provided for in the current guidelines. We would like to highlight that this should be only be for reasonable and justified expenses, and Constituency Travel should be consulted in advance about estimated costs, and reimburse costs only upon receiving receipts and supporting documentation.

**5. How does your group allocate its community travel support slots? How are members prioritized? How are newcomers to ICANN considered?**

At the NCSG level, the limited travel support that we receive from ICANN is allocated to our elected officers. There are also three travel slots allocated to the Executive Committee, which are being assigned by rotation between the 5 members of the NCSG EC. If an elected officer is unable to attend an ICANN meeting, the NCSG allocates their travel slot to other active members of the stakeholder group. In addition, GNSO Councillors get travel slots to perform their duties at Council during ICANN meetings. The NCSG does not receive CROP support, but we would like to be able to partake in this programme.

**6. What, if any, educational and informational activities does your group conduct to inform participants of ICANN community resources?**

There are calls for expression of interest published on the mailing list. All members who meet the criteria can apply, with selection made based on merit.

**7. What are actionable and measurable expectations your group or leadership has for members who receive travel support? Are there follow-up reporting requirements for members who attend ICANN Public Meetings and/or receive Community Regional Outreach Program (CROP) funding?**

There is an expectation of attending GNSO, NCSG, and Constituency (NCUC, NPOC) meetings, proposing and organizing thematic sessions and participating actively in the discussions. Supported travellers are customarily required to provide a report and to update our membership about the activities going on during ICANN meetings, in addition to attending the relevant meetings. These reports are distributed on mailing lists and are occasionally published through our own, and ICANN, communications channels. We would

like to work with ICANN's communications department to further amplify the audience engaging with such reports or social media content, which can make engagement in ICANN meetings increase exponentially.

**8. Instead of reimbursement for travel-related expenses, would your members prefer to receive a stipend or per diem from the ICANN organization?**

We prefer to keep the current arrangement of receiving a daily per diem instead of reimbursement of expenses. We would also like to note that finalizing these payments before travel is paramount to our members. Those who do not have access to efficient banking systems may go through additional hurdles in receiving financial support and information about per diem emission and receipt could be improved to safeguard the community participation in meetings.

**9. Are there categories of travel and events that you are not presently able to support?**

Yes. As the NCSG is not eligible to participate in CROP (though we would like to be), we are unable to regularly support our members' participation in civil society fora where we could recruit qualified new members. In particular, we would like to be able to participate in the global Internet Governance Forum (IGF), the annual World Summit on the Information Society, the Internet Freedom Festival, RightsCon, and other regional fora where we have a genuine and justified need to participate.

Furthermore, the current arrangement to participate in the IGF with the support of ICANN depends on the acceptance of the workshop proposals submitted by the NCSG. With the increasing competition in the proposals submitted for the IGF and their increasing numbers, these travels slot depend on the IGF MAG selection. This is problematic due to high competitiveness, the possible narrower focus of ICANN-related proposals (which does not undermine their importance), changing criteria, and the possible subjectivity of the MAG.

We suggest that at least one ICANN travel slot for the IGF be allocated to the NCSG annually, without dependency on MAF decision, which we could then assign upon an open call to one of our most active NCSG members (active both in NCSG policy making and IGF participation in terms of speaking and representation). This would be helpful in order to increase our visibility and involvement in the IGF.

**10. How does your group plan for upcoming events? What is your planning cycle for deciding on whether ICANN community or organization resources might be used?**

The NCSG Executive Committee makes these decisions.

**You are welcome to append any general comments on the community resource consultation.**

We would like to point out that the questionnaire contains no questions related to the ICANN Fellowship, NextGen@ICANN programme, and ICANN community onboarding programme. As one can see from the ICANN travels reports, many of the travelers who ICANN supports participate in the Fellowship, NextGen, and community onboarding programmes.

The costs of these programs for ICANN are quite high compared to SO/AC travel expenses. The value and effectiveness of these programs in their current state are, however, uncertain. There are no KPIs or any other forms of assessment considering how active those sponsored as fellows - especially returning fellows - are in policy making and other community processes. While there are some cases of successful contributions of the fellows in the ICANN community, there are no tools to identify these fellows and support and encourage the active contributors. With inflating costs, increasing scale and unclear benefits, there is definitely a need for the reassessment of these programs in order to increase their effectiveness. While we agree that both newcomers and active members of ICANN community should receive travel support, it should be provided to those (at least in case of returning ICANN fellows) who are actively contributing to working groups and policy making processes. This means contributing not only by visiting different sessions at the ICANN meetings, but also taking active part in different processes between the meetings, when most of the work is being done. The current scale of these programs doesn't look like a wise resource allocation. We would encourage ICANN to undertake a broad community consultation to assess the value (if any) in the continuation of these programmes at their current scale.

The reassessment of these programmes via a broad community consultation could also solve other problems that are outside of the scope of this questionnaire. There is no question that some of our asks may have budgetary implications for ICANN. But the value that the NCSG brings to ICANN - by way of our legitimising the multistakeholder model and developing policy through donated time - far outweighs this. We believe that a proper evaluation of existing resource allocation may make it possible for ICANN to better retain hardworking volunteers and attract new active participation without there being an overall increase in cost of community travel support.

Currently these programs (fellowship and next generation) have selection committees which do not have a community call for volunteers, SO/AC leaders could be involved in assessing the composition of these committees and even in fellows selection. We have had instances where fellows alleged an affiliation with NCSG and NCUC or being active in working groups and this was not verifiable information. Candidate members, therefore, should make this status clear when applying for Fellowship and similar programs. NCSG has a vetting process of their membership and candidate members are only confirmed when their affiliation to the stakeholder group is deemed without conflicts of interest. Travel reports for fellows should also be shared with their affiliation group. This can be beneficial for assessing the effectiveness of the program and performance reviews of community members.