Genesis & Mandate

Section 9.3 of the Affirmation of Commitments states: “If and when new gTLDs (whether in ASCII or other language character sets) have been in operation for one year, ICANN will organize a review that will examine the extent to which the introduction or expansion of gTLDs has promoted competition, consumer trust and consumer choice.” An implementation advisory group recommended a set of 66 metrics [PDF, 472 KB], which the ICANN Board adopted, for the review team to consider. ICANN has been collecting data on many of these metrics. In addition, ICANN commissioned a global survey and economic study to gather data on certain metrics. Baseline reports on consumer and registrant awareness of new gTLDs have been published along with an economic assessment of competition in the domain name marketplace. These and other supporting materials will be made available to the review team to inform its work.

Under the Affirmation of Commitments (AoC), ICANN launched a process to review the extent to which the introduction of gTLDs has promoted Competition, Consumer Trust and Consumer Choice (CCT Review). This AoC mandated review also will assess the effectiveness of the application and evaluation processes, as well as the safeguards put in place by ICANN to mitigate issues involved in the introduction or expansion of new gTLDs.

To conduct this review, a Competition, Consumer Trust, and Consumer Choice Review Team was formed in late 2015. The resulting recommendations from the CCT Review Team will be provided to the Board and posted for public comment. The Board will take action within six months of receipt of the recommendations. Note that the recommendations, if accepted, may take different paths (e.g., some could relate to policy issues and could be recommended for going through the policy development process in the GNSO).

Preparations to inform the CCT Review Team's work areas are described below.

Mandate

The Review Team is charged with assessing:

- the effectiveness of the application and evaluation process. This may be informed in part by a set of program implementation reviews. The work described above will provide an input to the Review Team in this area.
- the effectiveness of safeguards put in place to mitigate issues in the New gTLD Program. A set of new protections were required of all new gTLD registry operators. The previous analysis on rights protections described below, as well as additional quantitative and qualitative data to be gathered in relation to abuse prevention mechanisms in the Program, will be made available to help inform this element of the Review Team’s considerations

Preparation for the Review

ICANN has been conducting a series of activities to prepare for the review. These activities include developing metrics and collecting data for benchmarking purposes.

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IAG-CCT

An Implementation Advisory Group was convened by the ICANN Board in 2013 to examine a series of potential metrics that were proposed by the Generic Name Supporting Organization (GNSO) [PDF, 203 KB] and the At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC) [PDF, 491 KB]. This team, referred to as the IAG-CCT, evaluated the feasibility, utility and cost-effectiveness of adopting several recommended metrics produced by these two groups.

The IAG-CCT determined that a subset of the metrics was best evaluated using a consumer survey. To capture an accurate baseline of end user and registrant attitudes and opinions before the new gTLDs saturate the domain space, ICANN conducted a globally representative survey conducted by the Nielsen firm. The baseline was taken in early 2015 with a follow-on survey to be scheduled one year later to gauge changes in consumer trust and sense of choice in the DNS. Trust is being measured by asking for users’ experiences with phishing, malware and spam, as well as experience in navigating the DNS, including reaching intended destinations online, and relative preference for mobile applications and other software that do not display URLs, like QR codes. Perceived sense of choice is to be gauged based on questions establishing respondents’ understanding of how the DNS operates, including eligibility restrictions in TLDs, and general public awareness of the New gTLD Program. In addition to these questions, registrants were asked about how they make decisions about registering domain names. Taken together, these multiple metrics offer a multi-faceted picture of consumer trust based on opinion research, hard data on registrations in the New gTLDs as compared to legacy TLDs and ccTLDs, as well as on abusive activity in the DNS.
A second subset of metrics aims to measure competition in the New gTLD space based on an analysis of pricing data and other, non-price-related indicia. These two metrics [cks1] are sufficiently important to capture an accurate baseline of data before New gTLD prices begin to affect the marketplace. To that end, ICANN engaged the Analysis Group to conduct an economic study, starting in early 2015. The study has two primary aims: gauge the pricing practices for domains in New gTLDs against those in the legacy space; and provide a qualitative analysis of other non-price competition indicators, like technical or other business innovations. Given the sensitivities surrounding the publication of pricing data, ICANN worked closely with the Analysis Group to ensure that price data was aggregated and anonymized, such that the analysis cannot be used to engage in collusion or other market manipulation.

The IAG-CCT concluded its work and issued final Recommendations in October 2014, which were adopted by the Board in February 2015. For further information related to the work of this group, please visit the IAG-CCT Wiki.

This will enable the availability of baseline metric data for consideration, as well as comparison data as one input to the team’s analysis. Additionally, reports on the rights protection and program implementation reviews will be available. Finally, the bulk of TLDs are expected to have been delegated and launched in the marketplace at this time, enabling consideration of a variety of TLD types (for example, IDNs, geographically-oriented TLDs, community-based TLDs, brand-related TLDs) to support more detailed analysis.

**Review Team Process**

The process of convening a Review Team, as called for in Section 9.3 of the Affirmation of Commitments was launched in October 2015 with a Call for Volunteers (translations available here).

Based on the timelines of previous Review Team processes, a rough estimate for this process is that the convening of the team occurs across 3-5 months, a draft report is issued within 9-12 months, and a final report is issued within 3-6 months from the draft. The Board vote then must take place within 6 months of when the recommendations are delivered.