ICANN's New gTLD Program has given rise to business interest in running registries for so-called “closed” gTLDs (generic Top Level Domains). “Closed generics” are common words for which the applicants do not have trademarks but nevertheless would be the exclusive registrants, i.e. only they could have names under them, or “to the left of the dot.” Examples include proposed gTLDs like .antivirus, .app, .baby, .beauty, .blog, .book, .broker, .cars, .cloud, .courses, .cruise, .data, .flowers, .food, .game, .hotel, .movie, .music, .news, .search, .store, .tires, .video, and .weather, as well as some related multilingual domain names. Many of the applications for particularly choice character strings have been made by major corporations that heretofore have not been significantly involved in the domain name industry or in ICANN’s policy processes.

“Closed generics” have become a subject of great debate within the ICANN community. Critics argue, inter alia, that common words should be viewed as part of mankind’s shared heritage rather than private property; that closure is anticompetitive for domain suppliers and users alike; and that closure is contrary to core Internet principles. Supporters counter that the possibility of closed generics was accepted long ago within ICANN’s bottom up multistakeholder policy process; that the late opposition is driven mainly by registrars who would like to be able to sell names under these new gTLDs; that closed generics could stimulate the development of innovative, pro-consumer business models; and so on. Proponents of these polar positions and others it between can be found within as well as across stakeholder groups like civil society and the private sector, making this a particularly interesting debate characterized by unusual alignments and cleavages.

At ICANN’s April 2013 meeting in Beijing, the Government Advisory Committee (GAC) advised the Board of Directors that exclusive registry access should serve a public interest goal. In late June, the Board’s New gTLD Program Committee decided to prevent applicants for closed generic from signing registry contracts, pending more talks with the GAC. But regardless of the near-term state of play, the proposals for closed gTLDs raise a range of issues that merit serious consideration by the global community, including actors who do not participate in ICANN processes. Accordingly, the purpose of this workshop is to foster cross-community, multistakeholder debate on this range of economic, socio-cultural and political issues associated with closed gTLDs.

Moderator:

William Drake, International Fellow and Lecturer, University of Zurich; Chair, Noncommercial Users Constituency

Panelists:

Olga Cavalli, Advisor, Government of Argentina, Government Advisory Committee
Kathy Kleiman, Internet Counsel, Fletcher, Heald & Hildreth; Noncommercial Users Constituency (remote presentation)
Evan Leibovitch, Communications Architect, York University; Vice-Chair, At-Large Advisory Committee
Joy Liddicoat, Internet Rights are Human Rights Project Co-ordinator, Association for Progressive Communications; Noncommercial Users Constituency
Erika Mann, Director Public Policy, Facebook; ICANN Board New gTLD Program Committee
Michel Neylon, CEO, Blacknight Solutions; Chair, Registrar Constituency
Stéphane Van Gelder, Consultant, Business Constituency