

Considering Informed Consent for City-TLD Applicants

Section 1.2.2 of the 2012 Applicant Guidebook required applicants for city-TLDs to include a Letter of Non-Objection as part of their application:

"If an applicant has applied for a gTLD string that is a geographic name (as defined in this guidebook), the applicant is required to submit documentation of support for or nonobjection to its application from the relevant governments or public authorities."

Having followed the acquisition process for the .nyc TLD since 2001, I've come to see the Non-objection standard as inadequate. My firsthand experience with the .nyc TLD, and observations from afar about other city-TLD application processes, indicates that a knowledge asymmetry existed between (some /many) of the 2012 cities and the potential social, economic, operational, and political impacts of what many have come to see as a resource that should be planned and developed as digital infrastructure.

My intention is to follow the current crop of city-TLDs, monitor and evaluate their experiences, and if appropriate, explore with the Discussion Group processes that strengthen the application process for city-TLDs; perhaps requiring that applicants for city-TLDs include with their applications an indication of Informed Consent rather than Non-Objection. Additionally, city applicants might be required to demonstrate engagement by all city stakeholders in planning the application.

The bases for suggesting special consideration for cities includes their concentration of people and size: 1/2 the world's population lives in these tiny patches of the earth's surface; the potential for advancing a more sustainable planet via their energy efficiency; and their role as generators of social and economic innovation.

Informed Consent Explored

There are several standards for Informed Consent. Referring to the terms used in medicine, Wikipedia says https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Informed_consent "An informed consent can be said to have been given based upon a clear appreciation and understanding of the facts, implications, and consequences of an action. In order to give informed consent, the individual concerned must have adequate reasoning faculties and be in possession of all relevant facts at the time consent is given."

Another view of Informed Consent is in resource management: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resource_Management_Act_1991.

Informed Consent for City-TLDs

Assuming agreement that Informed Consent is appropriate for city-TLD applicants, here's a first thought on its definition.

An applicant for a city-TLD must demonstrate Informed Consent. It must provide clear indication that it understands the potential and impact the resource will have on all stakeholders. A city's demonstration of informed consent should include evidence that all stakeholders were engaged in planning the TLD application and provided their consent.

Application Development Process

Another area to be explored involves the method of engagement of stakeholders in the development of the application, and the prospect of engaging independent Internet users through the creation of At-Large structures.

Finally, to facilitate global cooperation between cities the at-large.city domain name should be reserved.