

Submission ICANN Strategic Plan
Version 1
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Introduction

The ccNSO Strategic and Operational Planning Working Group (SOP WG) was created to coordinate and organise participation of ccTLD managers in ICANN's Strategic and Operational planning processes. The scope of activities of the Working Group is to do whatever it deems relevant and necessary to facilitate and improve participation of ccTLD managers in the aforementioned processes. The Working Group shall not act as a representative of the ccNSO Council, or individual ccTLD managers collectively or individually, unless they have been explicitly asked to do so. However the SOP WG is mandated to make submissions on its own behalf.

General comments

The SOP WG notes that 9 December 2010 the Chair of the ccNSO has send a letter to the Chair of the ICANN Board, with a copy to ICANN's CEO and President requesting ICANN to, firstly, establish an organised process that it can commit to and, secondly to increase the number of days provided for public comment to 60. This may require changing internal planning processes, but is crucial to ensuring sufficient time for community members to provide appropriate feedback (<http://ccnso.icann.org/about/disspain-to-dengate-thrush-09dec10-en.pdf>). The SOP WG notes that to date this letter has not been published on the ICANN website, nor that has the ccNSO Council received a response.

On 24 January 2011 the SOP WG has submitted its first response on the strategic plan. With this submission the SOP WG wants to reiterate that the SOP, and other stakeholders, are attempting in earnest to provide ICANN the feedback it requires and requests to improve its draft Strategic Plan. It has been frustrating and counterproductive having no commitment to timelines and process. The very feedback from the community that ICANN professes to desire is being compromised by the ICANN process itself, or lack thereof. In addition, the process contradicts previous comments made by ICANN's Chair and CEO on the desirability of community participation in the strategic planning process. To alleviate this situation ICANN is again requested to establish an organized process that it can commit to, and secondly, increasing the number of days provided for public comment to 60 days. This may require changing internal planning processes, but is crucial to ensuring sufficient time for community members to provide appropriate feedback.

Finally the SOP WG notes, that ICANN has initiated it Operational planning process almost at the same time as the consultations on the strategic plan. One would expect that a strategic plan, in particular achieving strategic objectives and execution of strategic projects would feed into and shape the operational plan and budget of a corporation. It is unclear to the SOP WG, if and to what extent ICANNs FY 2012 Operational Plan will meet this expectation

Although the ICANN Board adopted the Strategic Plan 2010-2013 in January 2011, the SOP WG is of the view that the major concerns raised in the context of that Strategic Plan remain to be valid and have not been addresses adequately or taken into consideration. The SOP

WG therefore will re-submit most of its comments on Strategic Plan 2010-2013, and where it considered appropriate included additional comments.

In October 2009, a survey of members of the ccNSO Committee was conducted to gain insights from and measure attitudes pertaining to the strategic priorities developed within the ICANN community for the 2009-2012 planning period.

The following five priorities were perceived by the ccNSO community to be the most important:

1. Enhance security, stability and resiliency in the allocation and assignment of the Internet's unique identifiers
2. Implement IDN's
3. Ensure financial accountability, stability and responsibility
4. Strengthen ICANN's multi-stakeholder model to manage increasing demand and changing needs
5. Strive for excellence in core operations

Based on the outcome of the ccNSO Strategic Workshop held during the ICANN meeting in Brussels (June 2010) these priorities are still considered the most relevant from a ccTLD perspective (<http://ccnso.icann.org/workinggroups/brussels-strategy-discussion-report-23jun10-en.pdf>)

Enhance security, stability and resiliency in the allocation and assignment of the Internet's unique identifiers

In the draft Strategic Plan 2011-2014 and Strategic Plan 2010-2013 one of ICANN's four focus areas is Preserving DNS Stability and Security.

In the Affirmation of Commitments (AoC) it is stated (section 9.2) that preserving security, stability and resiliency are among ICANN's priorities and that ICANN has developed a plan to enhance operational stability, reliability, resiliency, security and global interoperability of the DNS. The plan should clearly lay - out ICANN's commitments and functions with respect to stability and security, including to ccTLDs. However, as the SOP WG will state repeatedly in its submission, while strategy and planning abound, there are no firm performance commitments or measures. A reviewable mechanism that defines key performance measures and indicators, and that holds ICANN accountable, would assist the ccTLD community in assessing ICANN performance in this and other focus area's.

Another concern is ensuring that the security and stability of the DNS are maintained with the addition of IDNs and new gTLDs. On the issue of IDNs, many communities have shown their dissatisfaction at the constraints surrounding variants. Variants are defined as characters that look alike or are pronounced alike, yet they have different Unicodes. For example, in the Arabic script, there are (ك, ك, ؤ) which have a Unicode of (0643, 06A9, 06AA). These three variants are pronounced the same and look the same - when written in a word, but the first one is in Arabic, the second one is in Farsi, and the third one is in Urdu, and different keyboards use one of the three. Variants could increase vulnerabilities on the

Internet by increasing phishing, thus jeopardizing the security and stability of the root servers. Cyber criminals may take advantage of the increased vulnerability in IDNs and the IDN system to confuse users regarding which web address or web page they are visiting. It is important for ICANN to be aware of such vulnerabilities when managing systems. In addition, there will be a need for industry support for development of solutions to the problem through technical and policy initiatives.

To run IDN ccTLDs, the following are needed for the smooth operation of ccTLD:

- 100% DNS uptime
- Distributed slaves for faster DNS query
- Automation of registry system
- Dispute team consists of local community, govt. body and other
- Efficient Technical team for Immediate response to attacks

As well, in order to improve DNS resilience to attacks, the DNS root server should be updated and patched and monitored continuously to stop attacks and threats.

In addition, although the Strategic Plan indicates that Preserving DNS Stability and Security is one of their four areas of focus, ICANN's Expense Area Grouping Report indicates only 5% of ICANN's 2010 budget will go to supporting SSAC activities and coordinating with Internet security efforts. This raises the question of whether this is an appropriate allocation of funds, or whether it is inconsistent with ICANN's priorities.

Implementation IDN's

In the Strategic Plan 2011-2014 IDN expansion, i.e. is identified as Strategic Project as part of the focus area consumer choice, competition and innovation. The introduction of IDN top level domains (TLDs) has the potential to open up a large new market for the domain name registration services industry. This will certainly offer many new opportunities and benefits for Internet users around the world by using their domain in their own native language. In this section, we have tried to focus on real concerns for the implementation of IDNs.

In addition to the stability and security issues surrounding the implementation of IDNs, other concerns include:

Increase IDN Awareness Programs – Many cc communities have limited awareness of the technical aspects and logistics of IDNs. Since ICANN has opened the channels of internationalizing the Internet, ICANN should encourage the cc community on this matter by providing awareness programs on the added-value of introducing ccIDNs. Furthermore, many cc communities might not have the manpower or the finances to raise awareness in the local community – via showcases – on the benefits of IDNs and how they could increase Internet penetration and awareness in their respective communities.

Also, the appointment of IDN consultants in various regions (in much the same way as ICANN Regional Managers) could further the process and increase acceptance to the idea.

Creating an IDN Centralized Repository – By introducing a website or a blog where the community can share their experiences with others (problems faced and solutions devised, Submission ccNSO SOP WG

transfer of knowledge, software developed, etc.), this could further encourage various communities to go forward with registering IDNs. This blog should have FAQ addressing the concern issues and basic things on IDNs. If possible online helpdesk with technical, DNS, risk management and linguistic experts where ccTLD community instantly communicate and make the things happen.

Minimizing the Gaps Between IDNs and IDN Applications (IDNA) - One of the major topics discussed within the IETF is the applications that will have to be modified to be used with IDNs. Many of the current applications do not support IDNs in one way or another. In ICANN's IDN ccTLD Fast Track process document, it has been stated clearly that "ICANN is not responsible for IDN usability issues in applications. The usability of IDNs may be limited, as not all application software is capable of working with IDNs. It is up to each application developer to decide whether or not they wish to support IDNs. This can include, for example, browsers, email clients, and sites where you enlist for a service or purchase a product and in that process need to enter an email address. Such usability problems currently exist today with the ASCII TLDs in some situations where the TLD string is longer than three characters". ICANN could help enormously by providing sessions at their regional meetings discussing IDNA with the special focus on IDNA2003, IDNA2008, and the upcoming IDNA2010.

Ensure financial accountability, stability and responsibility

How will ICANN be accountable to the Affirmation of Commitments and the 2011-2014 Strategic Plan?

In the 2011-2014 Strategic Plan world-class accountability and transparency is considered to be a strategic objective of the area of focus entitled " a healthy Internet eco-system" and the related Affirmation of Commitments & organizational reviews are considered strategic projects.

With regard to AoC reviews the SOP WG notes that the Final recommendations of the Accountability and Transparency review Team (ATRT) were published during the public comment period, and this could be anticipated. The SOP WG also notes that these recommendations are not explicitly considered, as a major mile stones and direction to substantiate the objective. In the view of the SOP WG implementation of the recommendations of the ATRT will have a major impact on ICANN and its community, and full implementation and embedding the results in ICANN will take several years and is not only of strategic importance, but also will

As noted in the analyses of Stratgic Plan 2010-2013 the AoC contains several references to ICANN's commitment to accountability, and to other actions which contribute to accountability. It also lays out its commitments to the Department of Commerce (US Government).

Section 7: ICANN commits to adhere to:

- Transparent and accountable budgeting processes,
- Fact-based policy development,
- Cross-community deliberations, and
- Responsive consultation procedures that provide detailed explanations of the basis

- for decisions, including how comments have influenced the development of policy consideration
- Publish each year an annual report that sets out ICANN's progress against ICANN's bylaws, responsibilities, and strategic and operating plans.
- ICANN commits to provide a thorough and reasoned explanation of decisions taken, the rationale thereof and the sources of data and information on which ICANN relied.

Section 9: ICANN also commits to ensuring accountability, transparency and the interests of global users. This section outlines the process for reviewing ICANN's execution of these commitments, which involves the Chair of the GAC, the Chair of the Board of ICANN, the Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information of the DOC, representatives of the relevant ICANN Advisory Committees and Supporting Organizations and independent experts.

With adoption of the Strategic Plan 2010-2013 by the Board of Directors, adherence to it will be subject to ICANN's by-laws and the AoC. A brief examination of the role ICANN's by-laws play in accountability follows.

How will ICANN demonstrate financial accountability?

ICANN's Expenditure Analysis

- States that the Expenditure Analysis by Stakeholder Interest Area method of reporting demonstrates their commitment to accountability by being transparent
- However, there are no mechanisms within the Expenditure analysis to enforce any obligations.

Not only do the AoC, the Strategic Plan, and the Expenditure Analysis establish accountability obligations, ICANN's by-laws also establish accountability requirements which govern how all ICANN business must be conducted. The ICANN by-laws contain transparency and access to information obligations, and a third-party review process, which contribute to accountable governance:

Current By-laws:

- Article III section 6 mandates transparency and access to information.
- Article IV, Section 3 (1) puts in place a process for independent third-party review of Board actions claimed by an affected party to be inconsistent with the Articles of Incorporation or Bylaws.

Proposed changes to by-laws: Two proposed accountability measures were posted in July 2009 for public comment until November 27, 2009, as the latest step in the Improving Institutional Confidence process.

- The first bylaw revision is a new mechanism called the "Community Re-Examination Vote". It would allow the ICANN community to request the Board to re-examine a Board decision taken by resolution.
- The second proposal would revise one of the existing bylaws and replace the independent third-party review process with a more robust process, the "Independent Review Body". The Independent Review Body would allow reviews of both the rationality and the fairness of Board decisions

How will ICANN be accountable to any ongoing consultations and feedback?

ICANN's multi-stakeholder process of public consultation contributes to the participation of the Internet community in ICANN's decision-making and execution of deliverables. For example:

- Reviews to global community: Annual report, Strategic and Operational plans,
- Periodic reviews of various Supporting Organizations and Advisory Bodies, are all made public.
- Obligations to consult with GAC and international community (section 9 of Affirmation of Commitments)

The Office of the Ombudsman has also been created to evaluate and where possible resolve complaints about unfair or inappropriate treatment by ICANN.

What should we be thinking about, as a community, to ensure and enhance ICANN accountability?

While an extensive framework exists at ICANN in an effort to remain accountable, in reality there is little actual responsibility and consequences in failure associated for ICANN to be accountable to its stakeholders. The Affirmation of Commitments does not contain any concrete liability, and even the proposed improvements to the by-laws would allow the board to reject a recommendation if the Board determines it to not be in ICANN's best interest. While with time ICANN may earn the trust of its stakeholders by being true to its promises, the following may ensure and enhance ICANN accountability:

- Ensure diversity and independence on the board of directors. By ensuring diversity of interest and background on the Board of Directors, the various viewpoints of stakeholders can be heard and maintain weight at the decision-making level. This could be further entrenched in the nominating committee's guidelines.
- Implement the proposed review process. The proposed review process would allow reviews of more than just board actions which are contrary to the by-laws; it would allow for a review of the rationality and fairness of board decisions. The review process could go even further by allowing review of administrative decisions and actions, and could contain obligations on ICANN to implement the recommendations.
- Implement a way to remove the board. Although the bylaws contain a procedure for removing an individual board member, a democratic method for removing the board could be planned for in the event of a serious lack of accountability.
- Implement more checks-and-balances of operational responsibilities and ideas by distinguishing between ICANN's focus and those areas which can be done or in fact are delegated to other organisations. Facilitate a framework of competition not only towards the domain market but also with regard to "the-best-way-to-operate" by fostering an open, minimal regulatory and innovation friendly environment.
- As the discussion from the Strategic Plan and the financial plan are disassociated interrelations between both are difficult to identify. It could be worth to discuss if transparency and informed decision making can be increased when interrelations are clearly documented through the whole process.

What sort of hard measures might we put in place to measure "accountability effectiveness"?

The AoC states that ICANN will organize a review of its execution of its commitments (including to accountability and transparency) no less frequently than every three years. However, the AoC goes on to say that the review will be conducted by a team consisting largely of ICANN related individuals, and does not provide for any enforceability of the recommendations flowing from the review team. As well, despite the numerous other documents referring to ICANN's accountability, no mechanism for measuring accountability effectiveness has yet been established.

Measuring accountability effectiveness could be accomplished by creating a mechanism that defines key performance measures and indicators. The review should be undertaken by an independent auditor and recommendations flowing from the review should follow the review process established in the ICANN by-laws.

Strengthen ICANN's multi-stakeholder model

In the 2011-2014 and 2010-2013 Strategic Plans the multi-stakeholder model is viewed as part of the unique characteristics of ICANN. It is formulated as:
ICANN is a multi-stakeholder, private sector, non-profit organization that administers the Internet's naming and numbering system with our partners. It provides a key forum for global Internet governance, involving thousands of companies, individuals and government participants.

It is further described as part of the area of focus i.e. to contribute to shaping a healthy Internet eco-system. In terms of the draft Strategic Plan:

As a strong multi stakeholder organization, ICANN also works to make sure that the views of all stakeholders are heard on Internet related issues. ICANN is active participant in debates on Internet governance, bringing the views of our diverse multi-stakeholder community. ICANN strives for exemplary levels of accountability and transparency, and seeks to bring the sesame high standards to all aspects of the Internet eco system.

Through the Affirmation of Commitment that was signed in 2009, ICANN has a number of obligations. Over the life of this plan, we will be honouring those obligations by implementing community reviews and initiating impact reporting on all major decisions.

What is scope of this topic?

In the draft Strategic Plan the scope of what is considered the multi-stakeholder model is not further described. Given the global nature of ICANN and the inclusion of stakeholders from different cultural backgrounds, further description and discussion is warranted to make sure there is a common understanding of the model. It is implied that ICANN is representing the views of its multi-stakeholders.

Furthermore, it is indicated in the Strategic Plan that there is a close link between this topic and the Affirmation of Commitments, which is further implied in the strategic objectives and projects.

Strategic objectives

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From the Strategic Plan 2010-2013 it is unclear, what the benchmarks for the first two objectives are and when they are considered to be achieved. The objective of one unified, global Internet could be considered to be overarching to all focus areas, and should not be only be part of this topic area.

Assuming the purpose is also to strengthen the multi-stake holder model, it is unclear if and to what extent the listed objectives do cover that topic. This is also due to non-availability of the underlying analysis.

Strategic projects

It is unclear whether the listed projects are sufficient to achieve the strategic objectives listed. It is noted the community reviews are not specified, nor is the impact on the community considered. It is unclear how these reviews relate to the reviews under the bylaws, for instance the review of the ccNSO which is currently conducted. Nor is it clear whether the reviews will be recurring during the term of the Strategic Plan. If the review and impact reporting follow from the Affirmation of Commitments, its impact on the community will be considerable, in particular given the tight timeframe from initiating the reviews to implementation. Without further details, comments on achievability and appropriateness of objectives and projects are difficult. It is also noted that participation at ITU Plenipot and participation in Internet governance discussions are considered two separate projects. It is our understanding both are focused on Internet governance.

Overall assessment and implication of this topic

- The 2011-2014 Strategy Plan states that “ICANN will actively participate in a wide range of constructive Internet governance related debates in partnership with other organisations”. While it is valuable to commit to such an effort, careful attention should be paid to the work done so far in this area in order to plan any future initiative on the basis of the past experiences and their outcome. Reference to what already done, achieved or not achieved is missing in the Plan itself.
- In 2006 ICANN established the Global Partnership project to create a network of liaisons to improve engagement at local level. It would be worth to see a global report on the work done so far in order to assess if the Global Partnership approach is still the best one to address some elements of the multi-stakeholder model ICANN is intended to refine.
- It remains unclear if the strategic projects listed as part of the focus area “A healthy Internet eco-system” are sufficient to achieve the multi-stakeholder model. Among them, it would be highly recommendable that these two – Enhance communications & better accessibility via improved web site and Enhanced translation strategy – are subject to extensive community consultation in order to understand their effectiveness before any further action and budget commitment are taken.
- Under “International engagement”, the Strategic Plan says “collaborate with international organisations such as the EC and the OECD”, it should say “the EU”.

Strive for excellence in core operations

What are ICANN's ("other") core operations?

According to the draft Strategic Plan 2011-2014 the included Focus Area Definition is supposed to define what are considered to be ICANNs core operations. However in the view of the SOP WG the delineation of ICANNs core operations remains confusing and vague. According to the Focus Area Definition two rather different aspects of ICANN activities are considered core operations:

- IANA and technical activities such as operating the L-root
- Supporting processes such as finance, strategy, etc. For the sake of clarity, these two areas should be handled distinctly.

In addition inclusion of some of the items as “core operations” seems questionable. For example, it is difficult to understand why the strengthening of international presence is part of the core operations. If ICANN has specific goals in that regard they should be made clear, but expanding activities should not by itself be considered as a core activity.

In the view of the SOP WG the following comments on last years Strategic Plan 2010-2013 remain valid and should be taken into consideration and be addressed.

ICANN's bylaws state:

Section 1. MISSION

The mission of The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (“ICANN”) is to coordinate, at the overall level, the global Internet's systems of unique identifiers, and in particular to ensure the stable and secure operation of the Internet's unique identifier systems. In particular, ICANN:

1. Coordinates the allocation and assignment of the three sets of unique identifiers for the Internet, which are
 - a. Domain names (forming a system referred to as “DNS”);
 - b. Internet protocol (“IP”) addresses and autonomous system (“AS”) numbers;And
 - c. Protocol port and parameter numbers.
 - d.
2. Coordinates the operation and evolution of the DNS root name server system.
3. Coordinates policy development reasonably and appropriately related to these technical functions.

The SOP WG has assumed that subsections 1 and 2 above should be considered as ICANN's “core operations”, while section 3 consists of “other”. The Strategic Plan 2010-2013 (and current draft Strategic Plan 2011-2013) commits to process improvements as well improvements in security and strengthening of ICANN's core IT infrastructure.

“IANA” and “Root” seem to be the key concerns under this strategic area of focus. However, things get confused when in the same category, under “staff work” things like “board support” and “financial operations” are mentioned.

What is meant by “to excel” in this context?

We consider this to imply a level of operational excellence. ICANN’s strategic objective in this area of focus for 2010-2013 as far as we can determine is to reach operational excellence in the following fields:

- The coordination of the allocation and assignment of Domain names, IP addresses, AS numbers and Protocol port and parameter numbers; and
- The coordination of the operation and evolution of the DNS root name server system.

Operational excellence is a focus in leadership, teamwork and problem solving aiming at continuously improving services by focusing on the needs of the customer, empowering employees, and optimizing existing activities in the process. The continuous improvement is not only about improving Human Resources quality, but also it is about the processes and standards improvement. Targets should be quantified. Metrics and KPI definition for any process is of key importance.

We therefore looked at this particular strategic area of focus from two perspectives:

- operations/processes and
- human resources.

Operations/processes

With reference to the Strategic Plan:

Flawless IANA operations: remains undefined. As with many other operational areas at ICANN, a performance matrix should be created which clearly lay out expectations and goals as well as benchmarks measuring performance. Such a matrix could cover quantity (performance/processing time) and quality of operations, with the following issues for attention:

- IPv6 readiness throughout
- DNSSEC implementation in the root
- New IDN ccTLDs and gTLDs

These issues do not only make the root larger (determine and monitor root scalability), but severely increase demand for IANA services. IANA is not ready for that, as processes are mainly manual and discontinuous, capacity is insufficient.

In anticipation of the introduction of IDN ccTLDs and new gTLDs, the focus for IANA services should be (greatly) increasing IANA’s root zone changes processing capacity to both cope with the strong increase in changes to (new entries in) the root zone as well as to improve on the present service levels.

Improved resilience: a challenge, considering the impact of several projects on the size and the amount of changes in the root

High levels of customer satisfaction: see above

Related actions to ensure excellence in core operations (but too detailed for a Strategic Plan):

- Identify core operations, key (sub-)services, define service levels and KPI’s
- Identify (key) customers for different (sub-)services

One cannot improve if one does not measure. As metrics and KPI definition for any process is of pivotal importance, ICANN should:

- Determine and implement monitoring and measuring methods
- Determine performance vs service levels
- Measure customer satisfaction both qualitatively as quantitatively
- Benchmark processes, technical and financial performance: effectiveness & efficiency (e.g. with registries)
- Improve performance
- Work towards compliance with quality standard (ISO 27001/2 and or 9001)

Human resources

Excellence in ICANN's core operations should imply focus on human resources, in particular in light to retain qualified staff at all levels:

1. Raising standards of the ICANN's HR policy to enlist and retain highly qualified staff for ICANN
2. Introducing the institution of certified coaches and appraisers to operate in the ccTLD community.
3. Developing a number of levers which should bolster intensity, quality and decentralization of ICANN's current efforts to build local capacity and improve the qualifications of the ccTLD community

Overall, if adequately applied, these instruments would ensure a synergy effect, which should bolster ICANN's excellence in its core operations, as well as a sound implementation of its basic operational principles.