

## DOC2. NEUSTAR’S RESPONSE TO THE EVALUATION OF TECHNICAL CRITERIA BY GARTNER, INC

The task assigned Gartner, Inc. (“Gartner”) in conducting a technical evaluation of the 11 .org proposals was both complex and difficult. Overall, NeuStar submits that Gartner produced a credible and sound evaluation. As with any complex evaluation, however, certain of Gartner’s statements are incorrect or are based upon false assumptions, while others require clarification by NeuStar. Thus, this comment process represents an important opportunity for all of the applicants to ensure that the ICANN Staff’s final report and the ultimate decision of the ICANN Board of Directors (the “Board”) is based upon a complete and accurate record.

Further, although NeuStar scored very high in the Gartner evaluation, the need for a fair, complete, and transparent selection process requires that each applicant offer any clarifications or corrections necessary to ensure an accurate record. These comments will further demonstrate this fact.

NeuStar asks the ICANN Staff to take our comments into account when creating its final report to the ICANN Board on the reassignment of .org. We have divided our comments on the Gartner, Inc Evaluation Report<sup>1</sup> (“Gartner Report”) into:

- Comments on the Gartner Letter (six-page supplement) and
- Comments on Gartner’s RFP Review (34 page report).

### NeuStar response table

| Error   | Reference   | ICANN Staff required action  |
|---|---|--|
| 2.1.1.1 NeuStar has considerably more registry experience than the other four candidates.   | Gartner letter, pages 5 and 6                     | Correct inconsistency.   |
| 2.1.1.2 NeuStar <i>does</i> provide an OT&E environment.  | Gartner letter, page 5                            | Correct evaluation.  |
| 2.2.1.1 Evaluation of this criterion omitted critical proposal sections related to stability.   | Gartner RFP review, mapping, page 8               | Include omitted sections in evaluation.                                  |
| 2.2.2.1 The logic is simple—lowest cost + highest quality = best value.   | Gartner RFP review, findings details, page 26     | Disregard Gartner evaluation and conduct their own evaluation.           |
| 2.2.3.1 Gartner incorrectly interpreted a dual-protocol environment as a benefit to the community, rather than a fundamental threat to the stability of .org. | Gartner RFP review, findings details, page 27     | Correct discrepancy in Gartner’s evaluation and rectify in Staff report. |
| 2.2.3.2 Gartner also omitted credit for NeuStar’s fluency over other applicants when it came to the SRS protocol.   | Gartner RFP review, findings details, page 26     | Correct discrepancy in Gartner’s evaluation and rectify Staff report.    |
| 2.2.4.1 Gartner’s evaluation overlooked the inherent risk of some bidders’ transition solutions.  | Gartner RFP review, findings details, pages 22-23 | Correct discrepancy in Gartner’s evaluation and rectify Staff report.    |

<sup>1</sup> Gartner, Inc Evaluation Report, <http://www.icann.org/tlds/org/preliminary-evaluation-report-19aug02.htm>

## NeuStar response table

| Error   | Reference  | ICANN Staff required action   |
|---|--|---|
| 2.2.5.1 ICANN Staff omitted Gartner's evaluation of Criterion 11. | Gartner RFP review, findings details, page 22-23 | Include evaluation of Criterion 11 and provide appropriate weighting. |

## 2.1 Comments on Gartner letter

### 2.1.1 Incorrect evaluation of NeuStar's experience and services.

One of the documents Gartner included in its evaluation of the proposals was a supplement to their Review in the form of a Letter to Stuart Lynn, President & CEO of ICANN. This Letter provided an advisory report for each of the top five candidates as ranked by Gartner. In the advisory report, they made the following two comments about NeuStar:

“However, we believe the following issues warrant additional attention should NeuStar be awarded the .org Registry.

1. NeuStar's Registry experience only extends over the past year.
2. No commitment to provide an Operations Test Environment for the Registrars. “

#### 2.1.1.1 NeuStar has considerably more registry experience than the other four candidates.

NeuStar is quite surprised at Gartner's comment, given that NeuStar has considerably more registry experience than any of the other four candidates identified in the Letter. This also seems inconsistent with Gartner's evaluation of NeuStar with regard to Criterion #1 in the Findings Details portion of their Review, in which they state, “Offering real-time registration services for almost a year.” In this section of the report, Gartner seems to be indicating this is a positive characteristic. NeuStar would like to clarify our level of experience relative to the other candidates by providing a summary of the other candidates' experience:

- **ISOC has no registry experience.** Gartner incorrectly states, “ISOC is experienced at transitioning an existing TLD to EPP. ISOC is also experienced at managing a landrush.” Neither of these statements is true. PIR, ISOC's proposed contracting entity for the .org registry, has not been formed yet and therefore has no registry experience. ISOC's proposed back-end subcontractor, Afilias, has been operating a registry for only approximately four months. Afilias's registry was previously operated by an unrelated entity, TUCOWS, Inc.
- **DotOrg Foundation has no registry experience.** Registry Advantage, the registry provider for both the DotOrg Foundation and Register.Org, has been operating its registry for less than a year, and has no experience managing a registry on the scale required for .org. It has not yet rolled out its registry operations for .pro and serves a few extremely small ccTLDs (less than 50,000 total domain names).

- **Register.Org has no registry experience.** See the description of the DotOrg Foundation for a description of their registry provider, Registry Advantage.
- **GNR outsources its registry operations,** which have been live for less than two months.

Gartner did not comment on any of these candidates' lack of experience with the exception of GNR. However it discounted GNR's lack of experience by stating, "Gartner would recommend discounting GNR's experience level should VeriSign prove to be responsible for the primary SRS data center operations." NeuStar would like to add that while running a primary SRS data center is a difficult and challenging undertaking running a registry has many additional challenges that require experience.

Given that experience is critical to the stable operations of a registry we take particular exception to Gartner's concern regarding NeuStar's registry experience, especially when coupled with Gartner's assertion at the end of the letter which states, "With regards to the items raised for all of the top five candidates; we believe that these issues, with the exception of the lack of experience, can be successfully addressed during the contract negotiations." NeuStar agrees that experience is a critical quality for the registry operator and that there is no way to compensate for lack of experience. Gartner's concern over NeuStar's experience, however, is misplaced since, in fact, NeuStar has considerably more experience than all of the other applicants.

ICANN Staff should acknowledge Gartner's comment about the critical role experience should play in the selection of the .org registry. ICANN Staff must also acknowledge NeuStar's extensive registry experience especially when compared to the other candidates.

#### **2.1.1.2 NeuStar does provide an OT&E environment.**

Although Gartner uses the term Operations Test Environment, we assume they meant Operational Test and Evaluation environment, commonly referred to as OT&E. NeuStar clearly states that we will "... establish an operational test-and-evaluation facility that will be available 24x7x365 for registrars to test their client RRP system" in Section 17.11.2 of the NeuStar .org proposal.<sup>2</sup> The OT&E environment provided for the .org registrars is referenced again in Section C25 of the NeuStar proposal.

## **2.2 Comments on Gartner RFP review**

### **2.2.1 Criterion #1. Need to preserve a stable, well-functioning .org registry.**

*ICANN's first priority is to preserve the stability of the Internet, including the domain-name system (DNS). Inasmuch as the .org TLD presently contains over 2,700,000 second-level domains, a principal consideration will be ICANN's level of confidence that a particular proposal will result in technically sound, high-quality services that meet the needs of .org registrants.*

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<sup>2</sup> NeuStar submission to ICANN for the reassignment of .org, <http://www.icann.org/tlds/org/applications/neustar/>

*Proposals should include specific plans, backed by ample, firmly committed resources, as to how the proposed operator intends to operate the .org TLD in a stable and technically competent manner. (See also [criterion 9](#) below, on transition plans.) In evaluating proposals, ICANN will place significant emphasis on the demonstrated ability of the applicant or a member of the proposing team to operate a TLD registry of significant scale in a manner that provides affordable services with a high degree of service responsiveness and reliability.*

#### **2.2.1.1 Evaluation of this criterion omitted critical proposal sections related to stability.**

Gartner did not include within its evaluation for Criterion 1 certain of the relevant and important proposal sections. The analysis should have included:

- C18—Transition plan; and
- C19—Mechanisms for compliance with ICANN policies and requirements.

Proposal Sections C18 and C19 go to the heart of registry stability and operation. Without a solid and workable transition plan, a registry operator will not be able to successfully complete the transition phase and will spend undue resources solving problems generated by the flawed transition. Likewise, without mechanisms in place to address compliance with ICANN policies and registry requirements, unexpected problems, which can in the operation of any business, will not be efficiently and effectively addressed, and likely would destabilize the registry operations.

Therefore, ICANN staff, in its final report, and the Board, in making its final determination, absolutely must consider responses to Sections C18 and C19 as they relate to a complete evaluation under Criterion 1.

#### **2.2.2 Criterion #7. The type, quality, and cost of the registry services provided.**

*The specific registry services proposed should allow uninterrupted provision of all [services presently provided to .org registrants](#). In addition, plans and provisions for additional registry services that will benefit .org registrants will be considered. Consideration will be given to proposed quality-of-service commitments. Any proposal should match or improve on [the performance levels of the current .org registry](#).*

*In view of the noncommercial character of many present and future .org registrants, affordability is important. A significant consideration will be the [price at which the proposal commits to provide initial and renewal registrations and other registry services](#). The registry fee charged to accredited registrars should be as low as feasible consistent with the maintenance of good-quality service.*

*The .org TLD will be operated with a shared registration system providing numerous (currently over one hundred) [competitive registrars from around the world](#) with equivalent access to registry services. Operation of a large TLD registry employing a shared registration system involves many aspects. In addition to the recording of registrations and provision of nameservice, necessary capabilities include Whois service, data escrow, certification of registrars for connection to the registry, processing of transfers between registrars, and technical and other support of registrars. Consideration will be given to the means proposed to supply all services required for operation of the .org TLD.*

### **2.2.2.1 The logic is simple—lowest cost + highest quality = best value.**

NeuStar has proposed the lowest price of all of the candidates. Gartner ranked NeuStar first in Criteria #1, #9, and #11; and second in Criterion #8. The quality of the registry service is, to a great extent, defined by those four Criteria. When one takes into account those rankings plus NeuStar's most competitive price, Gartner seems to have contradicted itself by ranking NeuStar fourth for this Criterion.

NeuStar believes that when one combines our low price with the highest quality registry service, users will receive the best value and therefore should receive the highest ranking on this Criterion. Furthermore, NeuStar proposes the best value without any need or desire for the VeriSign endowment.

For these reasons NeuStar recommends that ICANN staff disregard Gartner's evaluation of this Criterion and perform their own evaluation for the final report to the ICANN Board.

### **2.2.3 Criterion #8. Ability and commitment to support, function in, and adapt protocol changes in the shared registry system.**

*The selected registry operator for .org will be required to provide registry services to ICANN-accredited registrars through a shared registry system, under which those registrars provide services (either directly or through resellers) to registrants. Consideration will be given to the proposed methods of providing registry services on an equivalent basis to all accredited registrars. Applicants should show a commitment to making registration, technical assistance, and other services available to ICANN-accredited registrars in different time zones and relevant languages.*

*The current .org registry uses a registry-registrar protocol documented in [RFC 2832](#). Proposals should demonstrate the ability to support registrar communications under that protocol at the time of the successor registry operator's commencement of service. The applicant should also commit to adapting to meet changes to this protocol as adopted by the ICANN process.*

*In particular, the [provreg working group of the Internet Engineering Task Force](#) is currently working on specifications for a standard for registry-registrar communications, and it is expected that unsponsored TLD registry operators will comply with any standards that result. Consideration will be given to provisions for migration in a manner that minimizes burdens on registrars. (See also "[Transition considerations](#)", below.)*

#### **2.2.3.1 Gartner incorrectly interpreted a dual-protocol environment as a benefit to the community, rather than a fundamental threat to the stability of .org.**

In Gartner's review of Criterion #8, with regard to GNR they note, "Will provide EPP and RRP application processors allowing parallel use of EPP and RRP by Registrars." In fact, all applicants (with the exception of NeuStar) proposed a lengthy period of time operating in a dual-protocol environment. While it may seem like such an environment would be innovative and meet the needs of the registrar community, in fact it provides unnecessary complexity and threatens the stability of .org.

Although all other applicants, including GNR, proposed operating two different interface protocols, RRP and EPP, at the same time, NeuStar rejected this concept due to

the inherent risk of instability. In addition to the risk of instability, this solution also introduces different types of access for the registrars, thus creating the likelihood of different service levels being provided to different registrars and quite possibly making equal access impossible. GNR provided one of the more detailed overviews of the dual-protocol environment in Section C22 of their .org proposal<sup>3</sup>. Some of the key issues they raise and propose solutions for are:

- During the dual-protocol period when both EPP and RRP are allowed, unauthenticated transfers like under RRP are possible (under The Protocol Specific Layer).
- A transfer from an EPP registrar to an RRP registrar will result in contact information being deleted from the registry database (under Protocol Specific Rules).
- A transfer from an RRP registrar to an EPP registrar will result in authenticating information being deleted from the registry database (under Protocol Specific Rules).

While NeuStar does not agree that this would be the proper implementation of such functionality (nor would we attempt to impose such risky functionality on our registrars without going through an industry consensus process, such as the IETF), it does show the complexity and risk involved. Such complexity in the business rules of this very important function introduces the opportunity to delete critical information and create synchronization problems among the database, the Whois, and the zone file. We recommend strongly against operating a dual-protocol environment.

NeuStar proposed the most stable approach to the registry interface protocol as stated in Section C22 of our proposal that involves careful planning in a collaborative process with the .org registrars. We will transfer the registry from VeriSign to NeuStar using the version of RRP in place at the time of transition. The registrars will simply have to transfer their interfaces to the new registry. The migration from RRP to EPP will likely require additional standards development at the IETF. Since EPP also enables a thick registry model, this will offer the industry and the .org community the opportunity to decide whether it also wants to migrate from a thin registry model to a thick registry. NeuStar, as the .org registry, will work with the standards bodies and the .org community to plan the migration to EPP. Once there is consensus on the protocol and policy modifications, we will begin planning the migration with the registrars. After all of the appropriate testing and certification has occurred all registrars will migrate from RRP to EPP at the same time. This pragmatic approach will ensure the continuing stable operation of .org while maintaining the integrity of the data across the .org database, Whois, and zone file.

#### **2.2.3.2 Gartner also omitted credit for NeuStar's fluency over other applicants when it came to the SRS protocol.**

In reviewing the RFPs for fluency with registry-registrar protocols, Gartner also missed the fact that NeuStar is the only applicant to have authored and implemented an extension to the base protocol (i.e., EPP usTLD Extensions). usTLD Extensions added

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<sup>3</sup> A Proposal by Global.name Registry,  
[http://www.icann.org/tlds/org/applications/gnr/HTML/Sections\\_C18\\_and\\_C22.htm#\\_Toc12016761](http://www.icann.org/tlds/org/applications/gnr/HTML/Sections_C18_and_C22.htm#_Toc12016761)

two additional parameters required for the .us registry. Implementing the usTLD extensions required significant coordination, documentation, development, and registrar support. This included:

- Documenting the additional parameters at the IETF;
- Deploying the new capabilities in the registry including the .us database;
- Distributing an updated toolkit to the registrars;
- Providing an OT&E environment for the registrars;
- Supporting the registrars' testing needs; and
- Coordinating the process of going live with the new capabilities in a real-time landrush environment.

Gartner should have included this important experience in its evaluation of the Criterion. ICANN Staff should include this when drafting the final report to the ICANN Board.

#### **2.2.4 Criterion #9. Transition considerations.**

*A smooth transition to a new operator of the .org TLD is essential. Proposals should include detailed plans (including plans for significant contingencies) for the transition. They should also commit to provide data to allow ICANN's evaluation of the .org transition process.*

##### **2.2.4.1 Gartner's evaluation overlooked the inherent risk of some bidders' transition solutions.**

Specifically, some bidders solutions jeopardize a smooth and stable transition by:

- Providing a dual-protocol environment; and
- Not initiating a temporary freeze on non-emergency adds, modifies, deletes, and transfers.

One of the primary differences between NeuStar's transition plan and those of the other applicants is the fact that we have made stability our top priority. One of the core concepts behind the stability of the transition was the plan to transition the registrars using only the RRP interface in place at the time of transition. All of the applicants (with the exception of NeuStar, Global Name Registry, and Union of International Associations) proposed a dual-protocol environment during the transition from VeriSign.

Implementing a new interface, even as an alternative, at the time of transition:

- Adds an unnecessary level of complexity with regard to planning and implementing the transition with the registrars (especially given the short timeframe facing the industry);
- Threatens the integrity of the data among the .org Database, the Whois, and the zone file; and
- Imposes additional development and operating costs on the registrars.

For a more detailed description of the inherent risks of a dual-protocol environment, please see NeuStar's response to Criterion #8. Gartner omitted any reference to this risk in their evaluation.

One of the other core aspects of NeuStar's transition plan intended to ensure a smooth and stable transition is a two-week freeze on non-emergency transfers and a one-week freeze on non-emergency adds, modifies, and deletes to allow time to validate the data between the incumbent registry and the new registry. Other applicants have not taken this step. Instead, they intend to "flash-cut" these operations at the time of the transfer to the new registry. In our experience this both creates considerable risk and introduces the risk of jeopardizing the integrity and accuracy of the data among the .org database, the Whois, and the zone file.

Because registrar transfers can take up to a week to complete, it is necessary to ask the incumbent registry to deny non-emergency transfers for a week before the transfer of the registry. The alternative to a freeze is to allow the transfers and ask the incumbent to track transfers and provide a report of in-progress transfers at the time of transition and their expirations. This adds an unnecessary level of complexity to the transition and creates additional responsibilities on the incumbent registry. It is in the new registry's best interest that they take as much responsibility and accountability for the transition as possible. A successful transition will place as little reliance on the incumbent registry as possible. Other applicants that ignored this issue either missed a critical item in the transition or are placing their own operations at risk by relying too much on the incumbent.

Once the registry has transitioned to NeuStar, we propose a one-week freeze on non-emergency adds, modifies, deletes, and transfers. Applicants that do not propose a freeze are relying on their ability to create a perfectly synchronous set of data from the final version of the data provided by the incumbent. The one-week freeze will allow NeuStar to:

- Validate the data (esp., .org database, Whois, and zone file) that we have built for the registry against the final version of the data we receive from the incumbent registry and
- Help the registrars transition their RRP interfaces from the incumbent's SRS to NeuStar's SRS.

All applicants have acknowledged that it is critical that both the incumbent registry's data and the new registry's data are perfectly synchronized before the new registry starts performing modifications to that data. To do this will require:

- Regular data updates from the incumbent in the weeks before the transition to allow the new registry to build its own databases and files in preparation for the transition; and
- A final copy of the incumbent's data at the time of transition to create the baseline set of data for the new registry.

While NeuStar's transition plan will enable us to create such a synchronized set of data from the final version received from the incumbent, we are not relying on that plan alone. We will not risk the integrity of the .org infrastructure. We acknowledge that there are significant risks in assuming that the final set of data delivered by the

incumbent will be formatted and organized exactly like the prior sets of data, and will therefore be easy to integrate into our systems. Our experience has shown that this is a faulty assumption. Therefore, we have augmented our careful plans with a one-week freeze to allow sufficient time to validate the data. Applicants that have not taken this into account are risking the stability and integrity of .org. Gartner omitted any reference to this risk in their evaluation.

**2.2.5 Criterion #11. The completeness of the proposals submitted and the extent to which they demonstrate realistic plans and sound analysis.**

*ICANN intends to place significant emphasis on the completeness of the proposals and the extent to which they demonstrate that the applicant has a thorough understanding of what is involved, has carefully thought through all relevant issues, has realistically assessed all requirements for implementing the proposal, has procured firm commitments for all necessary resources, and has formulated sound plans for executing the proposal. Applicants are strongly encouraged to retain well-qualified professional assistance (e.g., technical, engineering, financial, legal, marketing, and management professionals, as appropriate) in formulating their proposals. Proposals that are presented in a clear, substantive, detailed, and specific manner will be preferred.*

**2.2.5.1 ICANN Staff omitted Gartner's evaluation of Criterion 11.**

Criterion 11 not only judges the completeness of the proposal but also the ability of the applicant to create a realistic solution and demonstrate the ability to deliver that solution. Therefore evaluation of the Criterion plays a significant role in determining the best applicant.

Criterion 11 was scored by Gartner but was not included in Gartner's process of ranking the applicants. It was intended to be used in the Procedural Evaluation, however it was not actually evaluated in that report, either. The only place Criterion 11 is used is to justify the Staff's selection of ISOC. Page 9 of 11 of the Preliminary Staff Recommendation states, "The ISOC proposal is also in the "A" category as evaluated by Gartner with respect to Criterion 11 addressing completeness of proposal and soundness of plans."

Criterion 11 is a critical criterion to the evaluation of the applicants. ICANN Staff must include a thorough evaluation of Criterion 11 and give it the appropriate weighting in the selection of the .org registry.