
ICANN77 | Prep Week – Grant Program Update
Thursday, June 1 2023 – 16:30 to 17:30 DCA

PAMELA SMITH:

Hello and welcome to the ICANN grant program implementation update for Thursday, the first of June, 2023 at 20:30 UTC. My name is Pamela Smith, and Yvette Guigneaux and I are the remote participation managers for this session. Please note that this session is being recorded and is governed by the ICANN expected standards of behavior.

During this session, questions or comments submitted in the chat will only be read aloud if put in the proper form, as will be noted in the chat. I will read the questions and comments aloud during the time set by the chair or moderator of this session. If you would like to ask your question or make your comment verbally, please raise your hand. When called upon, kindly unmute your microphone and take the floor. Please state your name for the record and speak clearly at a reasonable pace. Mute your microphone when you are done speaking. The session will include automated real-time transcription. Please note this transcript is not official or authoritative. To review the real-time transcription, click the closed caption button in the Zoom toolbar.

To ensure transparency of participation in ICANN's multi-stakeholder model, we ask that you sign into Zoom sessions using your full name. For example, a first name and a last name or a surname. You may be removed from the session if you do not sign in using your full name. And I will be posting a question protocol in the chat.

Note: The following is the output resulting from transcribing an audio file into a word/text document. Although the transcription is largely accurate, in some cases may be incomplete or inaccurate due to inaudible passages and grammatical corrections. It is posted as an aid to the original audio file, but should not be treated as an authoritative record.

With that, I hand the floor over to the Vice President of Implementation Operations, Giovanni Seppia. Giovanni, it's all yours.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA:

Thank you, Pamela. Thank you, Yvette. And indeed, welcome to this webinar on the ICANN grant program. So if we can move to the next slide, please. The next slide is about the agenda, the points we are going to cover during today's webinar. We'll start with the background on the ICANN grant program. And then it's going to be followed by a part that is covering the implementation progress on the grant program, which includes the progress highlights since the last webinar, the operational readiness for ensuring that the grant program [sails off] and also some explanation and information about the work we are doing to refining the objectives of the grant program and translating them into work areas.

We'll then cover the key elements of the first grant cycles, how it operates and the timeline. There's going to be a Q&A session at the end. And so please post your questions as Pamela just explained to you. So if we can go to the next slide, please.

So the ICANN grant program comes from the 2012 new gTLD round. It was indeed 2012 when ICANN launched the new gTLD round. Over 1200 new gTLDs were introduced to the domain name system and any established entity in the world could apply to form and operate a new gTLD registry, of course, subject to administrative and technical requirements that ICANN had set.

In some cases, more than one eligible entity applied to operate the same or similar top level domain. And as we know, there must be only one registry per top level domain. There were several methods to determine the ultimate registry for the new gTLDs. In cases where resolution between two or more entities could not be reached, there was a last resort auction run by ICANN authorized auction service providers. The proceeds generated from these auctions are referred to as the new gTLD auction proceeds or auction proceeds. These proceeds were reserved or earmarked until a community proposal for that distribution was produced. If you can go to the next slide, please.

Therefore, the ICANN community formed a cross-community working group on auction proceeds, CCWG AP, in January 2017 to develop a proposal for how these proceeds should be distributed. On 14 September 2020, this cross-community working group submitted its final report, which included 12 recommendations and related guidance to the ICANN board for review and consideration.

The ICANN board adopted the cross-community working group recommendations in June 2022. The board directed ICANN ORGA to produce a preliminary implementation design plan for the grant program within 120 days. This step was completed last October. Since then, work has been ongoing to design the program and to establish the resources needed for its implementation. To date, we had two community webinars that were held in the last calendar quarter of 2022 to inform the community about the progress for implementing the grant program. Next slide, please.

Now we'll touch base on the progress on the implementation of the grant program. So the implementation team progressed design work on key elements of the program, including several areas, such as the selection process, which is the process through which the applicants and their proposals will go through to eventually become successful grantees of the program. The fund disbursement and monitoring of the projects once they are funded to ensure that funds are used properly and in accordance to the ICANN rules. The program literature, which will include the applicant guide and several other items of literature. The application platform requirements, which are going to make the platform as accessible as possible. And one of the requirements, as a matter of fact, is for the platform to support internationalized domain names. And also communication and engagement, which includes an awareness campaign that is going to be produced and launched prior the launch of the first call for application.

We also launched a live in frequently asked questions section on the community wiki space that is now available for the ICANN grant program. In addition to what I just said, there is work that is ongoing on the operational readiness of the program, which I'm going to touch base in the next slide. Next slide, please.

So I was just speaking about the operational readiness. So we have started the recruitment of the people who are going to make the grant program department, who are going to work in the ICANN program department. We have posted two vacancies to date, one for the recruitment of a grant program director and also one for grant program

coordinator. The recruitment process is well underway, so we have made real good progress in recruiting those two profiles.

We have also determined that some aspects of the program will benefit from external vendors with proven track record of expertise in the grantmaking field to support some of the work on eligibility check, to establish and manage the independent application assessment panel and to provide the management platform for the applications and grants. We conducted a request for information in April and May 2023 and the results provided confidence that the market can offer these services. A request for proposal is about to be published on the 5th of June and it will be open from the 5th of June until the 7th of July 2023 to ensure that we receive a proper proposal by vendors, which we are expecting to contract to cover the aforementioned services by early October 2023. If we can go to the next slide, please.

As I said, we are also working to refine the program objectives and to translate them into work areas. As some of you may remember, the Cross-Community Working Group on Auction Proceeds proposed a list of specific objectives for the distribution of the new gTLD auction proceeds. Those were included in recommendation number 3 and recommendation number 11 of the Cross-Community Working Group final report. These objectives were accompanied by guidance for the implementation of those objectives. The objectives as defined in recommendation 3 of the final report are benefit the development, distribution, evolution and structures projects that support the internet unique identifier systems, benefit capacity building and underserved populations or benefit the open and interoperable internet.

The new gTLD auction proceeds are expected to be allocated in a manner consistent with ICANN mission. So this is the text that was included in recommendation 3 of the final report, which ICANN is currently working on to ensure that it becomes as accessible as possible because the applicant guide, which we are also working on as I said earlier, is going to be translated in the six UN languages and therefore will make sure that the language is clear in any of the available languages.

So we are currently working on refining those objectives to make them as clear as possible and also to translate them into work areas so that they are even clearer for potential applicants and for the dependent panel that is going to evaluate from a content perspective the proposals, the projects that we are going to receive. We can go to the next slide please.

So as I said, the program is in the implementation design phase. One of the most frequently asked questions is indeed when the program is going to be launched, when the first call for proposal is going to be launched. I'm happy to anticipate some of this information. So if we can go to the next slide, please.

So the grant program will operate in a series of cycles. Those cycles will have some common characteristics, including, for instance, the fact that there's going to be always the assessment of the applications from a content perspective by an independent application assessment panel. However, certain items will be piloted during the first cycle and evaluated for possible future improvements.

For the first cycle, 10 million US dollars will be the amount available for distribution. The grant awards will range between 50,000 US dollars as minimum threshold up to 500,000 maximum threshold for ICANN contribution funding to a project. These award thresholds will be reassessed for future cycles. And next slide, please.

So we anticipate that the first cycle of the ICANN grant program will open for applications in the late first calendar quarter of 2024. The application window is estimated to run for 60 calendar days, and it will be supported by an awareness campaign, which I mentioned earlier, that will start three months prior to the opening of the call for applications. ICANN will produce an applicant guide, which we are already working on, and this guide will be available in all the six United Nations languages. The guide is meant to support applicants in applying to the program in advance of the application window opening. Therefore, all the key information about how to apply, what's going to be the selection criteria, what's going to be the process for specific assessment, and many other details are going to be included in the applicant guide.

The evaluation of the applications, which is going to go through three steps. The assessment from the admissibility perspective of the application, the eligibility perspective of the applicant and the application, and the panel assessment on the content of the application is expected to last up to five months. As soon as this process is over, and as soon as the board approves the proposed slate of successful applications, the grant agreement negotiation will start with the successful candidates. Next slide, please.

And here is a chart representation of the timeline which I just described. So as I said, the estimated timeframe for the launch of the first call for application is by the end of the first quarter of 2024. The awareness campaign for the first cycle will start three months prior the launch of the first call for application, as well as the publication of the applicant guide is expected to be released three months prior to the first call for application.

As I said, the evaluation is expected to take up to five months, which is going to be followed by the board approval of slate and subsequently by the phase when the grant agreements will be negotiated with successful applicants. Afterwards, ICANN will start disbursing the funds and also the process for disbursing the funds and the monitoring of the grant is going to be described in the applicant guide in detail. So this is in a nutshell the tentative timeline. Next slide, please.

Everything that I said will be continuously regularly updated on the ICANN wiki page that we have created for the grant program. There is going to be also an ICANN page for the grant program, which we are working on. And again, it's really good to have an interactive session like this to provide this kind of updates and to make sure that we can answer some of the possible questions that you may have. As I said, we are still in the implementation design, so you may forgive us if we can provide you the information because there are still several elements of the grant program that are under internal discussion. And as I said during the last webinar, we are aiming to deliver really high-quality grant program which meet all ICANN requirements and as much as possible the expectations of our community but also a broader

community because we would like this to be a truly global grant program.

With that said, I'm happy to answer any question that may come from the audiences. You may also ask some questions later on and also reach us via the community dedicated wiki space. So Pamela, I'm happy to open the floor for Q&A.

PAMELA SMITH:

Thank you, Giovanni. We do have a question from the chat from Dirk Jumpertz, .eu, and he says, up to five months, does this mean it can be shorter?

GIOVANNI SEPPIA:

Well, I'm tempted to answer with a joke, it will be shorter if we have one application only. So if we have estimated five months based on a certain number of applications that we estimate to receive during the first grant cycle. Again, we have said that we will try to contain the evaluation process within five months because that is, let's say, the timeframe that global granting organizations have for the evaluation of projects they receive for their funding. I hope I answered the question.

PAMELA SMITH:

Okay, Giovanni, I'm not seeing any hands raised but we do have another question from the chat from Paul Diaz of PIR. How soon do you anticipate hiring and onboarding the new staff? Will they have enough time to get up to speed before the first cycle opens in Q4 2023?

GIOVANNI SEPPIA: Yeah, thank you, Paul. It's a very good question. So as I said, we're making very good progress with the hiring of the staff for the grant program department. The vacancies were posted on the ICANN website and one of the requirements is an expertise in grant program management. So when it comes to the staff that is going to be hired for the grant program department, we are going to have staff with an expertise on grant programs and also we'll make sure that there is indeed sufficient time to make them up to speed with the specifics of the ICANN grant program. Happy to answer any other question.

PAMELA SMITH: I have a comment from Sue Schuler, RySG Secretariat. The sooner you get the application information out, it would be beneficial for starting proposals for applicants. Also, I'm going to put an additional link for the slides.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA: Thank you. Thank you, Sue. Indeed, we are working to make sure that the applicant guide is available as soon as possible. We acknowledge that the applicant guide is the crucial document that possible applicants should have in their hands to start the process to apply and therefore that's why I said that the goal is to make the applicant guide available three months prior to the publication of the call. Happy to answer any other question.

PAMELA SMITH: I see one hand raised. Let me see who it belongs to. Sébastien Bachollet has his hand raised. Sébastien, go ahead and take the floor.

SÉBASTIEN BACHOLLET: Thank you, Pamela. Yes, it belongs to Sébastien Bachollet, chair of EURALO. Thank you, Giovanni, for your presentation. My question is the following. If the number of applicants who pass through the process and request an amount of support, and this amount, it's higher than the 10 million adopted by the board for this first round, how you will deal with that? Do you will ask some of them to wait for the second, another round, or do you will ask the board to give more money or you will decrease equally the amount of money given to each project? Thank you.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA: Thank you, Sébastien. It's a very good question. It's also a big dilemma for any grantmaking organization. As I said, the amount that is going to be available for the first grant cycle is 10 million US dollars. We do not anticipate to increase this amount to date. There are still several elements of this kind of procedure that we are currently discussing and refining. At the same time, I'd like to point out that the selection process is a selection process that will be carried out by an independent panel that will evaluate the proposals against some selection criteria that will also be included in the applicant guide. Those selection criteria are likely to be associated with scores. Therefore, there will be a moment, as in any global grant organization, that there is a sort of clear cut based

on the score to finance the successful proposal until a certain score because after that score, there are no extra funds available.

Indeed, those who have been successfully evaluated, but for whom there's no enough funds available, we may have a procedure for these special cases. We may also invite them to apply again for a future cycle. Again, those are options that we are currently discussing. There is nothing yet set and decided. Again, those kind of elements will be fully explained in the applicant guide. I'm happy to answer any other questions.

PAMELA SMITH:

All right. Giovanni, we have another question from the chat, also from Paul Diaz, PIR. When will more details regarding the work underway, in other words, selection process, fund disbursement and monitoring, program literature, etc., be publicized? Three months before the start of the first cycle could be as soon as October 2023.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA:

Thank you, Paul. It's a good question. So currently, we have our goal to publish the applicant guide that contains all the information. Three months prior to the publication of the first call for application, which has as a tentative timeline the end of Q1 first calendar quarter of 2024.

Of course, the sooner we get to internal alignment and decisions on the different elements of the program, the more we'll be happy to share. However, it's always preferable to share everything in one batch. And therefore, we aim really to work hard on the applicant guide and make

it available as soon as possible, so that all the information is included there without being dispersed across different, let's say, information avenues.

At the same time, again, we may continue to update the FAQs, which are posted on the Community Wiki. And therefore, that is the best place where you can find more information. I hope I answered the question and I'm happy to answer any other question.

PAMELA SMITH:

Giovanni, I don't see any other raised hands presently currently. And there are no further questions in the chat, although I am going to add the resource to the Wiki page for the recording and the grant program page. Does anyone else have any questions? Don't be shy. Give it a few seconds. I'm not seeing any further. And a thanks from Cheryl Langdon-Orr for today's update. I don't see any further hands raised. Giovanni, nor are there any further questions in the chat.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA:

Okay, so I think it's my time now to thank everybody who participated in today's webinar which aimed to provide a high level update on the status of the implementation of the ICANN grant program. It's a big program for ICANN and we are all committed to make it deliver really top quality grant program. Yvette has posted the grant program Wiki links in the chat. Stay tuned on those stages to know more. Big thanks to Yvette and Pamela for the support. And also to the tech support as well as all the interpreters. Thanks a lot. We'll see each other probably

at the coming ICANN meetings and soon. Thanks and we'll stay in touch.
Bye.

PAMELA SMITH: Thank you for coming, everyone.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]