
ICANN78 | Prep Week – New gTLD Program Next Round Registry Service Provider Evaluation Program Status Update

Wednesday, October 11, 2023 – 4:30 to 5:30 HAM

NICORIE MUSTARD:

Hello, and welcome to this ICANN78 Prep Week session on the Registry Service Provider Evaluation Program. My name is Nicorie Mustard and I am the remote participation manager 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 Q&A pod will be read aloud at the time set aside for question and answer. Questions written in chat may not be read aloud. Interpretation for this session will include English, French, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Russian, and Portuguese. Click on the interpretation icon in Zoom and select the language you will listen to during the 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're done speaking. Before speaking, ensure you have selected the language you'll speak from the interpretation menu. Please state your name for the record and the language you will speak if speaking a language other than English. When speaking, be sure to mute all other

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.

devices and notifications. Please speak clearly and at a reasonable pace to allow for accurate interpretation.

This session includes automated real-time transcription. Please note this transcript is not official or authoritative. To view the real-time transcription, click the Closed Caption button in the Zoom toolbar. To ensure transparency of participation in ICANN's multistakeholder model, we ask that you sign in to Zoom sessions using your full name.

With that, I will hand the floor over to Karen.

KAREN LENTZ:

Thank you Nicorie.

This is Karen Lentz from ICANN. We'd like to welcome everyone to this session. This is the last session that we are having this week in Prep Week in the set that we've had around the work for next round of the New gTLD Program. The New gTLD Program, as we've talked about, is based on enhancing competition, consumer choice and diversity in the Domain Name System. And the aspect of that that we will talk about in this session is at the registry service provider level. So our recommendations that we're implementing call for a new set of processes around that that we'll describe here.

So I will turn it to Francisco. Thanks.

FRANCISCO ARIAS:

Thank you, Karen. My name is Francisco Arias. I work in the GDS Technical Services Team. We are going to be talking, as Karen said, about the Registry Service Provider Evaluation Program.

Let's start first with a quick definition of what a registry service provider is. From the final report on the new gTLD Subsequent Procedures, you can see the definition there, it refers to the provider. There can be many for a given TLD, by the way, that provides one or more of the critical registry services on behalf of the registry operator. So it's something that was widely observed in the previous rounds where most of the gTLDs are using these registry service providers to operate, like I said, one or more of their registry services.

For example, they would typically have main RSP that will provide the services like EPP which is the protocol that is used for the connection between the registry and the registrars, how the registrar will manage the registration of domain names or update and renew, etc., or DNS or DNSSEC. Particularly in the case of DNS, it's certainly a good thing if they have more than one because then you can have diversity.

Another thing to consider here is that the registry service provider can be a separate entity or it can be a registry operator. There are a few gTLD registries that operate the services themselves. But like I said, in most cases, they tend to be a separate entity.

Why do we have Registry Service Provider Evaluation Program? This comes from Recommendation 6.2. They call for these types of programs

to basically improve the way things were done in the previous round in regards to the evaluation, and in some case, testing. In the previous round, the way the evaluation was approached was by daily basis. When you had this case, as I mentioned, which you have registry providers that is, say, for example, providing services for all the TLDs, and if you're doing evaluation on a TLD by TLD basis, you end up doing the evaluation 100 times for the same provider. So that, as you can imagine, it's not the best use of time or resources.

So with this evaluation, we're going to try to minimize that duplicative evaluation and instead, do an evaluation in the relevant parts of the evaluation that can be done on the registry service provider. Do it once and then the registries can opt to use one of those registry service providers so that at the time they apply for gTLD, there is no need to do that evaluation, or the parts are covered by their RSP Evaluation Program. With this, I'm going to pass the microphone to Andy Newton.

ANDY NEWTON:

Hi. My name is Andy Newton. I'm a Principal Engineer in GDS Technical Services. As previously mentioned, the RSP Evaluation Program allows for evaluation of the RSP separately from the gTLD registry operators. This is to accommodate a pre-evaluation phase of RSPs before the gTLD applications are submitted. One of the outputs of the program will be a list of the RSPs that will be made available at least six months ahead of time to the gTLD applicants. This does not preclude RSPs from being evaluated during the application phase, though. Next slide, please.

In comparison to the 2012 round, the aspects of the RSP Evaluation Program encompass the items you see here that are circled in red. That would be specifically the technical and operational capabilities of the RSP and any registry services the RSP will support. The other aspects of the round are for the gTLD applicants. Next slide, please.

Who is paying for this? Per Recommendation 6.8, the pre-evaluation program is supposed to be funded on a cost recovery basis. We need to keep in mind that a high fee could impact underserved regions of the world. And therefore, one of our goals is to try to keep the fees from escalating. We also want to note that unlike other aspects of the next round program, there is no support program for RSPs. Next slide.

Here's the RSP Evaluation Program timeline. In Q1 2024, we will hand outputs from ICANN Org over to the Implementation Review Team for review. In Q1 2024, we will then have a Public Comment period. Then Q2 2024, the RSP Evaluation Handbook will be published. In Q4 of 2024, the RSP pre-evaluation application period will begin. And in Q1 or Q2 of 2025, that has yet to be determined, that RSP pre-evaluation period will close. Finally, around six months later, we hope to have, in Q4 2025, a list of pre-evaluated RSPs published. Then approximately six months later, the gTLD application submission period will begin in Q2 2026. From here, I'll hand it over to Gustavo Lozano.

GUSTAVO LOZANO:

Hello. This is Gustavo Lozano. Can you hear me? Perfect. Thank you. I'm going to explain how we are planning to design this new program. As

you may remember from the 2012 round, the idea was that there was something called the back end registry operator. In fact, this design was so ingrained in the minds of ICANN on the committee from the time that we have the EBERO. That stands for Emergency Back End Registry Operator. Over the years, we discovered that we have different players within the industry and we have generalized those players in four categories.

As you can also read this information in the ODA, we are thinking that we need to have four types of RSPs. The first one is what we call the main RSP. This is the entity that is going to have the registry database or is going to operate the registry database and we are going to provide EPP data escrow and the additional registry services that you usually find in exhibit A, the Registry Agreement. We will also have what we call the DNSSEC RSP and the proxy RSP. These are the four categories that we believe are necessary to capture how the markets behave currently.

It's important to mention that an organization can be evaluated for one or more types of RSP. So this means that RSP X could be evaluated to be a main RSP, DNS, and DNSSEC. Now, a gTLD applicant, they must identify at least one RSP for each of the registry critical functions. That means they need to select during gTLD application at least a main RSP, DNS, and DNSSEC. Basically, what you have there in green. Next slide please.

Now, regarding the program itself, the program consists of three main components. The first one is technical evaluation, the second one is technical test, the third one is registry services evaluation. It's

important to mention that most of the questions from 2012 are mainly incorporated into technical evaluation, and all RSP applicants, they will be required to complete technical evaluation process. What happens once you fill out, let's say, an application for technical evaluation? Next slide, please.

Once we receive an application for an RSP type, let's say main RSP, the second step in the process, we are going to do what we call the ICANN Technical Review. This is going to be performed by ICANN staff. And then we have a decision box. If that RSP that is applying to become main RSP is already operating in the gTLD space and they have not had any incident that breached the [inaudible] threshold for the past six months, then we're going to consider that step to be clear. If it's not the case, then we're going to use one of the technical panels. And that technical panel is going to take a review of that application. And obviously after that review, we have a decision box in which we can have the step considered clear or not. Next slide, please.

One of the main drivers, of course, is technical evaluation, because obviously, we have the need for a panel. As Andy mentioned, we're trying to maintain the cost as low as possible. So we are scoping those questions only for those questions that are necessary for the types of RSP that is in consideration. The questions will be more specific than back in 2012. So we are trying to reduce the necessity of providing broad answers and we have given a lot of consideration to those RSPs that are using cloud services. We know that the industry is moving to the cloud or some RSPs already moved to the cloud. So we want to be sure that

we ask questions relevant to the new design for RSPs that we're seeing in the market. Next slide, please.

The other component of RSP evaluation is technical test. Currently, those technical tests, for those of you that participate in the industry, is what we call RST or Registry System Testing. But in this case, we're going to use the new version of RST, which we are calling RST version 2. RST version 2 is fully automated. All the tests are automated. Clients interact through an API, it's a self-testing designer tool, and we're going to develop a specific plan for each type of RSP. This is important to mention. Currently, we have seen that there is a necessity of having more bandwidth in the case of RST, and the way that we're going to solve this is through automating the program of RST as much as possible. Next slide.

The final step of this program or the final, let's say, evaluation is registry services. We know that there are main RSPs out there that offer additional registry services. You can see those services in the Registry Agreement of a lot of gTLDs. Those are listed in Exhibit A for most of the gTLDs. In the case of the RSP Evaluation Program, we are doing the evaluation of registry services within RSP evaluation itself. Again, we are trying to improve the service that we provide to the industry and we are also trying to be as efficient as possible. Next slide, please.

Now, in order to do registry services evaluation, we will have three parts. The first part is if you are an RSP currently operating in the gTLD space and you are already supporting additional registry services for gTLDs, you can tell ICANN for those kinds of services in which TLDs you

are offering and ICANN will go and review that this is the case, and those services are going to be, let's say, mostly auto-proof. And this is going to allow us again to gain a lot of efficiency.

The second part is when you have an RSP that is trying to offer one of the registry services in the fast-track Registry Services Evaluation process and they are willing to use the default contracting language that we have for those services in the fast track. Then again, those services are going to be basically auto-proof.

The third part is when someone is trying to offer, let's say, a new service that has not been offered in the past or they are not currently offering in the gTLD space, that's when we're going to use an RSEP-like process. We're thinking of a lightweight kind of process, but obviously we will need to follow some of these steps. For those of you participating in the gTLD space, you're used to when doing RSEPs. Next slide, please.

For IDNs again, we're trying to be as efficient as possible. So instead of doing IDN evaluation, which is basically registry service during gTLD application, we are also going to do IDN evaluation during the RSP Evaluation Program. For this, we will have three levels of support. A main RSP can be evaluated for the following three levels of support.

The first one is you don't support variant TLDs and you don't support variant IDNs in the second level. The second level of support, you don't support variant TLDs but you support variant IDNs in the second level. And the third and highest level of support is an RSP or main RSP that

can support variant TLDs and can also support variant IDNs in the second level.

RSP Evaluation will include criteria regarding the different levels of support and the applicants will be tested for that level of support that they are trying to achieve. It's important to mention that all IDN tables, even those that have been approved in the past for the entities that are participating currently in the gTLD space, those tables are going to review during RSP Evaluation with the exception of the second-level reference LGRs that ICANN Org has published. Next slide, please.

Publication of RSPs is suspected that all the answers for the technical evaluation questions for all RSPs applications will be made public similar to what we did back in 2012. And we are going to publish a list of all the RSPs that has gone through the evaluation process to the RSP Evaluation Program. Obviously, if those RSP opt to go through pre-evaluation, they are going to be included in the list of pre-evaluated RSPs that is going to be published six months before the gTLD application period opens. Next slide, please.

Finally, you may be wondering how the RSP Program is going to interact with the gTLD application process. It's pretty simple. The idea here is once that the gTLD application submission period close, ICANN will communicate to each evaluated RSPs the list of gTLD applicants and which services in the case of main RSP that we have received during the gTLD application submission. So in other words, RSP X is going to receive a list of three, four, X amount of gTLDs that are hoping to be supported by RSP X. Then the evaluated RSPs will confirm to ICANN

which gTLD applications they can support and for which they have enough capacity. Obviously, if a gTLD applicant elected an evaluated RSP but that RSP is unwilling to support it, then the gTLD applicant will be notified and they will need to correct their application. In other words, come to an agreement with the RSP or show a different RSP. Next slide, please.

Finally, as part of the RSP Evaluation Program, we will have a self-attestation of compliance with the Universal Acceptance roadmap for Domain Name Registries. And in the list of evaluated RSPs that ICANN Org is going to publish, we're going to include an attribute to specify if the RSP self-attested for compliance with Universal Acceptance. Next slide, please.

This is the last slide. And now we are going to open the floor for questions.

NICORIE MUSTARD:

Thank you, Gustavo. The first question that we received was from Ching in the chat. He asked for slide nine, type of RSPs on the proxy RSP Evaluation. Is this per country basis? For example, NIS2 country or Chinese real name verification.

FRANCISCO ARIAS:

This is Francisco. Can you hear me?

NICORIE MUSTARD: I can.

FRANCISCO ARIAS: Okay, perfect. Thank you, Ching, for the question. At this point, we are in the initial stages of development of the Registry Service Provider Evaluation. We don't have too much detail yet on the proxy type of RSP. So, I'm afraid at this point, I don't have an answer for you. But thank you. This is indeed something very interesting and something we should consider when developing the service. Thank you.

NICORIE MUSTARD: Thank you, Francisco. The next question that we received is from Jeffrey Neuman. To confirm, will ICANN require an applicant to select a specific RSP in its application? Or can it just state, "We'll use an evaluated RSP?"

GUSTAVO LOZANO: A gTLD applicant will need to select a specific RSP that they are going to use, let's say, in production. In the gTLD application portal, let's say, they will need to select, as I was mentioning, a specific RSP. It's not only one. It's a specific RSP for main RSP, at least one for DNS, and one for DNSSEC. Obviously, a gTLD applicant may elect to, for example, have multiple DNS RSPs in case they want to have multiple secondaries for redundancy in the case of the DNS servers.

NICORIE MUSTARD: Thank you. The next question that we got is from Kroopa that asked, “While RSTs will be automated, will there be a limit to the number of RSTs conducted at a time?”

GUSTAVO LOZANO: RST will be completely automated. We are not thinking of having any kind of limit in the number of RSTs conducted at a time. And we are also not thinking of having any limits on the grounds, let’s say, of RST that an applicant can choose to perform. For example, if you go to RST, and we’re not able to clear that step, then you can restart RST as many times as you want as an RST applicant.

NICORIE MUSTARD: Thank you. Then back to another question from Jeffrey Neuman. He asked, “Also there were some questions that were kept confidential in the last round, for example, security, backup plans, locations of servers, etc. Will that no longer be confidential?”

GUSTAVO LOZANO: We’re still developing the RSP Evaluation Program and we will take into consideration this question. Thank you, Jeff.

NICORIE MUSTARD: Thank you. The next question is from Elaine. They asked, “Would you provide some of the highlights of the UA compliance self-attestation? What is the registry stating they can or cannot do?”

FRANCISCO ARIAS: Thank you, Elaine. This is Francisco from ICANN Org. Then we are relying here on Sarmad, who you may know from the Org, who is our expert on Universal Acceptance. What we have discussed with him is to reuse some of the work that has been done on this regard. I believe there is a Universal Acceptance survey that was developed with the community, particularly directed that registry service providers in terms of assessing their capabilities related to Universal Acceptance. The idea here is to reuse that tool that was developed some time ago. Thanks.

NICORIE MUSTARD: Great. Thank you. The next question that we received was a follow-up to Jeff’s question by Elaine, asking, “The assumption is the applicant must be contracted with the pre-approved RSP upon application submission.”

GUSTAVO LOZANO: For most of the gTLD applicants, the expectation is that they will have some kind of relationship with the pre-evaluated RSP’s Memorandum of Understanding, Letter of Intent, I mean, something. And obviously,

those gTLD applicants will be able to select a specific, let's say, RSP. During gTLD application window, we have support for a gTLD applicant that is, let's say, trying to create the infrastructure from zero, so that gTLD applicant can tell us, "I'm going to be my own RSP and I'm going to create all infrastructure from scratch." At that point, that gTLD applicant will need to go through the RSP Evaluation Program so they become an evaluated RSP. Then they can select themselves to support their services, let's say, during the gTLD application window.

But in order to go to gTLD application, you need to have an evaluated RSP. And the answer is you can be your own evaluated RSP and you can apply during gTLD application window if that's the case. We don't expect that workflow to be exercised a lot. We expect most of the gTLD applicants to have an RSP already chosen by the time that they go through gTLD application.

NICORIE MUSTARD:

Thank you. The next question that we received is from Sebastien, "In the previous round, RSPs received a score with pass or fail levels. Are the scores intended to be published? Certain services triggered additional points searchable WHOIS. Will this be the case here? Think, for example, of the level of IDN or variant integration shown earlier."

ANDY NEWTON:

The plan is to only have a pass or fail results and no additional points at this moment.

NICORIE MUSTARD: Thank you, Andy. Next question in the Q&A pod is from Anne, “Will each RSP be solely responsible for determining its capacity to handle a certain number of new gTLDs? Is it possible that an RSP could be submitted along with an application and later back out due to a lack of capacity to handle too many TLDs?”

GUSTAVO LOZANO: So we’ll have a few questions during technical evaluation regarding capacity. But in the feedback loop, let’s say, from the gTLD application window, the RSP is going to self-attest that they can support those TLDs. And it’s important to remember that technical evaluation RST is just one layer of a multilayer approach that ICANN takes to stability and security. Right now, for example, we don’t have an RSP that supports X amount of domain names and then they have a sudden increase and they have issues. Obviously, we will detect those issues with the [inaudible] monitoring system. We will discuss with them what are the next steps and if they cannot, let’s say, solve the issue then we also have the support of the EBERO program. In reality, this is, as I was mentioning, just one of those layers of stability and security that ICANN provides for supporting the gTLD space.

NICORIE MUSTARD: Thank you, Gustavo. We have a follow-up from Elaine. They said, “Thank you. Just to make sure I understand, all applicants must have

designated attested RSP prior to application, not prior to contract execution?”

GUSTAVO LOZANO: So gTLD evaluation during the gTLD application phase, let’s say, will include a step in which you need to have a specific RSP selected for those critical functions. During gTLD evaluation, you need to have an evaluated main RSP, at least one DNS RSP, and one DNSSEC RSP to proceed through evaluation of a gTLD.

NICORIE MUSTARD: Great. Thank you. A follow-up question from Ching, “Is the RSP’s financial status being reviewed as well? In 2012, the technical answers and financial answers are interdependent.”

ANDY NEWTON: That’s a good question. The financial evaluation is currently only planned for gTLD applicants as opposed to the RSP applicants.

NICORIE MUSTARD: Thank you. We also have another question from Jeffrey, “I believe we still need to discuss the issue of designation of an RSP because of what was approved by SubPro and the Board.”

GUSTAVO LOZANO: Jeff, could you please elaborate?

JEFF NEUMAN: Thanks. I'd have to go back and check the exact wording, but I believe there was rationale and the recommendation was that the RSP needed to be designated at the point of contracting, not necessarily at the point of the evaluation. The point was that when an applicant applies, it would say one of three things, either that it's going to be its own RSP, in which case, it may need the evaluation or if it's already been evaluated, or it could say, "I'm going to use a pre-evaluated RSP," and designate that at contracting or it could be a completely new application. The rationale for that was, if I remember correctly, there were RSPs in the last round that were—I'll say is it was a lot of pressure on the applicant to choose a very specific RSP prior to applying because of the market dynamics than it would be for doing it at contracting time. That's all I'll say at this point. Thanks.

GUSTAVO LOZANO: Okay. Thank you, Jeff. Thank you for the information. We will look into that. Thanks.

NICORIE MUSTARD: Next question was also from Jeff, "Is this an issue for the IRT?"

GUSTAVO LOZANO: Yes, probably. But first, we need to take a look into that. Thanks, Jeff.

NICORIE MUSTARD: Thank you. The next question is from Phil as a follow-up to Sebastien, “If an applicant fails the technical evaluation questions, what happens next? Does it go to an extended evaluation to get a pass score on each technical question?”

ANDY NEWTON: There is nothing about extending a technical evaluation. If they fail with the evaluation, then they have to restart.

NICORIE MUSTARD: Great. Thank you, Andy. Then the next question is from Susan, following up on Elaine’s question, “You did say that the RSP evaluation could happen up front or at gTLD application. So if someone plans to be their own RSP but they didn’t get pre-evaluated, then they would be evaluated at the point of gTLD application. Is this correct?”

GUSTAVO LOZANO: The answer is, yes, they can be evaluated at gTLD application phase, let’s say, but they will need to go through the RSP Evaluation Program. Like any other RSP that is evaluated, we’re going to publish into that list that entity that was evaluated.

NICORIE MUSTARD: Thank you. I’m not seeing any more questions in the Q&A pod, so I’m just going to briefly look through the chat and see if we have anything

unanswered there, unless anyone would like to take the floor to ask more follow-up questions.

GUSTAVO LOZANO: Yes, Jeff?

JEFF NEUMAN: Thanks. I saw a pretty good question from Jothan in the chat, which I think should be answered, “Will RSP evaluation have rounds of clarifying questions and responses as an opportunity to pass?” And then I have a second question, which is at what point will the fees for the program be determined? Thanks.

ANDY NEWTON: The answer to will there be clarifying questions, the answer to that is yes, they will have the opportunity to ask questions and there will be an opportunity for the evaluators to ask them questions as well. What was the second question?

JEFF NEUMAN: It’s about the fees. At what point will the fees be decided for how much it’s going to cost the RSP?

FRANCISCO ARIAS: We’re still working through the, as you can imagine, definition of the program. So we don’t have yet the full picture of the cost. We have a

good idea. As we build things or design things, I guess, there'll be a lot at this point. We have an idea of the cost but we don't have the full picture yet so we don't have the fee defined. We just have a certain idea of what it could be. I think once we have the full picture of the cost, which certainly happened before we launch, so at the time we are certainly doing the communication campaign for the program, for sure by then we should be communicating that, but hopefully before that.

GUSTAVO LOZANO:

Also there is a comment in the chat from Elaine saying, "So you are either pre-evaluated or evaluated same criteria?" The answer is yes. In reality, we are only thinking about evaluated RSPs. Pre-evaluation is just when the evaluation is going to take place. But at the end of the day, all RSPs are going to be evaluated and all gTLD applicants must use an evaluated RSP. And again, pre-evaluation is, yes, when this happens.

NICORIE MUSTARD:

Great. Thank you. Then I think we've answered all the questions and from the chat as well. We have another question from Jeffrey in the Q&A pod. He said, "And is it correct to assume that the applicant will not be responsible for paying for a technical evaluation if it uses a pre-evaluated RSP and proposes no new services?"

FRANCISCO ARIAS:

Thank you, Jeff. Technical evaluation is only intended to happen for RSPs, as Gustavo was explaining. It's only the RSP Evaluation that has a

technical evaluation component and that can happen at the pre-evaluation time, so before the opening of the gTLD application window or at the time of the gTLD application window. But we don't intend to duplicate evaluations. That kind of goes against the whole point of the RSP Evaluation Program. Thanks.

NICORIE MUSTARD: Great. Thank you. Perfect. We have another question from Jothan, “Will existing gTLD RSP backend transfers to new RSP entities be frozen between now and April 2026?”

FRANCISCO ARIAS: Hi, Jothan. There are no plans for doing something like that. Thanks.

NICORIE MUSTARD: Thank you, Francisco. I'm not seeing any more questions in the Q&A pod or any new questions in the chat. Francisco, I will hand it over to you to do the closing remarks.

FRANCISCO ARIAS: Thank you, Nicorie. I just want to thank everyone for their participation in this webinar. This has been an excellent interaction and conversation. Thank you for the great questions that were raised here. I think we have some homework to do, as you can imagine, we're in the middle of the implementation of these RSP Evaluation Program so there are certainly things that we need to develop. We do appreciate a

lot these types of interactions so that we can get your feedback on what we are thinking. Thank you very much.

NICORIE MUSTARD: Wonderful. Please end the recording.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]