
ICANN80 | Prep Week – Global Academic Engagement Plan Update
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GIOSE MCGINTY: Hello, and welcome to the Prep Week session on Academic Engagement. My name is Giose McGinty and I'm the remote participant 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 chat will only be read out loud if put in the proper form as I've noted in the chat. I will read questions and comments aloud during the time set by the chair or moderator of the session. Click on the interpretation icon in Zoom and select the language you'll listen to during the session. If you wish to speak, please, raise your hand in the Zoom Room, and once the session facilitator calls upon your name, kindly unmute your microphone and take the floor. Before speaking, ensure you have selected the language you will speak from the interpretation menu. Thank you.

JOE CATAPANO: Thank you, Giose, and thank you, everyone, for joining us here today for an update on the Global Academic Engagement Plan from the ICANN organization. We have over 70 people, which is quite impressive. Thanks, everyone, for joining. I hope you're having a wonderful morning, afternoon, or evening, wherever you may be. My

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name is Joe Catapano. Some of you may be familiar with me from my role as the director of Stakeholder Engagement for the North America region. I've been with the ICANN organization for just over 10 years. So it's been a while.

In the second half of last year, I was trusted with the duties for coordinating academic engagements at the global level. So stepping outside of my North America role for this particular purpose. It's wonderful to finally get here to Prep Week to give the community a little feel for what has been going on. My background is in communications and public relations as well as political science. But for the purposes of this exercise, the PR role probably comes more into play such that I go light on the slides and words and heavy on listening. Present short mentality.

So, we have an hour. If we use it all, that's wonderful. If we exhaust our time before the hour's up, that's fine too, and we can follow up obviously online or onsite if folks are in Kigali or future ICANN public meetings. That is a little bit about me. I'll, of course, rely on Giose here to help me out with the chat and any questions that may come up as we move along.

Just a look for how I've structured this hour here. We'll take a look at the rationale for pivoting or refocusing academic engagement at ICANN. For those that have been with the community for a while, we'll know that there have been past efforts in this area. We've built on that a little bit. We've taken some lessons learned from previous efforts. [Inaudible] tried to prioritize a little bit, sharpen our focus, be a little more flexible and nimble such that we can respond to community

needs as they evolve. We'll talk a little bit about the rationale for doing that. We'll talk a little bit about what we've heard both from you folks in the community through informal conversations I've had as well as conversations I've had with my stakeholder engagement counterparts in the regions, as well as some of my colleagues on the Engagement Programs team which is called Public Responsibility prior, as well as the [inaudible] and some others. We'll talk a little bit about how we can work together at the organization and the community to further this. Then there'll be plenty of time for open discussion, questions and answers. I can't promise I will have the answers to all of the questions at this early stage but I'll do my best to answer them. If I can't, I'll do my best to get back to you with an answer as quickly as possible.

Let's take a look at the rationale for, again, pivoting refocusing engagement in the academic sector at ICANN. I won't read word-for-word on the slides. In orange here, you'll see the working definition that we came up with for academic engagement. I just want to pause because it sounds like folks are not hearing me quite well enough. I'm happy to remove the AirPods and just go with the laptop. It might be better heard. Cheryl is hearing me fine. If the technical team could just give me some feedback and then we'll make a decision and we'll just move on. Everybody in the audience is saying they're hearing me fine so I'm just going to continue.

The field we're going for is that the organization should act as a bit of a bridge builder to achieve a higher level of engagement with the academic sector. We know we have a lot of stakeholders already from the academic community, but the field is growing, the interest in

multistakeholder communities, institutions, what have you, has increased particularly over the past, I would say, year or so. That has just anecdotally and informally monitoring has seen an increase in interest in the academic sector. ICANN's work is complex. It's niche. Sometimes it's not easily accessible. And the field of study relevant to the Internet ecosystem is very crowded. So there are aspects of tech policy that are more attractive to a lot of folks out there or to what we refer to a lot of times as potential ICANN stakeholders. Folks who have an interest, maybe they have a knowledge or an expertise, but they're either not exposed to our work, not exposed to the community's work, not exposed to opportunities. You can think of things like AI, content moderation, misinformation, disinformation. Things that are in the news a lot, occupy more oxygen, if you will, in the media space than what we work on.

In refocusing academic engagement at ICANN, we want to highlight the great work of our active stakeholders, what they're doing, and help potential stakeholders see the value in that work. In particular, for students, we want to show the opportunity for a rewarding career path working on ICANN issues. A failure to do something like this could result in an inability to fill this area of the pipeline of future ICANN stakeholders. And that could leave a void in the community so we want to make sure that we are filling all the pipeline for all stakeholder groups. So academic, civil society, business. We're all familiar with the groups there at ICANN.

When we think about formalizing global academic engagement, from the organization side, this is more similar to the org's efforts in the

business and civil society sectors, as opposed to the office of the CTO or the Government and Intergovernmental Organizations Engagement Team. This is not a new function within the organization. Government Engagement and OCTO are their own functions with their own attributes, with their own dedicated budgets, own dedicated staffs. That is not what this is. It's more along the lines, again, of what you see within the global business work that Chris Mundini does and then the civil society work that you may be familiar with with my colleague Adam. That does not mean that there are no resources. The regional Global Stakeholder Engagement Teams are empowered to use the resources at their disposal to execute on whatever the academic engagement plan is.

Let's move to the focus areas that we've identified as what would be appropriate for this work. There are several subject matters where ICANN can lend subject matter expertise. There's technical topics. You start thinking of things like Universal Acceptance, the DNS itself. DNS 101, DNSSEC, root servers, Internet protocol, these are just some of the examples. Obviously, that list is not exhaustive. We have plenty more that we can offer in there. We can present on public policy topics. ICANN is very unique in that it's a technical organization, but we also work on obviously ICANN policy and then obviously our work intersects with public policy of At-Large. Then there are legal topics as well that can be worked on in the academic.

In terms of what might be interesting tactics to kind of look at, maybe develop, we would like to take a toolkit approach to empower people. Coming up with something like an academic engagement toolkit that

can be used, not only obviously by the organization staff, but potentially interested community. I know from my discussions with certainly some of the At-Large folks in the past, there's been a desire to have something that has a good amount of content in it so that the level of work is not quite so high in the community, but that it's flexible enough that, for instance, someone who is presenting in Montreal or something, as an example, could, within reason, make some adjustments and tailor it to the audience.

We want to approach any kind of academic engagement with the trainers type of mentality. This is something that we have seen has been successful before. The office of the CTO has done some of this work. In this kind of model, someone from the organization, myself, or someone who may be in your region on the organization side that's presented, they may present one, maybe two times to the same institution on a particular topic, but then, ideally, they're able to hand that material off to the faculty or the staff to move it forward and ensuing presentations. That doesn't mean we completely go away. By no means would we do that. But this could be a scenario we can see where, for instance, if it's in the U.S. or Canada, myself, I could check in with a faculty member. I'm in Washington now, so I'll use George Washington University. It's right down the street. I could check in with that person and say, "Hey, I know I've provided you this kind of content, I know you've been working on it in your classes. Is it still working for you? Are there new topics that you'd be interested in us exploring?" Then I could go back to see if we have content that might be appropriate and update things as we go along.

For the second bullet there, I did want to just highlight this in terms of—because when we’re talking about academic engagement, obviously, colleges, universities, institutions of higher learning are the first thing to come to mind. This particular effort includes engagement with research institutions whose primary mission is to educate. This is distinct from research institutions whose primary mission is policy and advocacy, which sometimes get lumped into its think tanks. A research institution that’s mission is mainly policy and advocacy, those would be covered under the civil society engagement work that Adam Peake is doing. Figuring out where that line is, sometimes it can be difficult, but the Regional Stakeholder Engagement representatives and the regional vice presidents will take the lead in determining, “Okay, this institution is more academic, this institution is more civil society.”

Obviously, we have two programs right now at ICANN that intersect with the academic sector quite a bit. Those mainly being the Newcomers Programs. The ICANN Fellowship, the NextGen Program, and our online offerings through ICANN Learn, and then as well as the Grant Program obviously, which was launched just recently. We want to supplement the work that is going on within those areas. It’s not moving anything anywhere, it’s just this effort will try and bolster what’s already going on there. Talking about further raising awareness for future application rounds of the Grant Program. Obviously, the first round just closed, but there will be future rounds, we know that. So we just want to make sure we’re raising awareness to a lot of these, because many of these institutions will be 501(c)(3)s, which obviously will be eligible.

Then we want to use the Academic Engagement Program to build a more robust narrative around the value add to our newcomers programs. Particularly Fellowship and NextGen, to show how these programs can enhance the skillsets. They enhance the skillsets of established professionals for sure, particularly in the case of the Fellowship, but of course, further the career aspirations of students that may be interested in ICANN, may be interested in Internet governance and the like.

I did want to make a note of Schools of Internet Governance because obviously, again, I do get a lot of questions about how do Schools of Internet Governance play into this. There are several successful community-led Schools of Internet Governance across the globe already, and the ICANN organization, obviously, supports many of them in a number of capacities. This effort does not aim to insert the organization into the areas of Internet governance, but the organization through the Regional Stakeholder Engagement Teams will continue to support well-established, well-run Schools of Internet Governance as we've always done at the discretion of the Regional Stakeholder Engagement Teams.

On the communications front, I mean, I think this is an important part of any effort, but particularly this one. I think we want to try and use communication resources that are currently at our disposal to raise the profile of academic participation, including newcomers through our digital assets. I think we have some things already that wouldn't be additional. I think we're already here that maybe we're not using, including a web presence, maybe some more coordinated social

media work. And then eventually, as we move on and we build a real engagement plan and engagement program around this, eventually start looking at things like different kinds of collateral, graphics, video, etc. Somebody may be off mute. Moving on.

Community collaboration, any engagement at ICANN, anything that this Global Stakeholder Engagement Team does or the Government Engagement Team does don't matter. It really only works if we collaborate with the community as an organization community working together. Here are some areas here. I've got six areas that we could really use your help on. We would like to map out not just where we are, but where we should be. Help us find and participate in any academic conferences across the globe that are best suited to academics that research ICANN issues and Internet governance issues with At-Large, probably, as well. Because even if it doesn't perfectly fit what we're doing right now, it could be a relationship we could build, so that eventually they may have interest in something that ICANN is working.

Helping us deliver the message. Again, this goes back to something I mentioned in the first part of the presentation. There's particular interest I know I've heard from some At-Large folks. I'm sure this crosses over to other parts of the community too, to deliver some kind of presentation around the ICANN basics. Obviously, the Stakeholder Engagement Team is here to do that, but we can't be anywhere and everywhere. So getting that kind of help from community members where they live and they work would be certainly of interest. In time, we'd like to equip those in the community that are interested in

engaging in this area with some simple tools in presenting or engaging in the community easier.

Issue tracking. What topics related to ICANN’s mission are academics talking about or research? Help us identify those so we can work together to connect the talent in the community and the organization with faculty, students, and staff that want to pursue further work in the field.

Sharing your experience. We want to tell the story of an academic’s ICANN journey. We overused the term journey now, I feel, but I couldn’t find a better one for it, so I’m going to use it again until I find something better. Part of that can be done through the written word. Again, having a dedicated web space for academics at ICANN can help with that. That could be a place we could house some of this content. Now, this could encompass stories from those across the spectrum. Those that have participated at ICANN for a long time. Obviously, newcomers. Certainly, if you’re a student that is upcoming in university, you’re going to want to hear the story of the ICANN80 NextGen alum that went to Kigali and presented on whatever. Then as a student, you see yourself in that person, and then in theory, you would may attempt to replicate it for future ICANN meetings.

Then in terms of engagement events at ICANN Public Meetings, I think it’d be a good thing to create, for lack of a better phrase, kind of a micro community of academic stakeholders at the meetings. Obviously, you don’t need to be physically at the meeting to participate in academic engagement, but such that we have academics at the meetings would be great to get together during that time and have that face time

together. This doesn't need to be a large undertaking each time. There could be opportunities for that at some point. There could be formal public sessions with speakers. But smaller events can be effective too in terms of building, again, a micro community, if you will. So that could be the equivalent of a birds of a feather type session, networking periods, working lunches, and things of that nature.

Then obviously, we want to report out on progress on the regular. The ideal setting for this, it would seem, just when we looked at it, would be the community forum. Doing that annually seems to be at least beginning the appropriate cadence, and then if that were to change, then we could adjust.

With that, I will stop talking. We're going to stop talking now and then we'll do some discussion, Q&A, etc. If we don't get to your question or if you think of something after we log off the Zoom, this inbox here, academicsaticann.org is active and operational and you can send something there. It goes to me right now. I run it so I'll see it. Can't promise I would get you an answer immediately, but I will most certainly respond. With that, Giose, I have not been connected to the chat. So, are there any questions? I'm going to pop it open right now for initial questions.

GIOSE MCGINTY:

We have a question from Glenn McKnight. "Has the group reached out to the U.S. and Canadian Native Technology Schools?"

JOE CATAPANO: We have not. Glenn, first off, thank you for the question. This is good. This exactly goes back to that bullet on the previous slide about helping us mapping not only institutions but issue areas. I see you dropped a link in there so thank you for that. So that is something, Glenn, if you wouldn't mind, whether it's this First Nations Technical Institute or others you have, we could shoot that to this Academics inbox. That would go long way toward us beginning to build that out and then maybe you and I can have a conversation about connecting with them at some point.

GIOSE MCGINTY: I think that's the only question we have so far.

JOE CATAPANO: Okay. I will leave a moment then for any folks who have any thoughts or would like to raise their hand, type them in the chat. Just going through to catch up. There's Cheryl, "Very supportive trying to train them." I agree. I mean, I think that it's a good way to do things. I think it empowers faculty, staff, etc., anybody who's presenting. If they feel a little bit of ownership to it, also takes a little bit of the onus off of us on the Engagement Team to try and feel as though we have to replicate ourselves, to try and be everywhere all the time. Avri, please.

AVRI DORIA: Thank you. I want to ask a question and it's something that I haven't been able to ask for many years, but now I feel I can. I coordinate within the IGF system the dynamic coalition on the schools on Internet

governance. And one of the problems that we've always had is that some kind folks like ICANN and others support a school here, a school there because they have contacts with those schools, they have some experience that has taught them that it's a good school. And then we have the many schools that don't know anyone. So we keep talking about, "Really, as a dynamic coalition, we should put together the ability to go out and raise funds." As I said, I never felt I could go out and raise funds because I had other hats that made it a conflict, but I have no such hat. So I'm wondering in terms of looking at what you're doing and looking at the support that you do give to schools and Internet governance, is there any possibility or interest or way to go about looking at getting ICANN more involved with supporting schools, the dynamic coalition on schools, and such more as a systemic thing and such so that multiple schools, especially the newest ones that no one knows about, can get help? That's the idea I was hand waving at. But basically, wanted to put it on the table. Wanted to know whether it was something worth talking about, something worth having the dynamic coalition approach ICANN about. That was it. Thanks.

JOE CATAPANO:

Sure. It's worth talking about. Yes, absolutely. Again, when we talk about Schools of Internet Governance, it would be a three-part thing. So there would obviously be you or the dynamic coalition or whoever that group is. The Regional Stakeholder Engagement Team to wherever the school is and then myself trying to work together to see what the best kind of approach is. Go ahead.

AVRI DORIA:

I think that was what kind of prompted the question is if it only works with it being a regional and we're talking more at the international level to support the coalition of schools. Because one of the things that happens with schools, unfortunately, is they end up competing with all the other schools for the same funds. And one of the things is it's always become a touchy issue when we talk about that—I see I'm being addressed in the chat—is, “Well, if I go for the fund at ICANN, am I getting in the way of some other school that's getting it?” We're always putting ourselves in the competition with the funders and with the people like ICANN that do support these schools. If it's only regional, again, it's unless the regionals together can somehow... I'm just not sure how that works at an international level and whether there's a mismatch there. Thanks.

JOE CATAPANO:

No problem. Maybe you and I should follow up because I need to get more familiar with the dynamic coalition and the underworkings of that. And if it's not a regional thing, there may be another person within the organization, in addition to myself, that we could bring in that could help to at least facilitate the conversation and maybe see where we can take it. Thanks.

AVRI DORIA:

Thank you.

GIOSE MCGINTY:

Joe, we have a question here at the pod from Felix Opilli. “How does ICANN plan to integrate the insights and contribution from academic sector into its broader strategic objectives? And what specific impact does it anticipate this will have on its development and operational effectiveness?”

JOE CATAPANO:

That is an excellent question, Felix. I’ll address it this way. In terms of the ICANN, the strategic objectives, all of that work is being done/finalized right now from the Strategic Planning Team. That’s the ICANN Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years ‘26 through ‘30. So doing the five-year kind of chunks, right? That is coming to its conclusion soon. We’ll have that kind of moving along there from the Planning Team. That is really the base or even the top, if you will, if you want to think of it that way. Kind of everything that the organization does, this effort included. Everything’s needs to tie into the ICANN Strategic Plan because the plan has gone through a long process, it’s gone through several consultations with the community, and etc., like that. So it’s important that whatever we do here and in the regions ties into that.

Now, in terms of what impact it has, there is going to be research or other work in academia out there that is either on issues that are within ICANN’s remit or tie into the strategic objectives that eventually come out. So, to the extent that we can use this engagement effort and the tools that we come up with to engage academics and raise awareness around the work that is happening out there, because we know it’s happening, right? It’s just it’s not always tied together between kind of what we do, what we’re going to be doing in Kigali and

beyond, and what's being worked out. And if that awareness is raised, and it is seen by other academics within the community, be that a peer of maybe—I'm just coming up with examples now—a peer of a faculty member or a student taking a faculty members class, maybe that professor went to an ICANN meeting and presented on something, or maybe they contributed to some piece of research for a public comment or something, right? If you're a student sitting in there in a class and you see your teacher working on these types of things, you're more apt to be being engaged with it, explore opportunities, and things of that nature. So I know it was kind of a long [inaudible] so I hope it helped a little bit. But we really want to try and kind of connect the dots to some things that may already be happening.

GIOSE MCGINTY: Joe, I have one more here on the chat.

JOE CATAPANO: Okay. All right.

GIOSE MCGINTY: It came in French, so I hope this is correct. But it's from Eve [inaudible] asking, "Does ICANN support the new school on Internet governance in the Democratic Republic of Congo?"

JOE CATAPANO: I don't have an answer for that question. And I do not know if Pierre is on. Pierre is the regional vice president for the Stakeholder

Engagement Team for Africa and he would be the appropriate person to at least initially answer that question. But if he's not on, we can take it and get back to you on it.

NAELA SARRAS: I see Yaovi is on. I don't know if it's okay to call on the Yaovi. Or as you said, you could take this and come back.

JOE CATAPANO: Yaovi is on the call. You can speak if you want.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Please, sir, go ahead.

YAOVI ATOHOUN: Thank you so much. You asked the question about the Democratic Republic of Congo. Generally, we support Schools of Internet Governance when we have the request. So in general, we support the global schools like the Africa School of Internet Governance, so we support that. We support also the sub regional Schools of Internet Governance. So, in some cases, for the national schools, I can say we support all of them, because even remotely, we contribute. We contribute to the session remotely. So my question is, yes, we support all the School of Internet Governance. Just once we have the request, we respond to the request. Sometimes we may not be able to be on site. But I can tell you that I can confirm that. Once we have the request

for the school, we used to support the school even remotely. Thank you so much.

JOE CATAPANO: Thank you very much, Yaovi. Thank you, Naela, for pointing out to one of our colleagues in the region. Anything else, Giose?

GIOSE MCGINTY: No questions.

JOE CATAPANO: Okay. Well, if there are no other questions—yes, sir?

PATRICK JONES: Can I add something? Patrick Jones from ICANN's Global Stakeholder Engagement Team. I wanted to emphasize some of the outreach and direct interaction with universities and academic programs has been going on for many, many years back to even my big first years at ICANN. So we've done a number of not only trainings, but delivered lectures, webinars, in-person lectures to students, for many, many years, and this effort that Joe's kicking off with this call is to put increased level of coordination across all of these types of efforts that are happening. I think now it's we're going to be looking to interact much more closely with groups in the community that are doing this too. Please do take the opportunity to talk with Joe and the other regional teams from ICANN. If you're not in Kigali in person, reach out to Joe through the e-mail address he has here and we look forward to

helping grow and attract not just new active participants to ICANN's work but spreading the word about the types of things that we've been doing for a long time.

JOE CATAPANO:

Thank you. Any other questions or comments? I see kind of a little activity in the chat. Giose, if we could just save the chat before we log off so we have that for record and follow up on anything? That would be wonderful. I don't see any hands. If there are no other questions... Thanks, Cheryl. If there are no other questions, I'll just thank everybody for joining today. I'll give you a little less than 20 minutes back. If you are in Kigali, please feel free to track me down. We'll be there. But also you can e-mail academics@icann.org inbox or I can also offer mine in there too. Thank you, everybody, and have a wonderful rest of your day, evening, etc. Thanks.

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