
ICANN82 | CF – ICANN Grant Program
Thursday, March 13, 2025 – 13:15 to 14:30 PST

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Hello, everybody, I was just going to say that we are going to start in two minutes. Thank you.

YVETTE GUIGNEAUX

Thank you. Hello, everyone, and welcome to the ICANN82 Grant Program session on Thursday, March 13, 2025 at 20:15 UTC. My name is Yvette Guigneaux and Madeline Werbelow and myself will be your participation managers for this session. Please note that this session is being recorded and is governed by the ICANN Expected Standards of Behavior and the ICANN Community Anti-Harassment Policy.

Interpretation for this session will include English, French, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic and Russian. During this session, questions and comments will be answered during the question-and-answer portions at the end of each section. If you would like to speak during this session, please raise your hand in Zoom. When called upon, virtual participants will be given permission to unmute in Zoom. We also ask that you please rename your sign-in name in Zoom with your full name, first and last name. For on-site in-person participants, you will use the microphones that are physically set up in the room.

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Please state your name for the record, the language you will be speaking if you're speaking a language other than English, and speak at a reasonable pace. With that, I will hand the floor over to Giovanni Seppia, Vice President of Implementation Operations. Giovanni?

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you, Yvette, and welcome, everybody. And before we get into the session, I'd like to pass the floor on to Xavier Calvez, Senior Vice President of Planning and Chief Financial Officer of ICANN, for some introductory remarks. Xavier, thank you.

XAVIER CALVEZ

Thank you, Giovanni. Thank you, everyone, for participating to this session. It's an exciting update on the program. This program is, as most of you know, a new activity for the ICANN organization and the ICANN community. And this cycle that we have initiated is also a bit of a test for all of us to be able to deliver, effectively and efficiently, a Grant Program and be able to benefit projects for this community and for the benefit of the Internet.

This program was launched as a result of the Board adopting the community recommendations on how to distribute the action proceeds from the New gTLD program of 2012. And it's been progressing on time as per the timeline that we had published and shared with the community ever since. And the team will now provide an update on where we are now. Thank you very much.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you, Xavier. And again, welcome everybody, those in the room and those connected remotely. Today's agenda includes an update on where we stand with the Grant Program development that will include an overview of the first cycle applications, some information about the evaluation process, what we have gone through so far to reach to the final slate, the application evaluation results, as well as the next steps that are the program review and next cycle.

So, just an upfront information, we are not going to be the Oscar ceremony and disclosing the names of those who are going to get the grant. We are still in the grant agreement negotiations. And as it's been mentioned in the Board resolution about the final slate, we will make an announcement about the 23 final slate applications at the moment the grant agreement negotiations are complete. And with that said, with no further ado, I'd like to leave the floor to Shayna Robinson, Grant Program director. Thank you, Shayna.

SHAYNA ROBINSON

Thank you so much, Giovanni. And thank you to everyone for being here today to be a part of this session. Thank you to everyone who participated in the first cycle by submitting an application. And thank you to the many staff members and partners that assisted in helping us to spread the word about the program and also to deliver the evaluation and to get us to this point.

So, thank you so much. If we can go to the next slide. Just to give you a reminder, we opened our first cycle for applications, call for applications last year, just around this time at the end of March. And had that cycle window was open for 60 days. So, we had lots of interaction with the community during that time and encouragement of folks to apply to the program. If we look at the next slide, you'll see what happened with that. So, the total number of applications received was the number 247.

We had a nice internal sort of discussion about how many applications we expected to receive. That number was around 200. So 247, we were happy to receive that number. 64 countries were represented in applicants who applied to the program. Again, I think that's a wonderful example and demonstration of the diversity and the reach of the program. We received quite a few inquiries, though nothing that overwhelmed our system.

So I think we did a good job with our applicant guide and explaining criteria and guidelines and things like that. And thankfully, fingers crossed for future cycles, we didn't have any issues with our system to receive those applications. We'll continue to track these measures across different cycles and use this as baseline data to assess our performance of the program as we move forward. If we go to the next slide, if we look at the total number, again, 247 applications received, these are where they came from and the regions that those represent.

Again, lots of geographic diversity that we really appreciate. If we go to the next slide, you'll see the different themes that

applications were interested in, the projects that they were pursuing, what those related to. And again, if you go back and look at our applicant guide, you can see some of those work areas and themes that we used to describe the program and the objectives that we were trying to achieve. We had lots and lots of applications related to Capacity Development and participation and inclusion, which ultimately was one of the objectives of the program.

So, we were really happy to see that. If we go to the next slide, overall, from all the 247 applications we received, that those funding requests amounted to a bit over \$83 million, which, again, demonstrates the need and desire for this type of program. Lots of really great projects were proposed. There's certainly a need for programs like this, and we think that that figure demonstrates that.

The average amount of funding was requested was just over \$300,000 U.S. dollars, which, again, I think says to us that more money, bigger projects, larger scale, can really be impactful in the community. And then finally, the median amount, which is a bit different from the average amount, just lets us know that, again, the larger grant, the larger funding request really is where those requests were coming from, the bulk of them.

If we go to the next slide, we can look at some data on duration of projects, the parameters and the guidelines for this first cycle. Projects had to be up to 24 months. And so, if we look at this, we can see sort of where all the dots are congregated towards the top, which means that most applicants and projects were longer term and then requested more funding.

So that, again, helps to inform how we think about and move forward in the program. Making larger grants with longer term funding is certainly something that's being requested. The next slide, I think, shows the funding that was requested per region. Again, if we link that back to the previous slide that showed where those applications were coming from, certainly in Africa, there was a large representation of projects and requests for funding, as well as in North America and in Europe. So, with that, I will pass it back to Giovanni to talk through the evaluation process. Thanks.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you, Shayna. I'd like to pause here to see if there's any question on the first part of today's presentation, knowing that what we have presented until now is an overview and some data regarding all the applications, the 247 applications we received. There's going to be another section that is about the 23 applications that made it to the final slate. If there is any question for the first part, please, either here in the queue or in the Zoom, please. Yeah, Alfredo, go on.

ALFREDO CALDERON

I'm Alfredo and I'm going to talk in my personal capacity in Spanish, so please use your headsets. So, my name is Alfredo Calderon. As I said, I will speak in my personal capacity. I'm worried about the fact that during this cycle, as it was mentioned in the public forum, where the opening window from the submission of applications, there was such a long period that went by, and as a consequence

of that long period of time, we're waiting to know who are the 23 participants or applicants that were chosen.

The graphs that you've shown shows that there was a period of near two years or 24 months. We don't know yet if these 23 projects will be able to be executed or performed because this waiting time may have caused those applicants in a situation where they are not able to execute those projects in view of this long waiting period. Are you taking this into account for the next cycle? And that is a question. I have a question for the next cycle, but let's start with this one first. Thank you.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Shayna, would you like to take it?

SHAYNA ROBINSON

Thank you so much. Yes. So, just to reiterate, 24 months, not quite. It wasn't that long, but the cycle opened last year in 2024, so we're coming up on 12 months, which again is a long time, and I certainly acknowledge that. Part of the plan and the timeline that was outlined in the applicant guide did give sort of estimates of what the time frame would be, and for the most part, we've actually stuck to that, and we've been very successful in meeting our milestones.

The last part here, and I know everyone's super eager to learn and to know who's won the awards, and we are eager as well to share that information, but there's some internal obligations that we need to ensure that as an organization, we're meeting all of those

obligations before we can consolidate and finish these, the contracting period. So, it's really not a reflection of the applicants.

It's not a reflection of the projects, and certainly we're going to give those applicants an opportunity to adjust work plans and timelines so that they better align with where we are today, but it's on track. It's any moment, and again, it really is more reflection of us as an organization. This is the first time that we've done this, and so it's taking a bit of time for us to make sure we've got all the bases covered. So, we appreciate the patience, and thank you.

ALFREDO CALDERON

Shayna, you've mentioned that there is a group of grantees that has been chosen, 23 of them. What's important for me right now is that according, as they sign the contracts, and as you cannot announce it one by one, and you need to finish these 23 contracts that are signed, can you not make it public as they sign, instead of waiting until the end for them to have signed them all? Thank you.

SHAYNA ROBINSON

Yes, thank you. So it's actually, again, it's not a reflection of individual applicants. It's really a reflection of our internal process and obligations that we have as an organization, and so that's impacting our ability to move forward with all of them. So, again, it's not specific to any one application, and we anticipate that we'll be able to move forward on all of them at the same time as we sort of resolve this internal, some of the internal questions that we have, and better understand our obligations. Do you want to add?

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Yeah, thank you, Shayna. I'd also like to add that over the past couple of months we've been in close contact with the applicants that successfully made it to the final list, and we have somehow asked them if they were prepared to, let's say, move the start date of the project at a different date than the date that was included in their application. I must say that some of those applicants, the start date of the project is not yet there.

I mean, so there were some applicants with the start date of the project that was after April, 2025. So, for those, there is no issue for the start of the project. For those for which the start date was different and was earlier, either January or February or March, we have been in close contact with them and to make sure that they are still able to move the project forward once the grant agreement negotiations are complete.

So, that is, again, communication and work in progress. But the point of time to contract is well taken. We have heard by one or a couple of applicants during this week, including one applicant during the public forum that just ended, and the time to contract, as we say, so the time that goes from the closing of the application window to the time when the successful applicant signed the contract with the grant organization is a point that, for us, is a point of high consideration that will be taken into account for the refinements to the next cycle. So, thank you so much. It's really important for us to receive this kind of input. Maureen, please.

MAUREEN HILYARD

Thank you. First of all, I'd like to congratulate the team for their successful selections and also the applicants for receiving their grants. What I wanted to just ask about was the fact that in the overview of the applicants, successful applicants, there were some very low numbers, well, not very low, but lower numbers in those areas that are considered underserved and underdeveloped, APRALO and the LACRALO area.

It's just that I was wondering what you plan or propose for future applications to do outreach similar to what is being proposed for the Applicant Support Program to make sure that people truly understand, as you say, making sure that the completion of the applications is appropriate and that they understand exactly what they're getting themselves into, so that outreach is really important. The written explanations really do need to have some face-to-face outreach to really make sure that those people actually do get the funding that they really, really need and that they're capable. It's just that they need the proper information. Thank you.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you, Maureen. Again, great input and again, we have done some outreach through the ICANN network and also through some ad hoc, let's say, communication outreach activities. We'll continue to do so for the next cycles, also learning from the lessons we have learned within the first cycle. I don't know if, Xavier, you'd like to add something or so thanks a lot, Maureen. That's a point

taken for now as we are, again, start thinking about the next cycle. Please, and then I have to read a question that I've just been told is in the chat, but please, go first.

RON ANDRUFF

Thank you, Giovanni. Ron Andruff, DNS AXE. I think you just said, and I want point of clarification, that the 23 grantees have been contacted by your office and then, in fact, you're in discussion with them. So, if one were to fail, do you have like a something to backfill? In other words, would there be some issue on their end? Do you have an A list, B list? How is that looking?

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

That's an incredibly good point. So, at present, we are not planning to have a B list. So, the 23, we are quite confident that we'll move forward and we complete successfully the negotiation with all of them. As in any Grant Program at global level, there could be indeed failures that could happen during the grant agreement negotiations, could happen later when the project starts and suddenly the grantee realizes that unfortunately what they have planned is not going to be implemented.

In this case, for the first cycle, we have not planned to have a B list. We have considered that and we may consider that for future cycles. However, for the first one, the 23, they were part of the Board resolution that was made at the end of January and that resolution, according to the proposal that we presented to the

Board, did not foresee, did not contemplate the, let's say, B list. But again, that was one of the solutions that we had in mind.

RON ANDRUFF

Thank you. And if I may ask another question which may come up later in the session. If it does, please tell me. I'm happy to hear it then. But it's pointed towards Xavier. This year, there was \$10 million put forward for that Grant Program and I understand the budget is \$5 million next year. I'm just wondering why it was cut back or if that was a misread.

XAVIER CALVEZ

We didn't decide yet the size of the next cycle, so I'm not sure what that \$5 million comes from. So, that was a misread then? Yes, it must have been a misinformation from someone.

RON ANDRUFF

Very good. It just sounded kind of strange that you would start with \$10 and then ratchet back to \$5, so that was why I was asking.

XAVIER CALVEZ

It would be strange, I would agree. Indeed.

RON ANDRUFF

Thank you.

XAVIER CALVEZ

That's the only thing I will say about the size of the next cycle for now.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

And Shayna, please.

SHAYNA ROBINSON

And I just wanted to add, I think the term negotiations and grant agreement negotiations is a bit of a strong word for what we're doing. It really is to just ensure that we have certainty and we're on the same page with grantees about the expectations of the grants moving forward. We don't anticipate that any of them will fail. We're really going to work hard to support these projects as they move forward. That's the purpose of our department and sort of the remit of our program is to ensure that we have success. And so, we're not anticipating or planning for those failures, though we do know that things may change along the way. But I just wanted to add that.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you, Shayna. I know we have a couple of questions in the chat, and I would like to invite Madeleine, who's part of the Grant Program department, to read the questions. Thank you.

MADELEINE WERBELOW

Hi, Giovanni. Thank you. The first question we have in the chat is from Peter, and it's asking, in the diagram showing the topic areas

of applications, capacity building, DNS security, et cetera, was each application counted to one topic area or potentially several?

SHAYNA ROBINSON

Yes, each one was accounted or represented for one. Specific area. Work area. Yes.

MADELEINE WERBELOW

And we have another question. It states, will it be a next round for the Grant Program?

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Yeah, there will be a Next Round. And as I said, now that we are in the process of completing the grant agreements with the successful applicants of the first round, I will have, there's going to be a slide later in the presentation that says that, as recommended in the Cross-Community Working Group on Auction Proceeds, the process has a review at the end of each cycle. And at the end of the review, this review, the findings will inform a future cycle. So, there will be next cycles, indeed. And Alan, please.

ALAN GREENBERG

Thank you very much, Alan Greenberg speaking. There's been a lot of comments about how long this has taken, and I was vice chair of the drafting, of the group that drafted the charter for the Cross-Community Working Group that led to the report. I just checked; we convened in February 2016. So, it's taken a while to get here, but I'd just like to say thank you for the work you've done. I

understand the teething pains of doing this the first time, and I'm really pleased we finally got to this point, and we're going to see it going on continually. But it's been a long haul, but I think we're at the right place. Thank you.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you so much, Alan. Thank you. I understand, and thanks to Sam for providing the translation of a question regarding the grant program, and regarding a specific, let's say, question about an applicant whose application has been not successful.

So, we have provided feedback to the applicants, and we have invited those applicants who like to have further information to get back to us, and we'll provide as much information as we can regarding the reason of rejection. Could be a rejection that happened at the panel level, could be a rejection that is a failure in the admissibility or eligibility criteria.

So, this kind of information we'll be happy to provide to applicants in case that kind of information has not been provided yet. Xavier, please.

XAVIER CALVEZ

Just to add a bit, as a reminder, Giovanni has highlighted the fact that this first cycle is the subject, or is going to be the subject of a review, which then will inform the Board to be able to then make a decision to proceed or not with the second cycle. So, I just wanted to remind you of the process that we're going by, which is that we want to inform ourselves with the review, including input from all

of you, on this first cycle before deciding to proceed with the second cycle. That's the process we allow ourselves to go by. Thank you.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you, Xavier. If there is no other question on this first part, and we have also covered some elements of the next sections with the questions that we have collected today, let's go to the second part of the presentation, which is about the evaluation process. The evaluation process was spelled out in the Grant Applicant Guide, which we published the first version in early January, 2024.

The Grant Program Applicant Guide highlighted the different steps of the assessment of the applications. The first one is an internal review. As soon as the application window closed at the end of May, all the 247 applications went through a first internal review. The purpose of the review, the first internal review, was to screen all applications against the admissibility and eligibility criteria. Some of the admissibility criteria were built into the grant management system, so the scrutiny about certain criteria, like applications respecting the threshold between \$50,000 up to \$500,000 request, or the 24 months maximum duration.

Those kinds of criteria were embedded in the grant management system, so the check was made automatically at the time the application was submitted. There were other admissibility and eligibility criteria, if we go to the next slide, please. This is the admissibility and eligibility criteria as described in the Grant Program Applicant Guide. In terms of admissibility, the application

should have been submitted in English and with all the requirement attachments, including, for instance, the statute or the article of association of the organization, the applicant, as well as financial statements, as any other attachment that the applicant may have liked to submit to support the application.

In terms of the organization eligibility, the requirement, the main requirement, is that the organization should have been having a not-for-profit status 501c3 or equivalent, and this was a key requirement of the process, as well as that the organizations, the applicants, should have been free from reputational risk, free from sanction list inclusion, and also free from conflict of interest.

The conflict-of-interest policy was also well spelled out in the Grant Program Applicant Guide. In terms of the eligibility from the activities' perspective, the project should have been aligned to the ICANN mission, to one of the specific objectives of the Grant Program as designed and defined by the Cross-Community Working Group on Auction Proceeds, and also further explained and translated into teams and work areas in the Applicant Guide, and also any activities should not duplicate existing ICANN activities. So, those were the admissibility and eligibility criteria through which all applications went through during the first internal review. If we can go to the next slide, please.

The second step was that all the applications that passed the admissibility and eligibility criteria were moved on to the independent panel assessment. The purpose of the assessment of the panel was really to assess the applications from a content

perspective, and the assessment was done against five criteria that were outlined in the Grant Program Applicant Guide.

The panel was managed by an external vendor, which ICANN appointed through a request for proposal process, and was composed by a group of currently 52 individuals that were selected by the external vendor, according to the criteria that were outlined also in one of the recommendations and guidance of the Cross-Community Working Group on Auction Proceeds, and the group of 52 panelists was divided into four sub-panels that were covering the different thematic areas of the first cycle of the Grant Program.

Each application was scrutinized by three panelists, and afterwards, as mentioned again in the Grant Program Applicant Guide, there was a process to reach a consensus among the panelists, and this again was fully coordinated by the external vendor. ICANN participated as a silent observer in the work of the panel in a couple of meetings to again observe that the process was conducted in line with what was written in the Applicant Guide as well as in the Panel Guide, and I must say we were very much well impressed that the panelists were very scrupulous in assessing the proposals against each of the criteria.

If we go to the next slide, please, those are the five criteria, and the five criteria were scored on a 0-4 scale, where any application receiving 0 or 1 in any of the five criteria was disqualified by the panel. Again, it was work done by a group of three panelists, at least three panelists per application, and subsequently by a consensus panel. The criteria were innovation and relevance,

effectiveness, implementation and feasibility, competence and expertise of the project team, as well as community value and impact.

And as you can see, those criteria, they were covering not only the content of the project per se, but also the capacity of the applicant to move forward to develop the project, as well as the value that the project would represent for the community once the grant is over, and the capacity of the applicant eventually to continue the project once the grant is over. So, if we can go to the next slide, please.

Some demographics regarding the panel, as I said, there were 52 panelists that were selected by the external vendor, with a good distribution in terms of male and female, and also a very good distribution in terms of the countries that those panelists were coming from. If we could go to the next slide, there is the distribution by country, which as you can see, is quite broad, from Albania down to Uruguay.

So, there was a very good broad representation. This was one of the criteria that ICANN put forward with the external vendor to make sure that the external vendor was taken into consideration and to high account the element of diversity when making and putting up at the different panels. If we can go to the next slide, please. Then there was a final internal review on the applications that came back from the independent panel and those applications that received a score.

The final internal review covered the review for each of the shortlisted applicants against the trade regulation and conflict of interest, background reputation and due diligence checks, as well as mission alignment and duplication of activities further checks, as well as the so-called equivalency determination for those not-for-profit organizations not based in the states to which ICANN offered the expertise of an external vendor that also ICANN appointed to help them to complete the so-called equivalency determination.

If we can go to the next slide, please. Once the final internal review was complete, we reached the final slate that was presented to the Board for the resolution. The final slate was accompanied by a rationale that explained the process, as well as explain how the 12 cross community working group on Auction Proceeds recommendations were addressed during the work that we have done to develop the first cycle. As it's written, as we said, we have decided to keep the confidentiality of the grantees until all the grant agreement negotiations process is complete, which is going to be really now a matter of some weeks, so stay tuned, it will come soon.

And we have been in close contact with all the 23 applicants in the final slate to make sure that as I said earlier, they are capable to carry on the project, although there is this slight delay for some of them, not all of them, because as I said, some of them they have indicated a start date of the project that is in the future from April onwards. So, I'd like to pause here, I'm going to the next slide, please, and before we move into an overview of the results of the

application evaluation, I'd like to pause here to see if there is any question at this stage. Please.

ALFREDO CALDERON

I will make use of the interpretation services. In the first step that you are talking about an internal review to contemplate whether there is a duplication of activities put forward by the grantee and internal activities, but then being aware, all of us, the way the ICANN community works and getting internal projects approved, in the second phase, the second step, you send the proposal to an external panel for their assessment, but in the third step, you review the ones that have gone through the second stage, you again check for duplication of activities.

I understand that you are doing that because at the time you are assessing the projects, there may come up some internal activity that doubles what was screened between the first and the second step. Am I understanding right?

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you. So, indeed, the very first screening during the very first internal review was done to make sure that, as was recommended by the Cross-Community Working Group, any activity funded through the grant program is not duplicating existing ICANN activities. So, there was a preliminary screening, just a preliminary screening, that any of the projects that were submitted was not duplicating existing ICANN activities.

Then those that were moved on to the panel, which were again scrutinized not only against duplication of activities but conflict of interest, the admissibility requirements and much more. After the panel assessed them, there was a second scrutiny of all the applications that made the evaluation, the assessment of the panel.

This was a sort of abundance of caution to make sure that, indeed, anything that was in the slate that came back from the independent assessment panel was not including applications that were representing duplication of activities. So, we have done this with the help, great help, of the subject matter experts, our colleagues working at ICANN in different departments.

And sometimes the response that we got was, we already told you, because they were already involved in the first scrutiny. But again, as abundance of caution, we wanted to make sure that, indeed, what we were going to present to the Board as final slate was a final slate of applications that was matching what was requested by the recommendation and by the criteria as set in the applicant guide. Xavier.

XAVIER CALVEZ

I'm going to try to speak in French for an additional comment. So, one of the reasons why we checked whether there was an overlap between activities, and I mean the activities of the organization or ICANN, the standing activities. Well, one of the reasons is because the Auction Proceeds that we use for the Grant Program come from one funding source, and this is not a repetitive funding source. And

the community actually imposed that rule. We didn't want to see that one-time funding of Auctioned Proceeds.

We didn't want that it should be used to fund, of course, activities or current activities. We did not want to have a one-shot funding for continuous or ongoing activities. And this is one of the reasons why we imposed that rule in the program, because in that, we indeed could understand that those funds could create increased capacity for things that we're already doing. But we decided not to do that because the funding source is limited and also limited time-wise. Thank you.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Xavier, before giving the floor to you, I see there is a question in the chat, which is Madeleine, if you can please read it.

MADELEINE WERBELOW

Yes, thank you Giovanni. The question is, will the admitted list be announced and when?

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Yeah, indeed. We are waiting to complete all these negotiations with the grantees in the finance late, and then of course we will announce it. So, that is planned as soon as the grant agreement negotiations are complete. Thank you. Please.

PAULO MILLIET ROQUE

Hello, my name is Paolo Roque. I am the president of the Brazilian Software Association, ABES. I would like to know if ICANN will make public the name of the vendors or the companies that won the bid to do the independent evaluation of the grant.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you, Paolo. If I'm not mistaken, they are already public because they were part of a procurement process. So, and if I'm not mistaken, ICANN has a dedicated page for those that participated in requests for proposals, where the names of those that are given the contract are shared.

So, I remember very well that the two main vendors, the one for the grant management system and the independent assessment panel, their names are published. Yeah, we can provide them of course. I mean, for the grant management system, the vendor was submittable, which is one of the most used grant management system platforms at worldwide level. And for the independent assessment panel, the choice was on the ESF, European Science Foundation. That is an organization based in Strasbourg that over the past 30 years has supported the international private and public bodies to run Grant Programs.

PAULO MILLIET ROQUE

Thank you very much.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

You're welcome. Bertrand?

BERTRAND DE LA CHAPELLE

Good afternoon. My name is Bertrand de La Chapelle for the record. Just a comment on what was mentioned regarding not funding something that would be potentially recurring activities because the funding is not recurring. I think there's something that is missing here that could be taken into account is that this is exactly what seed venture funding does in the venture capital environment. You may put some money at the beginning of something with no intention of additional recurring support just to initiate activities.

And I think we should not by definition avoid considering the Grant Program as a tool to seed activities that may require additional funding later on, but not through the Grant Program.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you, Bertrand. Xavier, would you like to take it?

XAVIER CALVEZ

Thank you, Bertrand. It's a bit strange to respond in English to a French person asking a question in English. Not the first time. Now, thank you, Bertrand. I think that it's, so Bertrand is illustrating the point that we, by the way, sometimes have done in the past this exercise of looking at a new activity and trying to pilot it a bit with funding it for a first time.

We've done that within our budget over the past few years with the additional budget request process. It was for a relatively small

scale, but that was exactly what Bertrand was describing could happen. And in concept, I think your point is completely well taken. We could absolutely consider using those funds for activities that are carried out or that could potentially be carried out in the future by the organization.

What we didn't want is that those action proceeds then become the source of funding for those activities that would be started. And the reason being, as I said, because those funds are limited in time and are not recurring. But I would argue that some of the applicants this time that are successful, some of the 23, that's what they may actually be able to do with the grants that have been provided is maybe start an activity that then can become recurring. But we wanted to be mindful and it's more caution than an impossibility, if you see, Bertrand.

And this is also where this first cycle is a test on many different aspects is your input now experience with this cycle may lead us to be able to think differently and more broadly about what type of activities and what type of funding we can provide. So, thank you for that point. I think it's an important input in the design of any future cycle.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you. Xavier. Please.

RON ANDRUFF

Ron Andruff for the record. It struck me as you mentioned the external contractor and the 50 odd reviewers. How much

experience did they have with ICANN? Were they “ICANNites?” Because we are this very strange creature and anyone external trying to do something with an ICANN where there's no ICANN experience. So, could you shed a little light on that, please?

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Yeah. Thank you, Ron. So, when we have been liaising with the external vendor, we have set some parameters for them to select the panelists. So, this external vendor that we have selected, the European Science Foundation, they had already a pool of about 15,000 panelists.

They usually use for the different kind of programs they cover for different international, private, and public organizations. And we have made indeed some requirements which were coming from the Cross-Community Recommendations, which is that the independent panel members, they should have had an expertise on the teams and work areas that were the teams and work areas of the first cycle of the Grant Program, as well as of grant programs.

So, there were some requirements that were provided to the European Science Foundation for the selection of the panelists. We also made sure in the process that the European Science Foundation was recruiting further panelists. So, they did not only look at the panelists that were in the pool of panelists, but also, they expanded that pool to cover those teams and work areas that were part of the ICANN Grant Program first cycle.

And that was covering like, for instance, Universal Acceptance, specific security and stability elements that were highlighted in some of the projects, specific Unique Internet Identifier Systems elements that were also highlighted in other projects. So, all these, let's say, elements were taken into consideration by the ESF, the European Science Foundation at the time they selected the panelists.

RON ANDRUFF

So, then can I take from that, that the applicants that applied would have comfort that of the three people looking at their application, at least there was one ICANNite or someone who understands what the institution is? Someone that understands the institution of ICANN?

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Someone that understands the content of the three of them must have had an understanding of the content of the project, indeed.

XAVIER CALVEZ

Very good. Thank you.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Yeah, you're welcome.

XAVIER CALVEZ

Which is not the same thing as knowing ICANN inside out.

RON ANDRUFF

I'm sorry, would you say, I didn't hear what you said.

XAVIER CALVEZ

No worries. It's understanding the projects and their content in order to be able to evaluate them is not the same thing as knowing ICANN inside out.

RON ANDRUFF

No, that's understood. But as long as they realize that they're not fresh to ICANN and looking at something that they they're not quite sure what this is. So, I would assume so, but I just wanted to make sure that was clear.

XAVIER CALVEZ

The rules of the, that independent panel and how the panelists were selected lead us to believe and to have noted that they were qualified for their job.

RON ANDRUFF

Very good. Thank you.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you. Yeah, and as to complement what Xavier said, as I said, we were invited to be silent observers in a couple of panel meetings. And so, we really appreciated the fact that they were

really experts because it was a very robust discussion on the project that, that specific moment they were discussed.

RON ANDRUFF

Thank you.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Mary, please.

MARY UDUMA

Yes. Thank you very much. Yes. First, I want to congratulate the ICANN for getting to this stage of giving out the grant. And you people have worked so hard to get to this stage. I just have a couple of questions or suggestions. One is, I wanted to know whether at each stage of evaluation, whether the applicants were communicated, I mean, were reached to say, look, you cannot move beyond this. And whether they were just, because some would have submitted the application in anticipation that, okay, it's taking eight months, probably my application is going forward or not.

So, I wonder whether that communication was done. Secondly, I want to say maybe going forward in the next round, we consider lowering the threshold for grants. For instance, in ISOC, you can get a grant as low as \$10,000 or \$20,000. If the ground level is still too high for some people to be able to accomplish, there could be more little projects that will not take so much. Probably we'll look

at that. And in that process, the spread is higher than we had 247 applications and we only got 9.3% going to the award stage.

So, we could also spread it if we lower it. I don't know whether it would be more, we have the resources to do that because it could also mean more manpower. Finally, would you want to publish the, you said that the three countries were part of the evaluation criteria, I mean, panels. So, I don't know whether during the application evaluation result, are you showing the countries where they are coming from? I mean, the panelists.

Okay. If you are going to publish that for transparency, you can look at that. So, probably when you finish the last segment, I'll come up with another question. So, those are the three I'm seeing. Thank you.

SHAYNA ROBINSON

Thank you so much. To your first point about communication, I think as grant makers, there are pros and cons in several different considerations that you have to make as you sort of share information with grantees. You don't want to set expectations too early. You also want to have flexibility, especially as you're sort of establishing a new program with how you're going to move through that. But I think the point is well taken.

I think we can certainly improve our communication. We absolutely can improve the length of time that it's taken to process applications and be sure that we're communicating with applicants so that they feel a bit more responded to in the process.

So, definitely that. In terms of the panelists, yes, the countries represented on the slide are the countries from which the panelists came from, which I believe those are the slides are public. Yes. So, you can have that and be available.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Yeah. And there was also the lower end of threshold.

SHAYNA ROBINSON

Oh, yes. The lower end of threshold. Yes. So, this is, again, a large part of our consideration as we think about future cycles. What is the community really need to move the work forward? How can we think about this strategically? We want to make sure that those who need the funding and can, where the funding can fill gaps to really encourage the community, we want to be responsive to that. So, that's absolutely something we're going to consider and think about and certainly look at how we structure that, those criteria and elements moving forward.

XAVIER CALVEZ

And Marie, the countries are right there on the slide. So, if you lie down on your left side, you can read the 33 countries that the panelists represented.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

And the slide deck is going to be made available after the session on the session webpage. So, now we move to the next part of the

presentation, which gets into the details of the 23 selected application without disclosing the names. Thank you, Shayna.

SHAYNA ROBINSON

Thank you so much. If we can go to the next slide. Again, we had 247 applications. 23 of those were included in the final slate. So, we sort of consider that as a 9.3 acceptance rate. That's pretty competitive is what that tells me. And so those who were not included in the final slate feel heartened that this was a really competitive process.

It doesn't mean that your project or your application didn't have value. It really just meant that there were other projects that really spoke to the criteria and the objectives of the program in a way perhaps that aligned a bit better. If we go to the next slide. Again, we've said this many times, but just to reiterate, we are not announcing those awardees until we've moved through the whole process and ensure that we're all on the same page and have all of our contractual obligations ironed out.

If we go to the next slide, here's the distribution of those applications in the final slate according to region. Again, I think if you compare this to the earlier slide, great geographic diversity and span of projects, not only where they'll be implemented, but where the applicants themselves are located.

On the next slide, we can look at the distribution of countries within those regions. Again, those are very much diverse and representative of where applications were coming from. And

certainly, those that have a bit higher representation also had a bit higher representation in the actual total of applications submitted.

If we go to the next slide, the distribution by theme. Again, each work area, we assigned applications or applications were assigned to work areas that were outlined in the Applicant Guide. And the final slate represents what areas those applications and projects will be focused on. Obviously, lots of representation here for the security and stability folks in the room, if you're interested in that. So, that's a great way forward. But also looking at things like long-term usability of the DNS and Universal Acceptance, which I've been in several sessions here this week where I've heard that's been a topic of discussion.

And so, it's very exciting, I think, to have these projects supporting and aligned to those particular work areas. If we go to the next slide, how much funding will be awarded to that final slate? So, again, the total amount available for this cycle was \$10 million. So, at the moment, again, we're still going back and forth a bit, but we're at just under that \$10 million, \$9.9 million to award in the first cycle. The average funding amount, around \$430,000. So, these are large grants. They're not the small \$10,000, \$20,000 grants. These are big grants.

And the median, again, skewing even further larger than that, meaning that there's more of the grants are actually requesting higher amounts of funding. If we go to the next slide, if we look at regionally where how much money and how that \$9.9 million is being split up across the world, you can see, again, the distribution

here corresponds to the distribution, for the most part, of how many applications were received and the requests that were received. For the most part, that corresponds.

And then I think last section, again, we'll keep saying it, that we really hope to be able to share information with you and with the community at large about the grants. We will provide short descriptions of what the projects will be. We'll provide the actual dollar amount that those awards, that the awards consist of. And we will make that list public as soon as we are able. And with that, I'll turn it back over to Giovanni.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you, Shayna. Any question before I dive into the very last part? Please.

ALFREDO CALDERON

Now I'm going to speak in English. So, in one of the previous interventions that I had in the process, we talked about language. Of the 23 grantees or applications that are being doing the contractual agreements, is there any correlation? Because I noticed that North America and Europe seem to have more than the other three regions. Was there any correlation understanding the proposal they submitted? And were they all supposed to be submitted in English? Thank you.

SHAYNA ROBINSON

Thank you for that. I think that's a good question. And I think that's certainly something we want to think about. Of course, again, the miscibility criteria were that everything should be submitted in English. What's the impact of that in participation for countries where English is not the dominant language? That's certainly something we want to think about and may revisit and adjust in future cycles. So, I think that's absolutely something we're paying attention to. Yes.

XAVIER CALVEZ

Just to add a practical point, while the application needed to be submitted in English, there were program documentation that was produced in several languages in order to help understand the program. And then the application needed to be submitted in English. So, that's something that we wanted to be able to emphasize as well. And of course, the awareness campaign that was carried out prior to the launch of the program was carried out in many different countries and in localized outlets, media outlets, that therefore was in the languages of the country to also help raise more interest that way. Thank you.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you, Xavier. Mary, please.

MARY UDUMA

Okay. Thank you very much. Now that you have shown us the figures, when we look at the distribution of the application vis-a-vis the final stage and those that are winning the grant eventually, we

found out that Africa had the largest application. And yet, I think almost the lowest, not the lowest, but in between when it comes to grantees. So, is it, do we think, maybe the next session will address this.

Could it be that they did not understand, the applicants did not understand what the program is all about, or they didn't get assistance in terms of outreach by the group, by ICANN to be able to understand what is expected of them while doing the application. And during the outreach, there was language taken into consideration while reaching out to people that, or applicants that will apply. I mean, the applicant guide, was it translated?

I'm sorry that I'm asking this question. Was it translated to other languages so that they could actually get to know what the application is all about? Some will be applying about content, why ICANN is not, is not ICANN's mission. And so, application is dead on arrival. So, those are things I wanted to ask whether those were considered, whether they understood actually. Thank you.

SHAYNA ROBINSON

Thank you again for that. I think part of the challenge is that we have one big Grant Program, but the world is very different, and the challenges and the proposals to solve those challenges are very different around the world. And so, I think for us thinking about how do we respond to the actual challenges locally in certain regions and certain communities, how can our program be responsive to that?

So, it's a bit tricky, I think, when we have one program with all the same criteria and all the same parameters to respond to very different and diverse challenges. So, I think that's one thing that certainly we want to think about and talk about as we look forward to future cycles. How can we maybe lessen the competition across all regions, but still being fair and transparent with the process.

So those are complicated answers and things, and I think the last time we had a public session there was some discussion about setting sort of quotas or designating funding for particular places and things like that. Those are always things that we can consider and think about, but certainly I think to have in particular Africa there's obviously an appetite for this funding and a need to solve those challenges and to think about how that correlates to what the outcome was and why that may or may not correlate.

So, I think those are good questions that we have to ask and help us to reframe the program moving forward. And then in terms of the guidance, yes, it was translated, our Applicant Guide was translated into the six UN languages, so that was available. But again, how can we improve or supplement or support capacity building for applicants? How do we make ourselves available as a team, webinars, guidance, so that folks have more support in submitting those applications so that they can be more competitive, I think would be helpful.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you, Shayna. Next one, please.

PAULO MILLIET ROQUE

Paulo Roque again from the Brazilian Software Association. This is a quick one. Do we need to translate through sworn translators the official documents? Today there is a lot of applications that can translate documents in a cheaper way and a faster way, like articles of constitution, this kind of documents.

SHAYNA ROBINSON

Yes, so we did not require translation of all of the materials, like articles of incorporation and things like that. Other vendors, though, that we worked with to validate those documents worked individually with applicants to ensure that they had all the information that they needed, but we did not require that up front, no.

PAULO MILLIET ROQUE

Thanks.

SHAYNA ROBINSON

Thank you.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Sebastien, please.

SEBASTIEN BACHOLLET

Thank you very much, Sebastien Bachollet in French. I was not an applicant for this cycle. I believe it's a good thing to state it. One of

the previous slides pertaining to the regional breakdown, you had the number of applications, but if you would display that figure on every slide, this would be helpful because it's hard to interpret these slides mathematically, unless you are a mathematician. So, I believe it would be good to have these figures on every slide. Furthermore, I hope we're not coming up with another harebrained idea and that I hope we don't need another 12 years to move to a second cycle of applications.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Sebastien, point taken. Peter.

PETER THOMASSEN

Hi, yes, this is Peter from the deSEC. So, first I want to thank you, right? There're delays and everything, but it's also the first time. I think that's not a big problem. So, you just had another slide, I think it was the slide before, the upcoming section four. Can you go to that slide? The bar diagram, yes. Yeah, this one.

So, this says Africa is roughly half of Europe in terms of the final slate funds. And if you go back to the chart that you just said before that he was commenting on, here, I don't actually know what is shown, so maybe you can answer that. So, here Africa is double of Europe in terms of the area, but also four is half of eight. And then four in Africa seems to be 32%, but then for Asia Pacific four is 20%. So, I don't actually know what this is. Is these funds or applications or something else?

GIOVANNI SEPPIA I think, Peter, we have already taken a note about this slide to be corrected before we upload the slide deck. It is point taken as well. We have slide 23 has been already detected by us while we were going through that there is a mismatch between the number of application and the percentage. So, we'll fix it.

PETER THOMASSEN Thank you so much.

XAVIER CALVEZ Thank you for editing the slides.

PETER THOMASSEN Oh, and will the slides be made available?

GIOVANNI SEPPIA They will, yes.

XAVIER CALVEZ The correct slides will be made available. Yes.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA This is the last in the queue because we are wrapping up the session as we are nearly there. So, thank you. Please.

JEFF OSBORN

My name is Jeff Osborn and maybe I'm the only one, but I was enjoying doing the math and calculating which was the percentage of the total and which was the nominal percentage of the parts. One thing, I understand how difficult it is to give away money.

You can get mileage at cocktail parties explaining it's hard to give away money. Nobody will believe you, but the stories are really good. So, this is hard. Having gone through a number of these, this has been done well. Congratulations. For the first round, this is really impressive. Somebody has really cared and very thoughtful and really followed up. So, the only thing I'm going to ask is I was asked by some friends whose nonprofits I helped them with, please let the people who didn't make it know how they can do a better job the next time. And the second one, and this is really crucial.

I run a software company. We ensure everybody who doesn't get a job from us gets a letter thanking them for applying and letting them know they matter. And so, I think I'm sure as a matter of course it will happen, but it's a great way to get a lot of goodwill for ICANN in a not difficult way is to let people know thank you so much. Here's some feedback. So, great process. Well done.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you so much. Thank you, Jeff. And a point really well taken about communicating to the applicants in a different timely manner. Let's put it this way. So, I know there is a question, very short question in the chat. Madeleine, if you'd like to read it.

MADELEINE WERBELOW

Yes, thank you. It is why don't share the names of the projects at least?

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

And I guess the answer is for the same reason that we are not sharing other information. So, until the process is complete, we are not going to share the project name or applicant name or the applicant comes from. So, just a bit of more patience and we'll get there. We'll be publishing the list.

So, I'm going to jump quickly to the last slide that is about the first cycle review. So, as was foreseen in one of the Cross-Community Working Group on Auction Proceeds recommendation, at the end of each cycle, we will have an internal review to assess how the cycle has gone from a procedural administrative perspective. The findings of this review will inform the next cycle. So, we are currently in the grant agreement negotiation phase, and we have already started to design the first cycle review.

So, this is a process that we have already started, and we are going to go through it in the coming months. The findings of this internal review will inform, as I said, the future cycles. So, all the information, we have a Grant Program webpage that is regularly updated as well as a page on the community wiki. So, as soon as the grant agreement negotiations are complete, we'll publish the names of the successful applicants there as well as the projects. And we will keep you up to date regarding future cycles on this community page and webpage. With that said, I do not see any

other question. We are sharp on time. There is one. The very last one. Very last one.

ALFREDO CALDERON

And it's in, this is Alfredo, and I'm going to speak in English. It's related to that cycle. The Next Round, the expectation, the way I see it, it's that it's going to be within 36 months because it's two years for the largest project. Then the review, how long will it take to start the second cycle or the second round?

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

It's a very good point. So, we are not going to wait for the end of the projects that are going to be supported within the first cycle to start the next cycle. So, we're not going to be 36 months unless there are some contingencies we cannot foresee at present, but it's certainly not going to be 36 months. Xavier?

XAVIER CALVEZ

Just to say simply that we're going to process and proceed with the decision of carrying out the second cycle as soon as possible, not conditioned by the completion of the first cycle. The review is the first step, then the Board decision to proceed, and then that next cycle, if the Board proceeds with it, then can be carried out. And it would be as soon as possible, not as late as at the end of the 24 months.

And I just wanted to say that all the comments that we collected today, it goes a long way into that review that we just talked about

because community input on that first cycle. So, all that gets logged into our comments that we are taking into account to then be able to carry out that review. And of course, we will come back to the community once that review has been completed. Thank you.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you, Xavier. Thanks to all those who have participated remotely or in person. Thanks a lot, to Shayna. Shayna joined ICANN in August, 2023. It feels like she's been with us since a long, long time. And her contribution with the Grant Program expertise has been really critical to move the program forward. So, thanks also to all the interpreters, to Sarah, Madeleine, Daniela, and Yvette who have supported this session. Thank you a lot, and stay tuned on the Grant Program webpage. Bye.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]