
ICANN82 | CF – SSAC Session: How to chair an SSAC Work Party
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KATHY SCHNITT

Hello and welcome to our SSAC session on how to chair an SSAC work party. My name is Kathy and I am the Participation Manager for this session. Please note this session is being recorded and is governed by the ICANN Expected Standards of Behavior and the ICANN Community Anti-Harassment Policy. If you would like to speak during the session, please raise your hand in Zoom. When called upon, virtual participants will be given permission to unmute in Zoom and our on-site participants will use a physical microphone to speak. Please state your name for the record and speak at a reasonable pace. And with that, I'm happy to hand the floor over to SSAC Vice Chair Tara Whalen.

TARA WHALEN

Thank you, Kathy. Welcome everyone to today's session on how to chair an SSAC work party. So I'll be moderating this session today and you're probably wondering what we're going to go through today and what we're going to learn. If we go to the next slide, you will get an overview. If you were in my session earlier today, you heard a bit about some of the plans that we had and I gave a little bit of an introduction to the fact that we thought maybe it might be good to provide some advice, insights, tips for someone who might be running a work party. Those of you who have done it have

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probably learned a lot. You have the battle scars to prove it. Some of you are in work parties yourself, maybe wondering how you can work well with your chair. You may be thinking about doing it in the future and wondering how you can be set up well. Well, there's no silver bullet. I think we all know these are difficult, some of our projects. We can't give you three tips and suddenly everything will be great, but maybe we can give you some advice and guidance that might make the job a little bit easier. So what we're planning to do is also put all of this into working on a training guide. And so we have a very early draft with some skeleton going on. We thought it might be good while we have people here is to have a conversation. And then, of course, the great thing about recording it is we'll have all of this in a transcript and we'll capture all of the discussion. So this is meant to be an interactive session. So we do have a panel here today. We have our wonderful panelists here. We have Suzanne Woolf and Ross Housley, who I have worked with in their chair capacity in different recent work parties. But I also know that many people who are in the room have experienced themselves and you could equally well be in here, but I'm hoping that you will jump in and give your insights, your challenges, your problems, your successes, and put all those on the pile of the conversation today. And I'm sure this will not be the end of this conversation. So then we'll take all of this content and put some of that in the guide as best we can and keep the training going. So what we're going to do then is I'm going to basically start with some kickoff questions for each of the panelists on a series of topics. So we'll go through the expectations and responsibilities of the chair

and then some particular things that chairs are expected to do, like planning the meetings and keeping the discussion going and working with the, I'm sure, not inevitable conflict and getting consensus and working on delegating tasks and tracking the progress of their projects. But this will be very interactive, a very open discussion, so I really do encourage your participation here. So we start off with our panelists, and so we'll always give them, I guess, the floor for each one of these sessions, and then we'll expect to kick the questions around. So the next slide, well, here we are, here are my wonderful panelists. They're looking so happy because they are so happy to be work party chairs, I am sure. For the sake of everyone who's watching, I think like a little introduction to the two of you would be great about sort of who you are and where you work, work party experience that you have had or currently or in the past. And if you even want to throw in a little bit, I know that some of you have experience even with work parties in other related Internet groups, if you want to lay that out, go ahead. All right. Start with Suzanne.

SUZANNE WOOLF

Sure. I'm Suzanne Woolf, and I do what we call technical community outreach for the Public Interest Registry. I'm not currently chairing an SSAC work party, but last year and the year before, I chaired the completion phase of the Name Collision Analysis Project. As I was saying, chaired the completion phase of the Name Collision Analysis Project, which was a work item for the SubPro, the new gTLD applicant guidebook project effort. We had a community discussion group that was responsible for that, which

is not the usual way for SSAC to work. There was also a related SSAC work party that I chaired. I have also chaired a couple of work parties in the past, and I co-chaired the DNS operations working group in the IETF.

RUSS HOUSLEY

So Russ Housley, I chaired with Barry the evolution of the name resolution work party. That was fairly successful in that it didn't go much longer than we anticipated, but we also kind of went into it thinking we weren't going to have board recommendations, and it was more of an informational piece, and that's what it ended up being. In terms of other chairing experience, I have a lot. Past chair of the IETF, past chair of the IAB, I'm chairing three IETF working groups right now. So, plenty. I chaired the SSR2 review team, which was a complete debacle, and so I'll share some of those things as well as we go along.

TARA WHALEN

I definitely have some heavy hitters up here on the panel. So I thought to kick the discussion off, we would start with talking about the expectations and the responsibilities of the work party chairs or the way that they have been laid out in terms of the SSAC operational procedures. So the next slide gives a bit of an overview. There we are. So if you can actually look in the operational procedures and see these written out to talk about the main responsibilities. So these are laid out as managing the work party meetings. I think there's a lot in those few words. Assigning the task to the members, who has to do what. Participate in developing the

work product. And there's also the monthly progress report. So you will have noted in our monthly meetings, there'll be presentations on the mailing list of the progress reports and then opportunities for people to ask questions of the work party chairs during our meetings. So we want to ensure that people know what's happening in the work parties, and that's one way of keeping track of the progress. In terms of the consensus process, the authority for the work party, the SSAC chair actually has delegated authority to the work party chair for declaring consensus. So that's a pretty big responsibility. But the chair returns the final authority and the consensus to the SSAC chair after achieving consensus. So there is a kind of a process here about the way that the consensus is delegated. And one other item is, from the perspective of the membership committee, is when there is a annual review, we can ask the work party chairs to provide feedback about observations of participation of members in a work party. So we sort of rely on the judgment and observation and insights of the work party chairs for that role as well. So I'd like to get from the panelists, when you kind of see the way this is laid out here in cold type, does this describe the way that, what did it look like in reality based on the definition from what you saw? Does this match? Is it complete? What is it missing?

RUSS HOUSLEY

The bottom one's just wrong. It just doesn't work that way. Basically, staff tells you who, you know, sent regrets and who didn't and all of that's just taken care of. The work party chair just doesn't need to get involved. If you're going to ask about who actually

participated and did work, that kind of happens. But the, you know, who said they were coming and who didn't and then didn't and all of that, that's not something that the work party chair needs to worry about. So let's take the other parts. It is very, very, very important for, before each call for the chair to have a, "This is what I expect to get to. And if things go really well, what's next?" Otherwise, you end up with dead air and going home early. So have a stretch goal, right? You don't expect to get there. But if you do, then you're able to take good advantage of everybody being there. The consensus authority is really, yes, you get to make the calls on the various topics as you get to consensus. And what you're really doing is handing the baton back to the SSAC chair to do the consensus on the final document. So it makes sense because you're moving from work party consensus to AC consensus.

SUZANNE WOOLF

Yeah, I think actually the hardest part for me personally as far as chairing, SSAC is very fortunate that we have very active and involved staff support. They are terrific and they are enormous help as far as setting priorities and helping to manage schedules and project planning and so on. But the chair still gets to make the decisions and set the priorities. And you can't really back away from that or it will cause all kinds of trouble indefinitely. The other thing, though, that I find personally challenging is to participate in developing the work product. Because if it's a topic I have strong opinions on myself, I have to keep saying to myself, you know, that's not my job right now. I'm here to facilitate other people being able to put together their interests and views. And I have to

consciously put a successful work party and a successful document ahead of, but what about this? So that I personally find very challenging. As far as assigning tasks to members, this can be very difficult or it can be very easy. It's easy if people are sharing their opinions, you know, on a call or in a mailing list discussion because the chair then gets to say, can you write that up as a paragraph or two in the document? And it usually works, at least as far as getting draft text. But if it's hard to get people to actually step in, then you kind of have to go a little further with, okay, we're all here to work on this.

TARA WHALEN

So I had a short follow-up, which was to find out all of these tasks that you're all responsible for. You had some expectation of the time commitment that you were going to have when you signed up for this. Did you have – did it match? Was it about what you expected? Was it – I'm not going to anticipate the answer.

RUSS HOUSLEY

I don't think – did it meet my expectations? Yes. But basically, you need to figure that you're going to spend an hour preparing for every hour of meeting.

SUZANNE WOOLF

I looked at that question and I have no idea how much physical time I've spent. I know it always feels like a lot of mental time because you're steering what's happening. I didn't even mention before about consensus, but if you're listening for where are we

ready to, you know, declare text at least half-cooked and then where are we going to have a – we have to have a wide-open discussion and then narrow it down. There's actually quite a lot of mental work involved. So I have no idea what clock time was involved, but it's a significant commitment of mental energy.

TARA WHALEN

Danielle, are you managing the queue? We have one in the room. We don't have any questions from SSAC members. Sorry, who's got their – Barry, go ahead.

BARRY LEIBA

Sure, this is Barry Leiba. I'll throw something out at both of you. We have three major issues that come up in developing things in work party. One is that we're all a bunch of technical experts and the stereotype of technical geeks having questionable social skills is not entirely unfounded. So people tend to talk and talk and talk and talk and talk and talk and hold the microphone for a long time. And sometimes by the time other people get to talk, the subject has moved on and it's difficult. So that's one. Another is we're all so busy people and we don't always follow up and write text. You covered that a little bit, Suzanne, but saying a little more about how to actually get the text into the document, how to manage the work to do that. And the third problem that we have is people can't always – we're all so busy, right? As I said, we can't always come to all the meetings and we wind up getting disjoint sets of people coming to different weeks of meetings and rehashing things and even turning things around that were discussed the

previous week because those people aren't there. And then they come back the next week and say, oh my God, you just changed everything that I told you two weeks ago. So how do we resolve that? So those are the three that I'd like to throw out there.

RUSS HOUSLEY

So I found it very frustrating when we had like a 45-minute discussion and then the participants, the more vocal participants would say, great, staff will write that up. Where that was the 45-minute discussion. And the staff was amazingly good at getting the core points, but boy, I think they really had to work a lot harder than if the people involved in that conversation had each spent 10 minutes writing it down. And I thought that was rather unfair. But as you said, sometimes they pull the I'm too busy card and that's what you get. And so the people who show up are loud and they go away for two weeks and then show up and are loud, that does lead to thrashing. And I don't know what to do about it other than when they're there, you talk about these are the changes and the rationale for the changes. And they either accept the rationale or they argue the rationale, but now you're actually talking about the content and that's good. What was the third one? I think you covered it well.

SUZANNE WOOLF

I'll second what Russ said and sort of add that you kind of have to meet people where they are as far as what effort they can provide. And you have to sort of make sure that you're protecting everybody's ability to contribute. For instance, if people are, you

know, taking too long to say something, it's okay to excuse me, let me see if I'm understanding what you're saying. And try to make it something everybody can grasp and then you can go on to the next thing. Doesn't always work. No, this always works. One key is that no single method of incorporating input is, you know, the end of the discussion. You don't want to keep going indefinitely, but at the same time, if everybody on the phone call agrees, but people who have been at, but a phone call is not necessarily representative. So you end up with kind of the IETF situation of, you know, people can't always be in the physical meetings, but let's make sure that you draw people's attention to, you know, section three on the mailing list. And that way people have more than one chance to pay attention. And then if they don't take advantage of the opportunity, you can say, you know, we did more or less decide where we're at with that. The other piece of that, I guess, is with NCAP, it wasn't just an SSAC work party, it was people from all over the community. We had some people who were not comfortable with the techies. And for some of them, I just had to make sure they understood that they didn't have to start their interventions by saying, I'm not a techie, but. And I say this with great affection because, you know, sometimes you just have to encourage people. You have as much reason to be here as anybody. But nothing always works. You kind of have to make it up as you go.

TARA WHALEN

I have Georgia, then Peter, then Maarten.

GEORGIA OSBORN

Thank you so much. I think I have a question, mainly because I'm new. Because I'm new, because I'm new. We've sort of launched into when the work party is going, but what, how does it form? And from the start, what kind of does a chair do when it's beginning? And the role, if it could be structured from start to kind of that middle bit that you've gotten to? Thank you.

TARA WHALEN

So it actually isn't the work party chair's job to start it. So maybe Ram can...

RAM MOHAN

Yeah, thanks. So the specific process is laid out, you know, in our operations manual. But the, in practice, what happens is, you know, you look at what Maarten did last year, for example, he, there was a particular area that was of interest for him. And he wrote a, not a charter, but he wrote a, hey, I'm interested in this area. I think this might be useful for the, I want to do some work in this. Are there any others who might be also interested? And then you find on the list, you'll find people saying, count me in, I want to be part of it. You know, that's what Rick and Matt did on, on [inaudible], for example, right. And it's a fairly low threshold, I think, you know, typically, if you have some folks who really object and say, no, I don't think it's a good idea, then it's unlikely it's going to move forward. But generally, the in practice, Georgia, what it's been is five, six of our members put their hands up and say, I will, I will contribute, not I will review, but I'll actually contribute to the work party. And that tends to be the threshold. If you don't have enough

contributors, then the, the, the work party becomes very weak. And we've had some examples of that, you know, back in the day, the request that had come specifically from the ICANN board to do some responses on IDNs. And there were three of us in all of the committee that had any level of expertise to offer. So officially, it was a work party. In reality, it was not the way we usually run work parties. So that's one part. The other part of it is, we have to check to see that we have enough staff resources, allocatable and available. Right. So right now, if you look at it, you know, we have three work parties that are commissioned and that are running. And we're effectively at capacity. We don't have, you know, the ability to start up another one. However, if you put a proposal forward, and if that gets traction, you know, so there's, there's one that is pending with a charter that has to be really modified and, and, and shaped, which is on DNSSEC, you know, examination of DNSSEC. If we get enough consensus on that, then as soon as the next, one of the current work parties, most likely the blocking work party, as soon as that finishes, we can spin up the next one and get going.

MAARTEN AERTSEN

So what really encouraged me, Georgia, to get started was encouragement from staff to submit a lightning talk. And then things went faster than I thought they would go. But that's how that went. I think I was encouraged to provide a lightning talk the week before the event. I was on a long flight. And then after that, things went quickly. So yeah, not sure if that's useful.

SUZANNE WOOLF

The other piece of this as far as initiating a work party is we have actually more rules than we used to have about having a charter for a work party. Because you want to know what you're trying to accomplish. You want to know when you'll be done. Because with many of these things, there's no natural deadline. But you also have to, and if you can't get consensus from the SSAC on a charter for a new work party, that's probably not a great sign for producing an advisory or some other output that SSAC will have consensus to support. So it's kind of the rehearsal for, does this idea really have legs?

RUSS HOUSLEY

Also, just because you proposed a work party doesn't mean you have to chair it.

SUZANNE WOOLF

Yeah. Wait, really? Why didn't you tell me that before?

RAM MOHAN

Yeah. And that's another thing, Georgia, that is an evolution. We've now had several successful worked examples of work parties having co-chairs. And I think that's a really good thing. Because then you don't have too much of the load. They can share it between themselves and it helps with scheduling, calendaring, things like that. And the practical part of it also is that when the work party is done with its work and it goes to all of the SSAC, and

then you have, in case it's something that is spicy and generates a bunch of comments, you now have two work party chairs who can go and work on it and talk to members and say, what are your real concerns? How do we go and reconcile? Because in the past, that has been an area that has been of huge frustration. You look at the SSAC 100 to SSAC 115 series, that was punctuated by work party chairs who got burned out by running the work parties because the work party finished the work, it went to the SSAC, and then effectively everything started back all the way up again. And then it took a year, in some cases a year and a half, before we could say, okay, we've got consensus. So I think that part is working a little bit better now, but I still don't know that we've solved the problem fully of sniping after the work party is done. But I think what the open source work party and the blocking work party is doing is a good example where they're providing previews to the entire SSAC ahead of time. They're providing updates, and we've instituted that as a feature in the monthly meetings. We're asking work party chairs to come in and share where the work party is going, you know. So we're trying to engage members earlier so that we don't run the risk of, you know, the core of the group does all the damn hard work, and then it gets unraveled, you know, by a few others who are not, it's not that they're not making valid points, it's that those points are coming in so late in the game that it causes huge frustration and burnout.

RUSS HOUSLEY

So that happened in SSR2 as well. The very late comment, you're trying to declare consensus and ship, and then this really well

thought out comment comes in. It's, you can't ignore it, but it totally destroys the consensus. And there's no preventing it, right, and when it's a really good comment, you just have to search your soul and go, crap, but they're right.

PETER THOMASSEN

Yes, so as for technical, sorry, for pragmatic things that work party chairs can do and how they would do it, I found Barry's three points very good points. And now given that Barry isn't entirely unexperienced, I would be interested in your own answers.

BARRY LEIBA

Sure, that's fair. Well, I'll say one thing, Suzanne had a good bit of response for keeping the discussion moving and getting people not to bogart the mic, as it were, of interrupting them and saying, okay, so do I have this right? This is what your point was? Okay, Peter, your turn. And now I've just gotten that ranter to stop ranting for a bit. So that's one, I like that, and I've used that sometimes, but it is a balance because you don't want to cut people off too soon when they're still making some important points, so that's tough. I've not figured out a good way to actually get people to write text when they're not doing it, and I don't know that any of us have. Russ pointed out that in the work party that we chaired together, Andrew was just brilliant at doing most of the writing, but the staff shouldn't be the ones who have to do that, we should be. And I know what Maarten and I have been having, and I know what Maarten and I have been having, and I know what Maarten and I have been Okay, the rest of this call will be let's look at the text and

write and have people actually write on the call. And I know Warren and Greg did some of that also. So that's, I think, the answer for that.

SUZANNE WOOLF

Suzanne? Yeah, I think I'm going to disagree a little bit or at least point out that there are various ways of doing this. Because, yes, we want the work party members writing and reviewing text. But I have found one case where it's very useful to have staff who are willing to draft the outline of a section or something like that, which is when we're having trouble getting consensus. And then somebody who's been in the meetings but is not an SSAC member with the agenda of producing this particular piece of work, they can just write down what they have heard. And having it written down and having a draft helps people decide if that's really what they meant or it needs more. So I want to say thanks to the staff who have done that for us, because we ask them to step in when things are the most difficult and contentious.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER

Actually, the most interesting of your questions was the one where somebody is there one week and not the other. You know, the topics shift.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER

I think there's no way to avoid having that happen for a couple of rounds. But after that, you can say we've got consensus on this or we've reached something that we need to write down that

discussion. Let's have the discussion move away from that. There's here's where we are. Let's move on. And that's where you do the chair judges consensus and judges where the work party stands on an issue and just keeps it moving. It's tough to do. But after a couple of weeks of the back and forth, that's what you just have to do.

RUSS HOUSLEY

So I think when you find two people who have significant disagreement, they're going back and forth and back and forth and back and forth. You need to sometimes get them to stop and just say, OK, I think I understand what each of your perspectives is. Is there anyone else on the call who has a thought? Because there are people who are not willing to, you know, breaker one nine. Let me talk. They basically are going to wait for an invitation. And as the chair, you need to see that's going on and give them the invitation.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER

And the other thing I've done in the IETF here is take it. It's just particularly if it's just two people or three who are going back and forth, break them off and say in the IETF, we call it a design team. And when you guys go off and in two weeks, come back and tell us where you are. Tell us how you've agreed with each other to come up with something.

TARA WHALEN

All right, next in the queue, we have Maarten.

MAARTEN AERTSEN

So I have a very practical question that I personally run into right now. And I just want to solicit your advice based on your past experience. So we have been practicing this asynchronous way of working, which I like a lot. So what I find difficult at times is that we have like process information shared on the calls. We have process information in a document like assigned action items. We have process information in the wiki, like the great notes that staff keep, action items. And then we also have stuff on the list. But for my current or our current work party, there's not that much list traffic. But I find that different people have different preferences in consuming this process information. And thereby, I noticed that if I don't put stuff, for example, on the list, things get lost or like I don't reach a particular group. And I guess my question is to most of you, but I'll give you the task to kind of summarize for me. What should I do in this regard? Because doing stuff in four places seems rather ineffective, even though we have great help. So should we stop doing one of these or like what has worked for you?

SUZANNE WOOLF

I think as far as that kind of thing goes, there is kind of a chair's prerogative to say, you know, the primary source of administrative information is this. And just ask people to make that particular accommodation that there will be summaries or there will be the most critical information in one place. And, yes, I understand not everybody likes email or not everybody likes the wiki or, you know, whatever you judge is the best place to do it. But I think that that's

one of the areas where the decision that's made matters less than making a decision. And the chair is kind of stuck with those.

RUSS HOUSLEY

In SSR 2, our wiki was impenetrable. You could not figure anything out from it. One person knew where to find stuff and was constantly sending links during the calls so that you could go find it because there was only one. And that didn't help, right? So I agree with Suzanne. You've got to kind of pick one and say, for this party, this is where the central will be, and then ask staff to help by, you know, whatever they need to do for their own process is fine, but can we put it here for the work party?

TARA WHALEN

Okay, I'm going to take moderator's prerogative at the moment. So I went back to the agenda, and I'm going to note that after the opening, it was going to be about things like agendas and planning and organizing meetings. And this is an example of no agenda survives first contact with the meeting. But I actually think the discussion is quite productive. I'm hoping people in the room are finding that this is going in a good direction. We're getting good feedback. It's working really well. So in this context, I don't feel I need to be dogmatic about sticking to the agenda as the way it was laid out. But I would like to know, at least from the panelists in the room, if there are particular topics that we should be sure to or at least try to cover. If we get a moment where there's a pause or we're

not moving forward, what are the topics that you'd maybe like to hit the most so we can push those forward?

RUSS HOUSLEY

On the last one, the tracking progress part, if you end up working outside of SSAC, there's often a budget dimension to tracking, which we – it's all taken care of at the higher level. How many staff do we have? Okay, then your work party gets, you know, this. But there's not the same kind of – like, as SSR2 chair, I had to do budgeting. And that was a bit painful when you're talking to the ICANN CEO and said, there's not enough budget to finish the review. That kind of was a weird conversation. Bylaws say you're going to give me the money to finish this. So anyway, that was – so that's kind of an aspect of tracking that is not required by a SSAC work party chair. Just what's the work the charter says we're going to do? How are we doing? And you sometimes have the option of saying, you know, we thought we were going to cover this topic, but there's not ever going to be consensus on it. Cut it from the outline.

SUZANNE WOOLF

I guess it goes back to, to some extent, you make it up as you go. You have to judge where the group is going and help them steer but not be dogmatic about it. What you just did with, oh, we have an agenda, but we're having a good discussion, so we're not going to be dogmatic about the agenda. It's important to be willing to do that. It's also important to be willing to end the meeting early if people are grouchy or you're not making any headway. It has happened. I get your point. Certainly I want to echo Rob's point

about having a co-chair because that way there's two of you and you can take turns being unavailable or burned out or having different places where you can get along in different ways with different participants. So absolutely. I think it's, in fact, I'm – anymore, I think it's, in fact, I'm – anymore, I think it's, in fact, I look at situations where there's one chair in the room, and first, I feel bad for them, because it's a lot to stake on by yourself with nobody to really talk about it as a peer. But also, it's better, I think, for the group to have multiple people they can approach if there's a challenge or a difficulty.

GREG AARON

Hi. So I think I've done, I co-chaired or chaired, I think, maybe five in SSAC over time. I can show you the wounds. And then I co-chaired at GNSO PDP, which is a higher level of difficulty. Yeah. There are some commonalities. Every one of the groups ended up working a little differently. I mean, there's always some things you should always do, like working on those agendas and so forth, and the background prep time. But some of the things I've learned were that there are people who are very comfortable writing, and there are lots of people who aren't. And sometimes it's just because some people like doing it, or they think they have skill with it. Some people are working in their second language, for example. So you have to accommodate that. It is fair, though, to say, you know, you'll have somebody say, I don't like this thing. I don't like the way it's worded, or I disagree with it. And it has been useful sometimes to say, okay, cool. I can try to repeat back to you what you're thinking, but can you draft something? Seeing it in their words

sometimes helps them clarify what they're after. And then everybody has something to literally work with and put their hands on. And that's very helpful. One of the hardest things in a group is thinking you've gotten a subject taken care of and discussed, and then somebody missed a meeting, comes back, and then you have to start to revisit it. And this is true in any group, in any business, and in any ICANN discussion. And that's the hardest thing for the chair to do, to kind of say, we've got to move on. I thought we had some consensus. So at the very beginning of the working group, when you first start, it's good to talk about that expectation, about if you miss a meeting, read the minutes or see what we did in the paper, if it's in a Google Doc or something, and talk about objections early rather than later. That's why we now do these early looks, which is so nobody's surprised. And if they are surprised, you can say, we did talk about it. Let's see if we can resolve it. One of the things we should continue to talk about over time is the use of staff to write stuff. Sometimes a group can get through a lot of material with the members of the working group doing it, like this open, the DNS blocking one. A lot of the members were comfortable writing, and so we didn't have to rely on John Emery to write so much, although John is an excellent writer. John's role turned out to be he was the one who we would rely on to resolve comments. So he could kind of be the neutral arbiter of all the conversations that took place, and then he could do that, and the chairs could work on other things. So that was the way we took advantage of John's presence. Not every working group will work that way, though. Sometimes you just got to keep people to their

assignments, and as Suzanne says, you got to meet them where they are. Sometimes they're going to get it done. Sometimes they're not. We're all volunteers in the end. Working asynchronously, though, has worked well in this particular work party with DNS blocking, because the meetings get boring if you're just going through a document and talking about this sentence, and you sometimes devolve into wordsmithing rather than getting at the thought you want to convey to your audience. So we did a lot of asynchronous work, and in this particular case, it worked out well, so that was really nice. The document moved along. One of the jobs for the chair is to remember the audience. We're trying to make sure their documents are actually readable to a difficult mix of audiences sometimes, because we're all on the technical end. The people in this community often are not, so we're really trying to talk to two sets of people, and what we think is people read the executive summary. We're working really hard on our executive summary, and then we know that we're going to have a fall off as people read through the paper, and only the hardcore people are going to get to the end. So we've got good material throughout, but we know that we've got to make our points early and clearly and without too much technical detail, and that's true probably of the board. I know they read the papers, but they don't have a lot of time. We've got to get the high points across. So those are some of the things that we've encountered in various groups. Just sticking to these tips in the operational manual is super important, and I guess the final thing is sometimes you need to provide snacks so people don't get hangry at the meetings, and the other thing to

remember is, you know what, nobody's going to die. Everybody works on this stuff because they think it's important, and everybody's professionals, and we have this culture that we need to maintain in that we're all opinionated because we know what we're talking about, and people have experiences that they bring to it, so that's important, and we have a merit-based kind of a discussion about the facts. That's always good, and it refines the work to a high level of accuracy and professionalism. So that we usually end up where we want to be, usually, and everybody is usually fairly chill about stuff because in the end, we're just trying to do some good work together.

RUSS MUNDY

Thank you. Yeah, a lot of good points folks have made here, and having chaired a batch of work parties, including some in that spectrum that Ram referred to earlier, and probably the one that for me personally as a chair or co-chair was the worst, most troublesome, most troublesome, most difficult work party I've ever chaired or co-chaired was where we, SSAC, along with RSSAC and one other group specifically, oh, RZERC, had a request directly from the board that we were to give them our considered opinion on a very technical topic, and we had to give it to them by a certain date. And so we had a strong request from the board, we had a tight timeline, and we had people with lots of different views on it. One thing that occurred in that is we started out with co-chairs, and one of them decided it was such a difficult thing, they quit as a co-chair, they just left the work party. So some of them have been pretty challenging, and one of the worst parts of that one was the area

where as it went back, we thought we'd gotten consensus finally, and we went back to SSAC and got a ton of questions. The iterations did not occur as a proper, I don't think, in a professional way. Since I was left as the only chair of the work party, I had to respond to, it was about 15 pushbacks from the bigger SSAC, the vast majority of which, probably about 12, we'd already discussed in the work party and had come to a conclusion. But when the response went back to the bigger SSAC, except for one person, it was radio silence. I never heard back from anyone. And frankly, I think that was extremely unprofessional on the part of the SSAC members that were raising the issue. So I would ask, as professional people doing this, that if you raise an issue, please be prepared to actually discuss it and iterate on it, not just take one snipe, one shot, and then if something comes back, you then go silent. That was probably the worst experience I've ever had, actually in all of SSAC, as a matter of fact. I think that's something we can all keep in mind as professionals, that we need to deal with the work parties in a professional way, and if we're reviewing it as SSAC, deal with that in a professional way and be willing to listen and respond and to iterate. So, yeah, that was the main thing I wanted to request or comment on here. Thanks.

RUSS HOUSLEY

So, Russ, in the IETF, we label ISG-level comments as discuss, meaning, yes, we're ready to talk about this and take it or leave it comments, and maybe we need to label ours that way, so you know whether you're faced with, oh, I just had this observation, take it or

leave it, or, you know, I think this is a real problem, we need to better talk about it.

SUZANNE WOOLF

Yeah, Russ, I'm not sure, but I think I know which work party you're talking about. It doesn't matter, but I do think that we have made a number of changes since then that would go a long way to making it a less unpleasant experience for the chair. For instance, I would expect and hope that if we lost a chair, there would be an effort made to replace them. That's how I got involved in NCAP, and I want to give full credit. There were several people that had worked on it and had been co-chairs before me, and they put in the effort that they felt they could, and it turned out, because it was a multi-year project, frankly, it turned out to be good that we had evolution in, you know, we did have some turnover for chairs, and I think that would be different now. I think we've also made some steps towards not, and we talked about it a little bit a few minutes ago, as far as, you know, giving people previews of the document, making sure that they weren't completely surprised with a complete draft, and saying, you know, at some point the objections from people that weren't there when the issues were discussed, you know, at some point you have to say, thank you, but this document is done. It's, you know, it's the work product of the people that worked on it, and it will have to stand as that. So I think it would be different now, and I'm sorry that, I think I know where your pain comes from, and I'm sorry it happened that way.

BARRY LEIBA

We also, a couple of years ago, made changes to SSAC's consensus process, and one of those changes was to say that if you submitted comments during that end period, your comments would be debated only if you were part of that discussion, and otherwise we would, the work party had the option of just setting your comments aside and saying that they're not going to deal with them.

GEORGIA OSBORN

I have a question on tracking progress and how that's done, whether it's in a formal manner or how you do that, and then the second question is on deadlines. I noticed with the open source software work party, there's like quite a tight deadline, which, you know, we'd kind of discussed it in that session, but it would be interesting what would happen if you miss that deadline, and also just talking about deadlines in general, who sets it would be really helpful. Thank you.

RUSS HOUSLEY

I think Maarten was clear, he wanted to work on it, but not work on it for years. I don't think it was anything more than that.

SUZANNE WOOLF

Sometimes there is a relatively straightforward way to measure progress, which is that either in the charter, and I think we try to do this with charters, but also sometimes we're just being asked by the board or another group, a community group, to address specific questions, and then, you know, it's relatively straightforward to track progress against that. It can be real difficult, though, and

different groups have different responses to deadlines, too, but particularly with questions from the board. I mean, with NCAP, we had a situation where it was very difficult for anybody to give us a timeline or deadline right up until they had a very firm idea about the deadlines having to do with having promised to ship a new version of the applicant guidebook by a particular date, and we ended up having to work backwards from that and have an abrupt moment of realizing we didn't have a lot of time all of a sudden. It's one of those things you have to prepare as best you can to manage, but the world isn't going to surprise you.

RUSS HOUSLEY

Nobody's going to take your firstborn if you miss a deadline, and also internally set deadlines as opposed to externally set deadlines can be more flexible, but how we handle it partly is determined by how far behind the deadline we are. You know, if we get it out a month or two after we wanted to, that's okay. If it starts to drag on for four or six months, we might just close down the work party and say we're not going to do it. SSR2 is a unique example where the board hit the pause button in the middle, and then a bunch of people resigned in protest, and basically the whole review started over again when they unpaused it because there was that much turnover, and I argued their budget should have been started over because you basically were starting the whole thing over again, so there's all these external factors and they matter.

TARA WHALEN

All right. Next, we have Maarten.

MAARTEN AERTSEN

So I guess this is kind of a bridge to what Georgia asked. It's an observation and a question. I think the milestones helped me because it laid out some steps that we would need to take. I guess it also gives me some comfort when I see activity levels higher or lower than I would like because they give me a tool to say, hey, this is the upcoming milestone, considering the activity on this call, maybe this is a good time to plant the flag in the ground and say, hey, this may be at risk. For example, I think we had a good meeting here in Seattle, but what I did notice is that the people most active in the work party thus far were not able to attend this particular meeting, which has good reasons, but it also gives off the impression that I as a chair am having a monologue, and I had the comfort that we had a plan discussed for multiple times, and then if the next online call feels a little bit like a lull, I can just have that discussion and say, hey, this is the plan that we put in the charter, this is the plan that we are working towards. So I'm not sure how other people look at the milestones. I guess I will pose a question to the panel. Historically, have there been examples where activity levels lead to a premature conclusion of a work party? And I guess I'm asking because as we, as a number of very core topics have their own papers and we branch out into areas which are maybe need a little bit more work in the charter to explain why they are within SSAC's mission, the number of participants that naturally think,

yes, I need to be here because this is my thing, decreases, and, yeah, so I'll stop talking here.

RUSS HOUSLEY

Ram left.

SUZANNE WOOLF

Yeah, I would ask him. No, I think that's part of why we went through the whole process with making sure that there are those milestones and there is, my favorite part of any project plan is how will I know when I'm done? And having that unambiguous, even if you end up changing it, having some stake in the ground is helpful. The other thing is that we have very occasionally, I mean, I don't remember the last time it happened, we have wound up a work party from time to time with no document produced. And what we've done is say, all right, It was worth people's time to look into this. We don't want that lost. But there is not going to be an advisory from SSAC on this topic at this time. And it's not a failure to do that. You have made an important discovery. But I think we've, I'm thinking maybe once or twice, it's a very unusual outcome.

DANIELLE RUTHERFORD

I know that when I was interviewing to be on the policy team, Andrew McConnachie had shared there had been, I think, one in the last couple of years that they ended up not being able to produce

something, but it hasn't happened since I joined in mid-2019. Next in the queue, we have Russ Mundy.

RUSS MUNDY

Thanks. As a matter of fact, that was one of the points that I wanted to follow up on. First, I wanted to say, though, that I agree with both Suzanne and Barry's follow-up to my previous comment that I think the changes that we have made in SSAC have been, have resulted in significant improvements and hopefully will minimize the likelihood of another Titanic-like work party, like that one that I was talking about. But one of the things that we used to do, in particular when we were a much more closed group, is at the public reports at the ICANN meetings, was talk about the work parties. But each time we say that, or the chair would say, of the work party or of SSAC, but there's no promise to actually put out a document. We think we will. We think we'll have something to say, but we might decide that we really don't. I agree. It's been a fairly rare occurrence, but I don't know if our more open and public stance about things, and especially as other folks are seeing our work products as they are being put together, if, in fact, we still want to retain that position. I think we do, but it's something that I think the SSAC, as a group, needs to think about. At each work party, if they get to one of these, oh no, we just can't come to a consensus on what we're going to say or how much we're going to say. We think that we've discovered that, and that there's nothing that can be said at this point. I think we do need to keep that alive as an option, but it might be harder now as we become more public. Thanks.

SUZANNE WOOLF

I'm sorry, I'll just jump in. There is a piece of that, though, where I think we're more open now to if we have something, a point where an answer to a question or a point that we're trying to come to consensus on and we can't, it is sometimes worthwhile to document why we can't. What are the points of view involved and why are they not clearly reconcilable? In that case, you probably haven't written what you thought you set out to write, but it can still be a contribution to knowledge moving forward. It's frustrating. It's not what any of us wants, but it still, in the end, might be more valuable than doing what you actually thought you were there to do.

TARA WHALEN

So we've now got about 10 minutes left in the session. I think we've had a pretty far-ranging discussion. We've kind of walked around some of these subjects. We kind of got into those areas without even, I suppose, planning to. Yeah, I don't know. It's always been just the same 20 people talking. So I wanted to dedicate a little bit of the time because I had a dedicated section for the panelists to give final thoughts before we have a little time for a wrap-up about whether you would do it again knowing what you know now and why or why not, or I suppose under what circumstances, what promises do we have to make you?

SUZANNE WOOLF

I've done this multiple times, so I guess I would do it again. It is harder work than you might think, but it's a lot of fun and there's a lot of pride in being able to sort of steer into a result that other people find useful, and it's a contribution to answering the questions or being part of the dialogue in the community. And for the most part, people are terrific to work with. And you make friends. You learn how to get along with people that you didn't necessarily know. And now I'm backing myself into saying, sure, I'd do it again.

RUSS HOUSLEY

So, I would gladly work with somebody to co-chair a working party, but I will never do another SSR review team.

TARA WHALEN

I'm seeing nods of approval around the room. And learning, yes, so thank you for that. I also wanted to thank a lot of people in the room. This was pulled together kind of quickly, and Russ and Suzanne volunteered to come up here and be our people in the hot seat for keeping things going, apparently. I very much appreciate you prepping for this, for giving your time, for sharing the wisdom for the work you put in that brought you to this point. Also, thanks to the other folks who have been in the work parties and the chairs who were sort of the panel, the distributed panel. You might not have been formally on it, but you were also acting as panelists, which I appreciate. It made for a bit of an interesting shape. I think we got a lot of good points out of it. I also feel like we barely scratched the surface somewhat. I'm looking around the room

trying to get a sense. Do people find this? For myself, I found this a really useful conversation. So, I'm hoping that people found that this was good. And so this may be something we continue because, again, we got to the first part and maybe we need to have a couple more conversations.

PETER THOMASSEN

Initially, you said there is some work going on for like a sort of tutorial or something, or I don't know, guidance document. What form is that supposed to take? Is it like a booklet or is it like a slide deck or is it a fax? No, really, like what's this supposed to contain? Is it like a summary of this meeting here or like what kind of thing is it?

TARA WHALEN

Sure. You were going to come to my next part about sort of next steps and what we're doing. So, right now, it really is a Google Doc. It really is a guide, much like you might have seen for there's some other groups like W3C and the IETF sometimes do. Some of it may be slides, but it's really just text in this case of a very quick start of some things that you might find useful, links to other resources. This is what people, so maybe training from some other groups in categories for particular topics that you may be looking at, like dealing with conflict or getting people to participate, that sort of thing. And the idea, so it's the first draft and things like what we learn in this session can then be captured and added in that, the takeaways, the bits of wisdom, the pitfalls, the pieces of advice can be added to that. And we can link to this session so people can

rewatch it. So, we'd like to have just a basic training guide, but looking for a lot of feedback on if you've been having particular issues or there's things you'd like to see in it, then by all means, please get in touch with me because this is going to be a living document. So, that's what we're going to be doing is taking all this, summarizing it, adding it to that, and hopefully having a few more of these conversations going forward. Danielle? Maarten?

MAARTEN AERTSEN

I just wanted to share my appreciation for this session. It was my favorite surprise when I went through the calendar for this week. And it's helpful to me, like just having this conversation. I guess there will maybe also be follow-up conversations. And I like that we are spending time on this topic. So, thanks, Tara. And thanks to the panelists.

TARA WHALEN

Well, it seems like a very positive note to end on right there. So, thank you for all that. And I guess then with that, we will adjourn the session. Thank you very much.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]