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ICANN84 | Prep Week – New gTLD Program: Next Round Implementation Status Update  
Tuesday, October 14, 2025 – 16:00 to 17:00 IST

RENATE DE WULF

Hello, and welcome to the session New gTLD Program: Next Round Implementation Status Update. My name is Renate de Wulf, and I'm the remote participation manager for this session. Please note that this session is being recorded and is governed by the ICANN Expected Standards of Behavior and the ICANN Community Anti-Harassment Policy.

The moderator will read questions from the chatroom out loud during the Q&A part at the end of this session. If you'd like to ask your question or make your comment verbally during the Q&A section, please raise your hand. When called upon, you'll be given permission to unmute your microphone. Interpretation for this session will include French and Spanish. Please state your name for the record and the language you will speak in if speaking in a language other than English. Please speak at a reasonable pace. I will now hand the floor over to Marika.

MARIKA KONINGS

Thank you very much, Renate. Welcome, everyone. Thank you for joining us today. My name is Marika Konings and I serve as the lead for the New gTLD Program. I'm joined here by several members of the team that will be giving updates on the respective projects. I

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think as many of you know, we're supported by a whole army at ICANN, and not only staff, but of course, the community has been working with us closely on this as well.

I think we're waiting for the slides to get pulled up. We have quite a few topics that we're hoping to cover in this hour. We do ask you to reserve your questions until the end of the session, but obviously, in the meantime, please feel free to post your questions in the chat. We'll aim to capture them there and some cases may already be able to answer those as we continue the presentations.

I think we're slowly getting to the slides so I'll kind of take my time until we get there. For the agenda, we'll first cover overall program status updates, and then we'll dive into the details of some of the specific projects and programs that are part of the New gTLD Program Next Round. And then once we've gone through that, we'll also give you a preview of the work that we expect to pick up at a pretty rapid pace after ICANN84, focusing on readiness, not only applicant readiness, but also broader community, ICANN and vendor readiness as we start getting closer to the opening of the application window. Last but not least, we will also provide you with an overview of sessions that you can expect to focus on Next Round at ICANN84.

I think I just went long enough to kind of cover what is on this slide. Also, important and I'm hoping that one of my colleagues can post this in this chat if they have not done so yet, I think our pre-ICANN briefing has been published by now as well where, obviously, you

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can find further details on what we're presenting here as well as more that goes into the implementation of the New gTLD Program. If we can go to the next slide, please. The next one. Thank you. There we go.

We're kicking this off with an overall look at the status of implementation. I know there's a lot of information captured here on this slide. As I just said, if you're interested in the details for each of these projects and kind of the activities that they're working on, as well as activities they have delivered upon in the most recent period, I really would like to encourage you to review the ICANN meeting brief. I think the key takeaway from this slide is that overall program continues at a medium risk status. This kind of yellow status that you see here. This is largely due to scope and nature of the work that's happening in the gTLD Application Processing project or GAP. Yuko will share with you shortly everything that is going into that.

I've shared this previously with you as well, one of the challenges that we're of course facing is that you've already started flying the plane while we're still finalizing the manual, which has the final details on interior design and requirements that the plane will need to meet. Again, that work is all coming together and I think, as you hopefully all recognize, the teams is doing an amazing job in bringing all those pieces together. We still are very confident that we're able to meet our timeline of opening the round by April 2026. But I just want to recognize that that is obviously not always easy

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and really want to recognize all the efforts of the team in trying to keep the plane in the air. If we go to the next slide, please.

I think this is a slide you've seen before as well for those of you that have joined previous updates on the program, but this really sets out the critical path to getting to that milestone of opening the round in April 2026. You see here as well, a lot of green areas that we either have already completed or that are well underway on track. Also flag again some areas where we're paying a specific attention as there's a lot of work that needs to happen in those areas.

One change that you may recognize or see here, and Karla will be speaking about that shortly as well, is that we had a change in the timing for the Base Registry Agreement. We had originally planned final version of that to be published together in conjunction with the Applicant Guidebook in December, but due to some other pieces of work that feed into that, we now anticipate that to be ready in March. Just important to know that this is not expected to impact the critical path, but it is a change in the timing that we had originally communicated. I said, Karla will be covering further details on that in a little bit.

I think just the next slide... If you do want to have a little bit more information on what goes into each of these pieces on the critical path, I think this slides probably capture this pretty well. Also indicates kind of the timing of some of the remaining items that we need to close on for these areas of work. As said, we did have a

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change in the Base Registry Agreement but all other items are tracking against the original timing that we communicated.

Before I hand it over to Lars, I just wanted to give a big congrats to him and the team and also the Implementation Review Team that has supported us in an important milestone that we hope to achieve by ICANN84. I hope I haven't taken away Lars's thunder with that, but he will share a little bit more about that in the next part of the presentation. Lars, over to you.

LARS HOFFMANN

Thank you, Marika. I appreciate it. And you did not, rest assured. I'll have a couple of slides on the Applicant Guidebook. If I can see the next one, please. Thank you. It's an overview of the IRT, the Implementation Review Team. The bend is going towards the end. We're on the right side of the bell curve here in terms of meeting and work ahead of us. It's the final phase. We have another call tonight. This is the last call before the ICANN meeting. We'll have a lot of informative session during the meeting. We'll talk about that later. But here's an overview. We started this work formally with the IRT in mid-May 2023. We had a lot of meetings, taking up a lot of hours. This is volunteer work, I think, not just for staff but also for many community members. This does not count preparation work that goes into all of these meetings. It's a significant amount of members and also subtracks that we had with the IRT. If I can see the next slide, please. Thank you.

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This is what we've worked through over the past two and a half years. There were over 300 outputs of recommendations and implementation guidances from the SubPro PDP. We had five Public Comment Proceedings overall. Everything has gone out for public comment twice, including the entire draft AGB in July and August this year. There was a total of five Board resolutions, actually, because the Board didn't adopt the whole final report in one go but there were some communications back and forth with the Council for those in the know. You may recall that. Just realized I'm speaking probably a bit too fast for the translators. I will slow down. The whole document now comes up with the annexes to 446 pages. It's about 130,000 words, I think, so it's substantive. But a lot of this is 50 or 70 pages of application questions. It's long, but maybe not quite as long as it seems here. Over the topics, the modules that we have in the guidebook you see on the screen here as well, I won't read through all of those. If I can see the next slide, please.

We did share with the IRT a complete post public comment draft late this week, I think. Late last week on Friday, Jared send that out. It's kind of to give the community those working with us a heads up, see if there's any kind of inconsistencies. But the text is essentially fixed. As Marika said, we're expecting the Board to consider adopting the AGB in Dublin. The Board meeting here is on the last day of the meeting. I think it's the 30th of October. And then the formal publication will happen a little bit later. This is because there's a couple of items that we're still waiting on. As the DRSP

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rules, these are third provider rules. The IRT is aware of this. We've discussed it with them obviously so this is not a surprise. They kind of pass through to a degree. And so we will include that with a guidebook and then publish it. And there's also an item still question on the intent of some recommendation that's before the Council. Again, on that issue, which pertains to string similarity, we have bracketed text in the document and we'll either confirm that text or replace it subject to the input we receive from the Council.

Again, it's not something that is kind of in discussions. They're just parallel processes that are taking place and then the guidebook will be published formally in December. Many of you know there's a minimum of 4 months between the publication and the start of the round. There's a minimum per policy recommendations. As you know, we have been planning to have the round open in April 2026 for a while. A couple of years, in fact. And if we hit the December deadline, then we are continuously on target to open the window in April next year.

There's a couple of issues here. You see that the sub-bullets towards the bottom, which is still some issues that are before the IRT. Some of these may be appended to the guidebook, some might be supplementary documents. The IRT is also, again, aware of this. We talk this through with them. This is the work that is still outstanding. We'll go through with them over the month of November, December, possibly early next year as well, and then the IRT will, in Jeff Neuman's words, will finally be retired.

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One other thing, I'm just going to put a quick plug-in here, as a result of policy recommendations, we have what's called a predictability framework. It's part of the Next Round. Details are in the Applicant Guidebook. And as part of that, there will be a Standing Predictability Implementation Review Team, SPIRT. That is a group that will work with ICANN on any material changes to the program. Definitions of that are all in the guidebook. It's not for this session maybe. But there's a call for volunteers that's open at the moment. If anyone's interested in that, please take a look at the call and see if you want to sign up for that group.

With that, that's the end of my spiel. I think Jared will talk about the sessions at ICANN84 later, which is kind of circled back to some of this. But in the meantime, I'll pass it on to Kristy to talk about the Applicant Support Program. Kristy?

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Great. Thank you so much, Lars. Hello, everyone. This is Kristy Buckley and I serve as the lead for the Next Round's Applicant Support Program. Next slide, please.

For ASP, and many of you may have seen this on recent IRT outreach calls, we have three primary audiences that we're aiming to reach here. We've done some increased audience segmentation on the Applicant Support Program. These are prospective applicants. And we do that through targeted outreach and engagement efforts through events, webinars, information sessions, awareness campaigns through social media and other



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outlets. We've also partnered with the ICANN Community to create broader awareness among prospective ASP applicants.

The second audience is applicants that are already in the pipeline. Those are those that have started an application at some stage. And our team has an increased focus here with new reporting that can help us assess the stage and the age of the applications to better understand their intent to apply, as well as having standard communications cadence to more actively support movement through that pipeline. We've also implemented feedback surveys to understand any barriers that applicants may be experiencing so that we can help to effectively address those.

The third audience that we're focused on is supported applicants. This is distinct from the other two in the sense that these are applicants that have qualified for support. And here, we're focusing mainly on preparing for applying for a gTLD. So, we're building out our infrastructure to onboard those new supported applicants, providing learning pathways for foundational knowledge all the way through to more advanced topics and providing access to expert guidance and support.

The next slide I'm going to talk about is hopefully one that is reasonably familiar and it's focused on that second audience that I just spoke about. Applicants in the pipeline, so to speak. These are folks that have some stage of an application process. This pipeline shows the total number of applicants that have started the application process and where they are in those steps of

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completing an application. In the 103 circle on the left, you can see the plus indicator. That shows the plus 12 is how many we've seen total since last month's data was published on the 22nd of September. Here, we've got total of 103 which is 12 more than last month. And when we remove the inactive and withdrawn applicants at the bottom, we still have 69 active applications in the pipeline.

The colored circles show the active applications. We have 21 that have started the process, 39 with their organization submitted. We have seven more that have moved into that phase since we last reported this in September. And then we have six that have got the application submitted which is three more that have moved into that phase since last month when we reported on this.

At the bottom, you'll see the inactive application. There, we've defined inactive as they have not been active in the application system in the last 90 days. This is now at 33 and we've got one applicant that has withdrawn to date. Those 33 at the bottom have been removed from the active pipeline numbers above. As you may have seen, I wanted to mention this that we did recently announce an extension on the ASP application submission deadline. I'm going to post that to the chat so folks can see. This allows folks that have created an organization. The 39, for example, in this pipeline as of the 7th of October. If they've created an organization by the 19th of November, they would be allowed to have an additional

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four weeks to submit a full application through to the 19th of December.

With that, I'll go to the next slide to talk a little bit more about the geographic distribution that we're seeing in that pipeline. When you add up all of the colored circles in the pipeline across those active applications, we have a total of 69 as of the 7th of October. This is already a week old. It changes daily, usually. These active applications are across all five regions and 27 countries or territories. Since our last website update on these statistics which was the 22nd of September, as applicants progress in the application process and submit the organization, their region or territory becomes visible. In Africa, we've had two more since this 22nd of September. APAC, we've seen six more. LAC, we've seen one more. And North America, two more.

I think most of you probably have seen this graph before, but just to help explain, it's showing the total number in the region. The number of applications in Africa, this would be 12 and this is spanning seven different countries. The green line is showing how many different countries or territories that those applications are coming from.

I see a question from Tracy to clarify this, "That means that nine in total have submitted applications thus far?" That is correct, Tracy. Yes. I think with that, I am turning it over to Marika for RSP updates. Thank you.

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MARIKA KONINGS

Thank you very much, Kristy. I'll be covering today for the RSP team. Of course, if there are any questions that may not be addressed by this update and we're not able to answer those, we'll, of course, take them back to the team. Hopefully, this will provide the information that you're looking for.

As probably many of you are likely aware, RSP or Registry Service Provider pre-evaluation and submission period close earlier this year. The application period will open again in parallel with the opening of the new gTLD application windows in April next year. But for the moment, the team is, of course, focusing on the applications that have been submitted during this pre-evaluation phase. This pre-evaluation or the evaluation phase consists of three main components, namely, technical evaluation, technical test, and optionally, Registry Services evaluation. Can we go to the next slide, please?

The next two slides provide a more detailed breakdown of the process flow for an RSP evaluation from application to ultimately Registry Service testing and inclusion on the list of evaluated and qualified RSPs. The RSP evaluation process flow includes steps that may occur in parallel and others that will need to be completed before they can advance to the next step of the evaluation process. The first step requires applicant onboarding. Once that step has completed, the RSP system then allows the RSP applicant to start as many applications in parallel as possible while payment is being

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cleared. Once payment is received, background screening process starts and after clearing that step, the technical evaluation process begins.

We go to the next slide which shows that. After an applicant has cleared a technical evaluation, the RSP applicant then continues to Registry System testing version 2.0 and after they successfully cleared RSP, the applicant will then be listed as an evaluated RSP.

If we go to the next slide, we can also have a brief look at current numbers similar to what Kristy shared for ASP. These are also published on a monthly basis and updated on a monthly basis on the New gTLD Program website. For RSP, there are currently 31 applicants that are either ready or have already started submitting applications for one type of RSP. Three applications for which we are either waiting payment or background screening to clear so we need to see if or when these proceed forward. We go to the next slide.

Again, these numbers may be are confusing. That's maybe a quick reminder that RSP organizations can draft applications for four types of RSP. Namely main, DNS, DNSSEC, and proxy. This is why the number of initiated applications is much higher than the number of RSP applicants. But you can see, also, here that applications have started moving through the different steps of the application evaluation process. We go to the next slide.

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It just shows as well the geographic distribution of RSP applicants that are currently in the pipeline. I think that's all we have on RSP. With that, I'll hand it over to Karla.

KARLA HAKANSSON

Thanks, Marika. Hi, everyone. My name is Karla Hakansson and I'm working with the Internal Team to develop the next round Base Registry Agreement. Next slide, please.

I think most of you have seen this so far that the first public—we had scheduled two public comments for the Next Round Base RA. The first public comment was posted in June and ran through July. And we posted the Public Comment Summary and Analysis Report on the 28th of August, of which you will have a link to that. We had 12 commenters across 14 different topic areas via a guided submission form. This covered the range of topics that we included regarding the SubPro recommendations that are a part of the Next Round RA. We also included other policy recommendations such as Registration Data Policy. And then we also included operational updates based on the information and things that the Org has learned since launching the 2012 round.

The good news is that there were no substantive changes to the Next Round RA that were required based on the feedback that we received, but we do appreciate everyone's commitment to providing that feedback. We did really want to focus the first public

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comment on more of the substantive elements of the Next Round RA using the current RA as our template and our guide.

With the second Public Comment Proceeding that posted on the 30th of September, we're looking at more of the getting feedback on any of those incremental updates that we have made to clear up language that might have been confusing and to clear up any of the bracketed areas. We had nine bracketed areas in the first Public Comment Proceeding, and those were then updated to include in the second public comment period, aside from one bracketed area.

And if you could go to the next slide, please. The one bracketed area that we still have is in Specification 14. And as a reminder, Specification 14 is new and it focuses on variant TLDs. And we had a specific section, Section 2.13, which covers variant TLDs that was bracketed in the first public comment and again in the second public comment. And why is this bracketed? That's primarily because the Board needs to take action on the IDN EPDP Phase 1 Recommendations 7.4 and 7.5. These deal with the registry fixed fee and the registry level transaction fees specifically related to variant TLDs. The team is now working on the documentation to submit to the Board during ICANN84. And following the Board's consideration of these two recommendations, ICANN likely post a separate Public Comment Proceeding specifically focused on Specification 14 to include updates regarding the variant TLD fees. Next slide, please.

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It's because of this that, as Marika already alluded to earlier in the presentation, that we have shifted the timeline of the Next Round RA to account for the likelihood of this next public comment period specifically on Specification 14. The timing of this would be that we would post the public comment in early to mid-December, which would carry us through the end of January 2026. And at that point, we would prep the necessary materials to take the Next Round RA to the Board for review likely at ICANN85 in early March.

As Marika already stated, just to be very clear about this updated timeline, this does not alter the critical path to make the Next Round RA available before the application window opens in April of 2026. And it is not anticipated that any other substantive changes will be made to the Next Round RA outside of adding the details regarding the variant TLD fees. Specification 14 is anticipated.

With that, we're taking questions at the end so I'd like to hand it over to Yuko to cover the gTLD application processing. Yuko?

YUKO YOKOYAMA

Thank you, Karla. Hi. My name is Yuko Yokoyama, and I am leading the GAP Project. GAP Project stands for gTLD Application Processing. Next slide, please.

What is a GAP Project? It is to deliver the processes, technology, and resources to enable end-to-end processing of the application. This means the application submission to contract execution and everything that happens in between. Next slide, please.



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Here is a quick view of what the project entails. We have three major buckets of work: business processes, systems, and vendor sourcing. In terms of business processes, we have further breakdown of application evaluation. Subprocesses such as objections and contingency resolution. Application management such as change requests or payment and refund and also the quality control program. Quality control program is to ensure quality and consistency of the evaluation. We have done this back in 2012 as well. Name collision-related matter is shown in the dotted line. While this is a separate project, it has very much deeply embedded in the application processing as a whole. For illustrative purpose, you see name collision-related matter there.

Of these buckets of things, we have completed 31 major business requirement documents so far, and we are currently working on process flows and procedures. In terms of systems, we have eight systems under GAP's umbrella to develop or has completed development, which is LGR and DNS stability, Oracle, string similarity evaluation and SMD verification. Some of them are integration. We have three systems development in progress. TLD Application Management System, which we call TAMS, Application Publication System and Application Comment Forum. NSP work, the Naming Services Portal work has not started as it is not needed until much, much later in the program. TAMS, the TLD Application Management System is the biggest system to build and we've so far concluded four build cycle out of six. Each build cycle is about three months long and consisting of about six two-weeks straight cycles.

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Vendor sourcing. We've determined some evaluation and policies can be done internally at ICANN. Many needed to be outsourced. Look here, you see a list of vendors we intend to source. So far, we finished all RFI and we are now to our two RFP into 13 total at the moment. Specific vendor sourcing timeline, you can see that in the link provided at the bottom left. Next slide, please.

Here is the high-level timeline of GAP project. For illustrated purpose, the timeline is starting from July 2024 because of real estate issue, but the project actually started back in February. You can see from today's line that we have accomplished a lot. Some of the work you can see is expected to happen after the window opens. For example, TAMS build six. The final build that we're expecting is taking place sometime over the next summer. This is for things that we do not need immediately after the opening a round such as a contracting module. Some vendor sourcing is also continuing, in particular for those that we don't need until a bit later in the processing phase, such as auction vendor or application applicant evaluation vendors. We focus our attention based on the priority and timing by which the things are needed to effectively and strategically allocate our resources.

Lastly, you see a readiness track at the bottom in yellow brown line. We, of course, want to ensure that we are not only internally ready to launch the program, but also to ensure that community, the future applicants and vendors are all ready too. We have a readiness track highlighted there, and we'll be providing various training materials. This is a nice segue into Kristy's for readiness

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workup before that long last slide. If you could go to next. Thank you.

This is the applicant journey that we presented during the ICANN83 Prep Week session so I'm not going to go over this. Again, this was covered during the last Prep Week session and there's a link to the Zoom recording there if you would like to review it. With this, I would like to hand it over to Kristy, please.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Many thanks, Yuko. Hello, everyone. Next slide, please. Thank you. Another hat that I wear is leading the readiness team. Maybe before I dive into the details of that, just to briefly describe what is readiness. Putting it simply, it is preparing all audiences for the Next Round, which includes applicants, both new applicants and those that are more seasoned, as well as community members, staff and vendors. When we say readiness, we're describing that work that goes into making sure that key stakeholders have the required knowledge and ability to play their role in the Next Round. Before primary groups of stakeholders with a role are applicants, community staff and vendors.

We have 3 objectives for the stakeholder groups. The first is in order to participate in the Next Round, stakeholders need to be able to build their knowledge of the application process to be able to use that application system that Yuko is just talking about in order to effectively participate. Second, readiness resources have to be flexible and sustainable. This is aiming to meet the various

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audience needs, depending on where they are and starting their sort of learning pathway. Lastly, we need to enable consistent and predictable processing and evaluation. As we plan on supporting readiness and planning courses around those, these are the 3 objectives that we're aiming to achieve. Next slide, please.

As we are building readiness content, we're focusing on 3 categories in this bucket here. The first is the foundational information and concepts. And then we're building on that foundational knowledge with content on application stages, the processes and the evaluations involved. Lastly, we're layering in systems, the TLD Application Management System used by applicants and the Application Comments Forum. Developing content for different purposes and delivering in multiple ways, as well as providing reference resources is aimed to fit the needs of a complex program with different readiness needs over that time horizon.

When we look at the readiness content, the delivery falls into two main categories, which you see the virtual courses and quick reference resources. The virtual courses include curated ICANN Learn resources to build that foundational knowledge in context for those that are new to ICANN or new to the Next Round. And we're currently developing content for webinars, which will be recorded and available online. Lastly, we're developing reference resources in a variety of formats that are available on demand that can be used by stakeholders at any time. These include system

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guides, topic overviews, FAQs and micro video resources to navigate common system tasks. Next slide please.

This is a preview of the readiness pathway that the team is building to ensure that applicants are prepared to apply for a gTLD in the Next Round Program. As I mentioned, there's a number of different audiences that we're looking at readiness for, but this is showing the applicant readiness pathway. We recognize that we're going to have applicants that are new to ICANN, maybe new to the DNS industry, or just new to applying for a gTLD. The readiness pathway is intended to reflect the full journey of a newcomer and all the steps that they would likely move through, while also recognizing the applicants may start at different points in that pathway, depending on their level of knowledge and experience.

The phase one here, learning about ICANN, the industry, policymaking, and operating registry, that's the focus of the kind of new to ICANN phase. Once that foundation is set, or assuming that folks may already have that foundation, phase two focuses on the Next Round program in general. Then the applicant journey stages from preparing to apply all the way through to delegation. In phase three, the focus is on the application process itself and the application system in order to submit a complete application. And lastly, the fourth phase covers other aspects of the application and evaluation process that applicants should be aware of as they're navigating that.

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That gives you a preview of the readiness pathway that we're building out for gTLD applicants. And the next slide shows what readiness resources that we have available now. While many of our learning resources are still in development, we wanted to socialize what we have currently available for folks to learn about the Next Round. This might be helpful for those that are in your networks or those that are in the ICANN community to be aware of.

As most of you have probably gathered, the Next Round website is the best place to start for general information, as well as some deeper dives on specific areas like the ASP and RSP programs. We also have FAQs, Frequently Asked Questions, being created and added to the website on an ongoing basis. That's depending on the questions that we're getting, especially those that are coming through our Global Support Team.

We also have a selection of key topic overviews that have been created and more of those are in development. We also have examples of micro-videos and system user guides on the ASP Resources page and more of those coming for the gTLD application process. For those that are interested in learning more about ICANN, the DNS industry, or what it means to be a registry operator, we've curated a view of the ICANN Learn courses that cover those topics. And those are great for newcomers that are brand new to this space or the folks that would like a refresher.

Lastly, coming in 2026, we will be launching a number of Next Round webinars on timely topics as applicants are preparing for

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the round to open, as well as webinars throughout the application and evaluation process. With that, I will turn it over to Lars to talk about Next Round at ICANN84.

LARS HOFFMANN

Thanks, Kristy. Jared was going to walk us through this, but this just falls right in the middle of his drop-off time so I'll cover this for him. I hope you don't mind.

This is the list of sessions in Dublin that are related to the Next Round. You see, the team on the ground is going to be rather busy. It's nicely color-coded. The butter yellow, I think, is the term here. I've been thinking about these covers a lot since I last presented and got stuck. The butter yellow here are the sessions that we call IRT working sessions. These are not actually working sessions, but we had to put this in earlier. Never mind, it's logistics. The team will present the various topics that you see here during the session, a quick intro, we're thinking about 5, 10 minutes or so. And then these are intended to be kind of Q&A sessions for the community. We'll make sure that a note goes out to the various community groups before the meeting to make sure that we advertise. This is open sessions and not just IRT members. In fact, the IRT members probably know more about this than some of us here on the team, and so the wider community is really invited to these sessions. There's also note already in the community digest about this.

The blue highlighted sessions are those where the GAC has invited us to come and talk about various topics. These topics that you see

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here are those that the GAC requested. We are happy to oblige and present accordingly. Again, these are open sessions. Anybody can attend. Obviously, speaking there falls under the rules of the GAC so that's a different issue. The yellow sessions are open for questions to anybody at any time.

And then the salmon—is what I landed on here—colored sessions are those where some of the SO/ACs have asked us to present. The team offered that to the community during this meeting, the last meeting already as well in Prague to be part of their sessions if desired and present on the topics, depending again what those individual groups would like us to talk about. We're going to be speaking here to the Registry Group, to the Business Constituency, and the Non-Commercial Stakeholder Group as well. If there are others and we can fit you in still, we will be very happy to do that.

Other than that, I hope we'll see many of you doing at least one of these sessions, probably some of you doing all of them. With that, I didn't do my homework, I'm not sure who I pass it back on. I'm going to hash my bets and say Marika. Incorrect? Who's speaking after me? I'm sorry, guys. Is it still me? I can talk about this. This is no issue. Since nobody's unmuting, I'll just go for it.

There's a couple of other links here that we see on the deck. Obviously, you can't click on those, but the deck is downloadable, and then you can access it. From there, that should work. And you'll see also the recording of some of the webinars on here, ASP information, and other Next Round stuff. With that, I think now I



definitely am going to pass it to Marika. We'll see what happens. Marika, over to you.

MARIKA KONINGS

Thanks, Lars. And apologies, actually this slide, I was supposed to do that and I didn't even realize. Thank you for covering it. But I think it's actually Ariel that will take us, I think, through the next part of Q&A.

ARIEL LIANG

Thanks, everybody. This is Ariel. I'm speaking to you from Washington DC. We have seen a few questions already answered in the Q&A part, as well as the chat record. I'm just going to start with the ones we haven't answered yet.

This is from Anil Jain. He's asking about the role of the group within ICANN Org responsible for government outreach, what they help with in the ASP. My understanding is he's asking about the government engagement team, what their role is in supporting the ASP. We also have Chris Mondini and Bob Ochieng in the Zoom room. If one of them could help chime in, we'll appreciate that. Or Marika. Marika, please go ahead.

MARIKA KONINGS

Thanks, Ariel. I can maybe take a stab at this. And of course, if either Chris or Bob want to chime in, they're more than welcome to do so. But there's our government engagement colleagues. Obviously, their role is engaging with governments. And as part of that

engagement, they will also be providing information on the Applicant Support Program. I know our colleagues as well from GSE, our engagement group, have also been working very closely with GAC members in relation to the support that they're able to provide both to GAC members and also where GAC members are able to assist in getting word out in their respective countries.

I think in the last update that the group provided on the outreach and engagement activities, as well as the report we recently published, I think there's some examples of collaborations that have happened between GAC members and ICANN Org. Again, putting the word out and making sure that there's awareness around the Applicant Support Program in the different countries and regions. I hope that addresses your question. Obviously, if you have further questions, feel free to either raise your hand or put those in the chat.

ARIEL LIANG

Thank you very much for answering, Marika. I'm just checking the Q&A pod and I think Anil said thanks. Jeff, please go ahead.

JEFFREY NEUMAN

Thanks. For those that aren't following along in the comments, just to make sure it's stated, the SubPro Working Group, the final report, if you look at the Topic 14, Implementation Guidance 14.4, the working group advised that ICANN Org should leverage prospective end users to beta test systems, perhaps by setting up

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an operational testing and evaluation environment. The working group notes that if beta testing is conducted, it must be done in an open, transparent manner, that does not provide the testers with an unfair advantage in the application process. The working group notes, however, that mere access to beta testing does not in and of itself constitute such an unfair advantage. It further notes that ICANN Org did not have an end user beta testing program in 2012 because it believed that allowing some users to have access to the system for beta testing provided those users with an unfair advantage over others, the working group does not agree with ICANN Org's assertion from that time period.

Just to make it clear, if there are other reasons, costs, or whatever, that's one thing, but if it's a fairness argument, that's exactly what SubPro had rejected. Because of what happened the last time, for those that were around in 2012, the "security glitch," the difficulty in attachments, having to use HTML coding as opposed to normal, we don't know what to expect from the system. And it is critical to provide testing available to those that will use the system to submit applications. Please do everything you can to have that beta test, but do not use the fairness argument to justify why not to open it.

Then on the legal agreement, the kind of non-answers we were given, I understand why they were given by staff, they're very conservative. But in 2024, last year, it may have been even 2023, the ICANN Board committed not only to making sure that ICANN Org was ready to launch the round, but also that it would do everything it could to ensure that applicants could be ready for the round.

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Having the legal agreement as much of it as we can, in fact, everything other than Spec 14 can be approved in Dublin, after the comment period or in December, is crucial. Even if it means waiting for Spec 14 until March. Legal departments take a long time to review agreements. Again, not a criticism, we know how long it takes ICANN Legal to review agreements. Again, not a criticism, it's just a reality of larger organizations. It takes time. To the extent you can provide that for applicant readiness, I think, it would be much appreciated. Thanks.

ARIEL LIANG

Thanks, Jeff. I will give the floor to Marika.

MARIKA KONINGS

Thanks. I'll take a first stab and, of course, if others want to weigh in. Thanks, Jeff, for that input. On a lot of points, I think Karla already noted that we'll be taking this back and understand that as much certainty as we can provide to applicants is welcome as early as possible, so we'll take your point back and we'll address that accordingly.

On your first point, there's noted fairness may be one aspect of the consideration, but we definitely need to look at cost as well as timing implications. Again, the team is doing that assessment while at the same time, obviously, we also need to get everything ready by April. We'll definitely come back to the team, but it's a broader set of considerations we need to factor in to see if that is possible.

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And if so, how that would fit within the timeline that we currently are working towards. So, to be continued.

ARIEL LIANG

Thanks, Marika. I'll just quickly note that Avri also has a comment or question in the chat about the testing. But I think your answer has helped address that part. But if not, Avri, please feel free to follow up and we will try to address it. Also, the next question in the Q&A pod from Om Prakash Sharma, "What is the provision for the gTLD evaluation fee for the unsuccessful application?" Perhaps, Marika, you can help address this.

MARIKA KONINGS

Thanks for that question. I think for that, I probably need to point you to the Applicant Guidebook. But we have basically three different windows during which gTLD applicants can withdraw their application and their specific refund percentages associated with that. The first window is basically directly after string confirmation day, if, for some reason, an applicant phase is during string evaluation phase and then before contracting. As I said, there's more information available in the Applicant Guidebook on the specific conditions and percentages that apply for each of those windows, which could be based on an applicant deciding themselves that they no longer want to proceed or if they're not as successful and their application is terminated as a result.

ARIEL LIANG

Thank you, Marika. Actually, Avri just sent a follow-up note. She would still appreciate an answer to her question, “Can you explain how a process this complex can be glitchless without proper alpha, beta, and other testing?” Marika, please go ahead.

MARIKA KONINGS

Thanks. Yuko may have more information on this. But I just want to note, if there would be a decision that we do not do community beta testing, it doesn’t mean that we’re not testing. I just want to reassure everyone that we’re putting in place a very robust testing process for the different steps leading up to the window. I hope that addresses your question. Yuko, if there’s anything further you want to add, please, chime in.

YUKO YOKOYAMA

Nope. You got it. Thank you.

ARIEL LIANG

Thanks, everybody. We’re just checking questions. I think there’s a comment from Avri. I don’t think she’s satisfied with the answer. I’m just checking whether there’s any more questions, comments from the chat or Q&A pod. Feel free to raise your hands and speak up directly. Avri, please go ahead.

AVRI DORIA

I didn’t realize we could ask or raise our hands. Otherwise, I would have previously. I started out by asking, could you tell us something

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about all the testing that's been done, including alpha and beta and other testing? I wasn't just asking about community testing. I was asking why you're explaining the process and showing us the Gantt charts and all that wonderful stuff. Could you tell us about the testing and how it went and how it's metric? That was my first question. I got one of those package non-answers on it. Then I started asking specifically about how can you go glitchless without doing proper testing all the way, including alpha and beta with the interface. I've encountered interfaces that had lots of little glitches. I'm just wondering, are we in such a rush that we're going to guarantee glitches? Thank you.

ARIEL LIANG

Marika, please go ahead.

MARIKA KONINGS

Thanks, Ariel. And thanks, Avri. Apologies for not capturing your question correctly. But I think this is something we'll take back to the team. Again, not everyone here involved in testing is on this call. But we hear you so we can come back with a more detailed overview of what is being planned and the timing for that. Hopefully, that will give some assurances to the community that we're not launching a system without any kind of testing or addressing glitches that we're able to find. That's something we'll just have to come back to you on.

AVRI DORIA

Thank you.

ARIEL LIANG

Thanks, everybody. I'm noting there are some more questions in the chat. My colleague, Michael Karakash, will help answering. And if you do have additional questions, please, feel free to raise your hand and speak up or post in the Q&A pod so we can keep track. I see Giacomo. Is that you are unmuting? Would you like to speak up? Yes, please go ahead.

GIACOMO MAZZONE

The question that Michael tried to answer was mine. geo.name TLD can be a community TLD so it would be eligible for support. This was my question. And the answer is yes.

MICHAEL KARAKASH

By support, can you explain what you mean? As there's not really support related to community TLDs.

GIACOMO MAZZONE

Like for instance, they have not to pay the fee.

MICHAEL KARAKASH

So, Applicant support? That's a separate issue there. I don't know if Kristy would like to respond to that one.



KRISTY BUCKLEY

Sure. Let me just catch up on the question in the chat. There is an Applicant Support Program that is open now through November 19 for new applications. And that is just for applicants that are intending to apply for a gTLD and need financial or other capacity development support in order to do so. If that's the case, they can apply to the Applicant Support Program. I can put the link in the chat. And applying for applicant support and qualifying for applicant support is distinct from applying for a gTLD. Whether it's a geo gTLD or community-based gTLD, you would qualify for support in advance of applying for a gTLD. I just put the link in the chat in case that's helpful.

GIACOMO MAZZONE

Yes. But the question, let's say, can a municipality apply for community TLD for its own geo name and benefit of the community rules or not?

KRISTY BUCKLEY

I think that's a CPE question. Marika?

MARIKA KONINGS

Thank you. I see Jared as well, but we really need to close on the call. So, I propose that we maybe take this offline. Maybe just as a note, ASP is separate from what an applicant applies for. Review what ASP is needed and then separately, there are of course specific conditions associated with either community applications or geographic names.

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I see still more questions coming in. Maybe we can address them in person during the ICANN meeting when we see some of you in the hallways or find another way to respond to those. But we need to close down on time, unfortunately. I really would like to thank everyone for your participation and your questions. And hopefully next time we'll get a bit more time for this conversation so we're able to continue this dialogue. Thank you very much for joining.

GIACOMO MAZZONE

Thank you to you.

**[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]**