
ICANN84 | AGM – ICANN Board Welcomes Fellowship and NextGen@ICANN Programs Participants
Wednesday, October 29, 2025 – 13:15 to 14:30 IST

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Thank you very much. Welcome to the session for our NexGen and Fellows to meet with the Board members here. And it's my pleasure to start introducing my guests today, but before that I will give the floor to my colleague Fernanda to read the script. Fernanda?

FERNANDA IUNES

Hello, good afternoon and welcome to the ICANN Board Welcomes the Fellowship and Next-Gen at ICANN Program participants. My name is Fernanda Iunes and I am a participation manager for this session. Please note that the session is being recorded and is governed by the ICANN Expected Standards of Behavior and ICANN Community Anti-Harassment Policy.

Please observe the following guidelines to participate in the session. I'll also post them in the chat for your reference. Only questions posted in the Q&A pod will be read aloud during the session as time permits and when directed by the chair of the session. If you wish to speak, please raise your hand in Zoom or otherwise as directed. When called upon, remote participants will be given permission to unmute in Zoom. On-site participants will use a physical microphone to speak.

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Please state your name for the record, the language you will speak if speaking a language other than English and speak clearly at a moderate pace. Interpretation for this session will include English, French, and Spanish. All are welcome to use the chat. Please note that private chats are only possible among panelists in the Zoom room. And with that I'll hand it over to Siranush.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Thank you, Fernanda. And again, this is an interactive session. We don't have the official slides for this session. I told you to come up with some interesting questions to our panelists today, but let me first give the floor to the ICANN president and CEO, Kurt Lindquist, to welcome you.

KURTIS LINDQUIST

Thank you. First of all, can I say, I think this is one of the most well-attended sessions we've had so far this morning with the Board. So, thank you all for coming, and it shows how valuable this session is. Not far off. In Prague, the last ICANN meeting, we started having the lunch that all the Nextgeners attended yesterday. And I think that's a really good way for us, the executives and the Board, to get to know all of you and learn more about you. And this is more a session for really an open engagement between us.

And the goal of the fellowship and NextGen programs is really to strengthen the diversity of the multistakeholder model, foster opportunities for individuals from underserved and

underrepresented regions and communities to become part of and being active participants of the ICANN community and ICANN processes, which is a really important part of ICANN.

In 2007, we created a fellowship program and as today, the largest capacity building program ICANN runs. And it has been very successful in bringing this. We have many examples of Fellows or Nextgeners who have gone on to become very integral part of ICANN, and in some cases even Board members, as in the case of Leon. And so, this has been really very over the years successful. It's really brought the diversity we sought and for us. It's very important to continue to drive this and to engage this.

And it's also sessions like this and the work during the week is also meant for you to be exposed, to have a chance to engage in ICANN and learn more about ICANN, but also for ICANN to learn more about you, to hear from you and your thoughts as we did at the lunch yesterday and I hope we do today. We have had 988 individuals who has gone through the fellowship from 162 countries. So, it has been a very large program. And I think we really hope we can build on this and continue to have this phenomenal success it has been. And that's really the core of this.

So, welcome, everyone. I hope this will be a great engaging session, not just for you to ask questions to us, but also learn from each other and from other members of the community. Many of the Board members are in the room as well and possibly some

executives, although I don't see anyone at the moment, but there I'm sure is someone here. But welcome and without a hangover.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Thank you, Kurt. And indeed, welcome all the Board members who managed to come here. I know you have busy schedule. But I now would like to give the floor to the person who is not only proud for the entire ICANN community, but he is a pride for the fellowship program. We were fellows together with Leon in older times. So, it's my pleasure to introduce Leon Sanchez and give the floor to Leon, please.

LEON SANCHEZ

Thank you very much Siranush, and thank you Kurtis. And yes, welcome to this session. This is definitely, I think, my favorite session in every ICANN meeting. It competes with the Afro-African, I guess, but yeah, being a fellow, I think this one went so well. And yes, I started my journey as a Fellow back in 2012 in Prague. That was my first meeting as an ICANN Fellow and well after that, my journey has been of a lot of work devoted to the community and to the mission of ICANN, to further ICANN's mission.

And I encourage you to ask all the questions that you may have. This is a unique opportunity, not only for me as your fellow, but also to my Board colleagues that are here. I'm sure they will be happy to also answer your questions. This is about you, not about us. So, we want to hear from you. We want to hear what you have to ask

and we'll be happy to try to answer as many questions as possible. So, please don't be shy, ask your questions and we'll do our best to answer them.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Thank you, Leon. And we do have questions and we do have also two mics over there. So, if there is a question and one of the Board members over there would like to take and answer the question, please let us know and we'll give you the mic to speak. And let's start the questions to our Board members. Anupam, you're the first, go.

ANUPAM GAUTAM

Hello. It's me Anupam Gautam from Nepal and ICANN NIXI for the record. So, my question is, I'm actually fighting for multi-stakeholder internet in Nepal. So, you guys must be aware about the recent protest and all of those things in Nepal, and I'm proposing an idea of the Nepal Internet Steering Committee because Nepal does not follow a multi-stakeholder committee process over there for internet issues. So, how can the ICANN Applicant Grant Program help me in this field and how can I take it along with me and it can be our collaborative journey? Thank you.

LEON SANCHEZ

I would defer to you or maybe Maarten who's very familiar with the ICANN Grant Program, but I would definitely go to you first.

KURTIS LINDQUIST

So the ICANN Grant Program. I mean I think there was actually quite a few parts to your question. So, if I start with the higher-level question about bringing multi-stakeholderism and advancing local IGFs for example, local engagement in the countries, that's something that we do. We do have some support around that, we do support the regional IGFs. There used to be a Nepali IGF, I don't know if it still is, but there is work we can do and together with the secretaries that we have done.

The grant program itself has a maybe a little bit narrower scope of what we can do in that, it's not necessarily so much directed toward the IGFs or the capacity building in that sense. But if you have ideas or programs that you think would benefit on a more maybe technical level, there are things we could definitely do. But also, when it comes to engaging with ICANN's GSE team and the support we do to the regional IGFs, we would be happy to work that. So, it doesn't have to be inside the grant program necessarily, but there's other work ICANN does that would help with that and could help you work on that.

But as I said, the grant program has maybe a little bit narrower scope than that. So, I think you would have to have some more concrete ideas of what you would like to do to achieve that, to look if that fits inside the grant program. But we can have a look at that. Please, microphone.

ANUPAM GAUTAM

So actually, I'm proposing for committee members, because when we go to the IGFs and things like that, it is like the events out there in a particular time frame, like maybe once every six months. Something like that, but we need to have a committee that is solely responsible and is constantly monitoring all the things, maybe presenting some reports every now and then, maybe thinking about all the government decisions and taking that into consideration for the future as well.

So, something like that needs to happen, a constant committee that's constantly working every day. So the IGF, it's a space to meet people from my perspective, I've not been into the IG space for that much, but it's going to be a place where we like aware people, right? But I think a committee is needed too. So, thank you.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

I think Maarten can take the question. Chris, please.

CHRIS BUCKRIDGE

Hi, I'm Chris Buckridge, I'm one of the Board members. I'm also a member of the Internet Governance Forum, MAG. And I think, the model you're talking about, there are countries that are doing things like that, and I think we mentioned NICBI yesterday as one example. I think the ICANN, I mean, beyond the technical remit that ICANN has and that the community is working on policy, it's also a

space like the IGFs where we can sort of come together and share ideas.

And so I think the opportunity to use ICANN meetings, but also to use, as I say, national and regional IGFs, APR IGF, as a space to sort of learn more and get those ideas and understand what's involved in such a process is really valuable. And I think, yeah, as Kurtis said, ICANN is funding some of those community structures. Some of those community processes. But really take full advantage of what is it, the 1500 people we have here on site who have been doing this thing, this stuff in lots of different formats, lots of different countries, and are generally very willing to talk about it. So, yeah.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Thank you, Chris. Miracle, please.

MIRACLE ONYEBUCHIM

Thank you very much. My name is Miracle, ICANN84 Fellow. Thank you for joining us. I think in two years, the fellowship program would be 20, and I think that the fellowship program and the NextGen program has been very important to get newcomers to join the ICANN community. So my first question would be-- because I was in a session yesterday where we were reviewing the strategic plan for FY26 to 30, and I'm not sure I saw-- I know one of the things that we want to focus on is really to increase the effectiveness of our multi-stakeholder model.

So, three things. Number one, it would be good-- I'm not sure I saw that as part of the things that were budgeted, but it would be good to do some sort of impact assessment of the fellowship program as we reach 20 years. And the reason is just to see what have we been doing well? What can we do better? The NextGen is 11 this year. And maybe make those things public and perhaps get some public comments just to see how we evolve this. And just to see how it's gone so far.

And the second part of that would be perhaps since this has been a very, very good way-- Because if you check the analysis, a lot of the people that are probably not involved in the technical aspects of internet governance, the ICANN fellowship is usually a way for-- and not involved in government as well and in the industry. The fellowship has been a very good way to get them involved in the community.

But perhaps we could also come up with a plan. It could be part of the review to see how we continue that engagement. When people come in through these programs perhaps what's the right channel? I know today what happens is individuals are encouraged to join their different At-Large structure and just find a way to continue to contribute.

But perhaps if we can make a focus as to how to make sure that that engagement is sustained. And part of the report that I'll be looking to read if we do commission that is what's the drop off rate? How many fellows get involved like Leon, like Siranush? How many of

them don't? Just to see what that is. Because the data could tell us things that we could do better.

And of course, the last one is part of what I saw in the plan for the next five years is engagement with the academic community. And it would really be interesting to see ICANN do something very intentional about the academic community. I do a lot of work with academia across the US. And internet governance, a lot of the issues around governance is usually focused on end users. And I think that there's so much work we can do around curriculum, around just partnering with academia. And it would be good to see.

Thankfully, I saw the line item in the plan, but I haven't seen the details. But I just wanted to say that that's something super, super important to pay attention to. So, thank you very much.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

So Miracle, I will start with the first question, and then Kurt will continue. So, for your question about the program's assessment, we did a program assessment for a 10 years Fellowship program. And then we had community consultations and changed the approach. For example, North America was excluded before to apply for the fellowship. So, different changes happened there. And as well as community to assign mentors and the selection committee members for the program.

So, about six years ago, we did alumni survey as well. Which told that 65% of those who came through the fellowship program, they

stayed in the community. And to your question for the 20th anniversary, we do plan a new assessment to be done next year. So, by the 20 years anniversary, by June 2027, we have the results. And by the way, you can find the reports of all those assessments on ICANN fellowship webpage. There are important links. And all the information is posted there. Thank you. But I will give the floor to Kurt to continue.

KURTIS LINDQUIST

Thank you. I think that it's just out to the reviews. Of course, these sessions and the lunches are also very much part of that review because we'd like to hear from you, and how you have experienced the program. So, we do this review continuously every single ICANN meeting. Not as formalized as you just heard. It will be this 10-year reviews as well. But we do adopt the programs as we go along, and as we hear feedback.

On the more engagement on a wider picture, and academia and curriculums, we do a lot of outreach in internet governance. I just want to say one thing, internet governance is a very, very broad topic, and some of it is outside our remit. So, there is a little bit of a limit to how much we can work there. We do try to engage with academia, not necessarily in well-funded regions. We do a lot of this in more underserved regions, and we also do some programs together with researchers and academia in the Global North if you want.

I actually spent a session earlier this morning talking to academia about how ICANN could be incorporated into some of the research. So, we do this engagement and work on that. That's something we continue to do. It is a very large field, as I said, and we do have to be a little bit more narrow to be careful of our resources. But we do engage with academia under those rules. Thank you.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Thank you. Yes, please, Jim.

JAMES GALVIN

Just to offer. So, Jim Galvin, SSAC liaison to the ICANN Board, just to offer another specific example outside of internet governance in terms of ICANN engaging with academia. They are very active in the IDN-UA universal acceptance activities, where a lot of their outreach is directed expressly at academia professors. It is with the particular goal of bringing that information technology to universities, so they can pass it on to the students and incorporate that into curriculum. I mean, ICANN is active in this space even outside of internet governance, and they certainly do their best to find places to do that. Thanks.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Thank you, Jim. And before we move forward with the next question, I would like to welcome Tripta Sinha, ICANN Board chair, and give the floor to her, please.

TRIPTI SINHA

Thank you. First, I want to apologize for being late. I got pulled into a meeting and had to attend to some matters. But first, again, a very warm welcome to our fellows. This is a very important program. As you know, it is designed to bring people into the fold from areas where there is underrepresentation. I just came into this conversation, but it looked like you were talking about how to connect more deeply with academia.

I just concluded a long career with academia, and I must say, this is a very positive move to reach out and work with universities, because that's where a lot of innovation takes place and where we look at futuristic technologies and how this ecosystem will evolve. So, I'm glad to hear that we're looking at how we can build that bridge.

Once again, a very warm welcome to all of you. This is an important, very, very important program for ICANN for so many reasons. You bring the next generation in, and it also speaks to the sustainability of the organization into the future. We are building new leaders and new expertise and bringing in all the communities that make up the world community. Thank you.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Thank you. And just to make a note that we do have Nextgeners as well, along with the fellows for this group. Okay, next question. Maciek, I know you were eager to ask the question.

MACIEK PIASECKI

Oh, I am, I am. Hello, Maciek Piasecki, first-time fellow from Poland. Thank you for this wonderful opportunity for bringing us together, this very, very international group. I'm proud to actually represent people with invisible disabilities here. And an issue we thought about with my new friend Andrzej, who's from Russia, is that languages are still a barrier. We see this session being translated into French and Spanish, and my friend Shabelle over here asked jokingly, where's Arabic? Well, yes, where's Arabic?

I wanted to ask you, what are you planning to do to address that? I know cost-effectiveness is enshrined in ICANN's mission, and we were actually thinking that machine translation is on such a high and evolving level, and ICANN is of course on the cutting edge of the technology world. So, maybe we could help with that, actually.

KURTIS LINDQUIST

We are actually looking at machine translation. We have done some tests with it. I think we have a little bit left, but we are looking into it and working with it. It's certainly something we envision using, absolutely. We haven't quite got there yet, but it's something that the language team is exploring. We do have an entire languages services team who does all the translation. I believe we actually include Arabic in the translation of the work. We don't do it in the simultaneous translation right now, but we do include it in the documents.

So, we do have an entire languages services team who does all the translation, and I believe we actually include Arabic in the translation on the work. We don't do it in the simultaneous translation right now, but on the documents. But the languages services team are looking into using more increased use of machine translation for a lot of different use cases, because languages in ICANN is translating all the documentation we do, and important outreach we do into languages. We also do some targeted work in different regions and different languages as well. So, that's another factor.

We have staff that covers several of these languages as well, plus the actual translation in this session. This is quite a wide breadth of coverage of languages that we do, and as I said, machine translation is definitely something we're working on to use, and we're trialing.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Thank you. Sameer, yes please.

SAMEER GAHLOT

Yeah, thank you. First of all, I would like to thank the Board and the ICANN for this wonderful opportunity, without which I may not be able to maybe like ask the questions or get to know more about the ICANN multi-stakeholder model. Thank you for that.

Now, as we all know that youth is one of the major stakeholders in the internet governance multi-stakeholder dialogue, and they will

keep on playing the major role going forward. And I attended multiple sessions yesterday and the day before yesterday also. So, there is a lot of information currently which is flowing in each of our minds. And we are in the process of mapping the strategic plan for 2026 to 2030.

Would it be possible, just a request, that if we could map what are the priorities for the youth in this upcoming strategic plan. So, that it would be easy for them to see how they could meaningfully contribute to the ICANN multi-stakeholder model or to the objective, to the vision and the mission. So that is one request.

And the last question which I would like to ask. So, far it's the responsibility of the ICANN to introduce us to the model, now it's after completing this fellowship program it will be the responsibility of the NextGen and the fellows, what according to the Board, what are the priorities wherein the youth could meaningfully contribute going forward?

KURTIS LINDQUIST

So that's a great question, two very good questions. I think that the idea of-- I actually would love to have some NextGen work as a project on what the strategic plan means for youth. I think it'd be a phenomenal report and an entire session to have one. I should be having an opinion on what youth think of this.

I'd like to claim that I'm very youthful, but I should like to hear from you and what you think the strategic plans are, because I think it's

not something we want to prescribe you. It's something that we'd like to hear on what are the priorities and what do you see should be a priority. I think that would be really interesting to hear.

We had some of that discussion yesterday at lunch on my table when we talked about future technologies and what this means, and I think it was half-jokingly that internet governance is a little bit yesterday. I think we'd like to hear more about this. I think this is a really important topic to understand and actually to dive into. I think that where youth can help, where you can drive us is exactly that. Where is the technology going? Where are the future needs and what do we need to do?

I'd like to stress one thing. This is what I said at lunch yesterday: all these new technologies and the shiny objects are all built on the very fundamental internet technology that has been there since the dawn of time. It's very easy to start taking it for granted. A large part of internet governance is to ensure that that can be taken for granted. That the model actually works and does not get changed or modified. And the principles that built the internet into a phenomenally successful platform remain that successful platform.

And that is something we need to work on every day. Although there might be new things that we can build on top of the internet, on top of these principles, we still need to defend them. That is actually one of the, I believe, one of the greatest challenges in internet governance, to keep defending principles that we all have

started taking for granted and have worked so well. But we still need to defend them every day, and I think that's very important.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Thank you. Maarten. Yes, I was going to name you Maarten.

MAARTEN AERTSEN

Thank you and thank you. I think what is true is that ICANN makes it possible for you to get here. But in the end it's about what you can do for ICANN and for the internet, right? So ICANN isn't the only platform either. So please use your ability to look around and look at other opportunities, regional or even global, like Internet Society with their online teaching platforms.

And there's a lot online also in ICANN. You can already participate in discussions without always having to be in the room. It's your interest. It's what you want. And then to see what from that you can contribute to ICANN, as Kurtis said, but also beyond. IGF was mentioned earlier. There's different platforms and it's about your future. So this is why it's so important. We embrace you, but also important you go on.

CHRIS BUCKRIDGE

Hi, Chris again. I just wanted to say, I think that it's a really interesting discussion about youth as a stakeholder group. Because I mean, I think youth, there probably are sort of consistent things to find there. But I think in some ways, the very important thing is also that youth is a sort of cross-cutting stakeholder group.

And it's important that in the business stakeholder group, private sector, that young business people, young people in business are being incorporated and respected there. In civil society where you have activists and civil rights, the young people have a way into that scene.

So I think the real point of the multi-stakeholder model and one of the challenges for it is that you don't have the stakeholder groups silo off into different discussions. I think ICANN itself struggles with that occasionally. We sort of have the GAC very busy with their own thing, but not necessarily always able to join the rest of the community.

So I think trying to make sure that we bridge those silos, that we have youth coming into all of these different discussions is one of the real challenges. And I hope that the NextGen program sort of gives that sort of incentive to sort of join in discussions, even if you don't see other youth in the room necessarily.

MIRIAM SAPIRO

Thank you, Chris. Hi, Miriam Shapiro, appointed to the Board by the nominating committee. Really wonderful to be here to see so many familiar faces and also meet new folks. I wanted to say that youth is fleeting. So believe it or not, we were all youth once in your shoes. And I say that only because it's important to think about the impact you all can have right now, but also well into the future for many, many years as you do more and more exciting things. So I

just want to encourage you while you're here to make the most of this opportunity.

We had a fabulous lunch yesterday with the NextGen Fellows. And as Kurtis said, we did a lot of brainstorming at each table. And I know the one I was at, we talked in particular about ways to integrate the fellows even more. In addition to now having a lunch when we get to actually meet you, we get to hear a little bit from each of you about what you're doing and more in the days to come, but also whether we can integrate you better with your representatives from the GAC, the Government Affairs Committee. Some of you may already know them. Some may not. ALAC, for example, and other parts of our constituency, the ccNSO community, for example, is also another way to help you integrate more smoothly.

So we're very open to your ideas on what more we can do as the Board, as org, meaning the ICANN staff. I like Kurtis's idea of encouraging you all to look at our strategic plan. In addition, comment publicly on the many things that will be open for public comment because your voices are so important as individuals, as representatives of the programs that you're in, whether it's NextGen or the Fellowship Program. And finally, in closing, I would say it's what you take back to your communities. And I think of each of you as ambassadors for ICANN.

So where you go back to, whether it's your university or your country, your region, you have so many contacts, your network,

online, etc. Help us spread the word about what ICANN is all about, the importance of its mission, and the critical importance of the multi-stakeholder model as we all seek to preserve it and to enhance it. Thank you.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Thank you, Miriam, and thank you, everyone who responded.

LEON SANCHEZ

I have a lady in the front.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Tinuade. Tinuade, please.

TINUADE OGUNTUYI

Thank you. Tinuade Oguntuyi from Nigeria, ICANN Fellow, and Paul Muchene awardee. Thank you to the leadership of ICANN for this opportunity. I'm just curious to know if there is one thing-- we've attended a lot of sessions, we've heard a lot of all topics from DNS abuse, the ASP program, but if there is one thing that the President and the CEO would want to see, this is what success would mean for ICANN for FY 2026 to 2030, what would that be? I'm not putting you the spot, sir.

And secondly, to learn, being a fellow yourself one time, what is that thing you want to tell us as Fellows and Nextgeners so that we

also can move in this direction of being a leader and to contribute our voice in the ways that matters? Thank you.

KURTIS LINDQUIST

I'll be careful. There's 36 areas in the strategic plan. I'm going to pick one, I'm pretty sure whatever I do is going to be-- we're not picking one necessarily, but I think the core of ICANN and the core of my role is that we deliver on the core purpose of ICANN, and that is to develop and implement DNS policy. I mean, that is really the fundamentally identified policy, I should say. I should be careful when I say DNS, identified policy. That is really the core of ICANN. And there is a lot of things we do that is in support of that.

But to continue to develop and implement policy in a timely and adequate fashion is really at the heart of what ICANN is, what it does and why ICANN has legitimacy. And we need to keep doing that. And that's really the core thing we need to deliver as part of not just a strategy, but who we are.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Leon, what does it mean to be a fellow and how to move forward?

LEON SANCHEZ

Being a fellow is a privilege. And I hope that you understand that. I hope that you understand that you are privileged in being here, in being part of the fellowship program, part of a community that is literally taken by the hand to get to know the ICANN structure, the

ICANN constituencies and all the things that we do at ICANN. And I encourage you to seize that opportunity.

And in my case, the way that I found to continue contributing and to, in a way, climb the ladder to leadership positions was to work, to work a lot. Because as I always say, leadership positions are to serve the community, not to serve ourselves. Right? If you look at leadership positions as means to grab whatever power you think those positions might have or any benefits those positions you think might bring, you are looking at it the wrong way.

You have to look at leadership positions as opportunities to serve our community, to serve the bigger picture, the larger good, the internet ecosystem. If you look at it from that perspective and you work hard and the community appreciates the work that you are doing, and I'm sure that if you do, they will, you will be able to find your way, not necessarily in leadership positions, but being a leader in the full extent of the world and appreciated as such by the community.

In other words, titles are nice to have, but they are not necessary to lead. And if you keep that in mind, I'm pretty sure that you will be able to exercise that leadership and contribute meaningfully to what we do in ICANN. So, don't give up. There are times that you might think that it's harder than it really is. And there might be times in which you want to give up, but trust me, if you work for this community, this community will give back to you. That is the secret.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

And just to add what Leon said, from my own experience before joining ICANN as a fellowship program manager, I served in this community for nine years. I was serving in nomination committee for two years, and seven years I was in Asia Pacific from At-Large, the representative from Asia Pacific. So, I served this community, I learned about this community, and this is the way how now I use the experience which I had within the community as part of this program and as part of the evolvement for this program. So, as Leon said, keep going.

The program itself, very competitive, and I know there was a question in the chat as well, why the person is not being selected a fellow. We usually receive more than 400 applications per each round, and we only can afford bringing up to 40. So, it's very competitive program, and we do have publicly available the criteria, the assessment score sheet even, to which the selection committee pays attention. So, it's not just an application to fill in and submit. It should be thoroughly thoughtful application in place, and yes, the selection is hard there.

Okay, let's move to the next question. Yes, Anna, do I see? No, Ankita, yes, please go ahead.

ANKITA RATHI

Hi, good afternoon, everyone. I'm Ankita, ICANN84 fellow, and I was an exchange at ICANN83. After attending ICANN83 and also the

sessions in this meeting, I understand that the Board members and the ICANN leaders often have to balance community expectations and technical constraints and also sometimes political pressures. So, what proactive steps does the Board take to nurture adaptive and value-driven leadership within ICANN? Thank you.

TRIPTI SINHA

So, ICANN has a leadership program that's offered at every public meeting, and we encourage those who have been appointed to leadership positions such as chairs and other leading committees and other groups to attend that leadership training. So, that is actively promoted.

And even within the Board, within the ICANN Board, the Board is constructed of several committees, and we actually seed the committees with members, and we select a chair of the committee. That is a leadership opportunity. And then within the committee, we also select a person who could step in in the event that the chair is unable to perform. So, all those activities lead towards leadership training.

And as well as we have team-building activities at workshops where we bring an outside entity to and do team activities with us. And we also do, I forget what it's called, the Myers-Briggs equivalent and those personality tests so that you can see how the skill set of the Board breaks down and the personalities of the Boards break down, and how we can better work with each other.

So, there are various and sundry activities that we engage in.
Thank you.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Thank you, Tripti. I know you need to leave. You have a session meeting, another meeting at two. If any last-minute question for Tripti, we can take one, but if not, we'll continue. Jim, please go ahead.

JAMES GALVIN

I just wanted to add on, you're asking about leadership training. I think it's important to keep in mind that in the community At Large, engaging in one of the stakeholder groups, finding a role for yourself and your place and doing that. There are leadership opportunities in each of the individual stakeholder groups, chairing their own working groups and, of course, rising to being chair or vice chair of those various groups. You shouldn't forget those.

Tripti very accurately spoke about what the Board does for itself, and, of course, ICANN provides leadership training, a workshop. But those opportunities to even attend that training come out of being part of the community. The community nominates people to take that training and make that available. So, it's important to get engaged at the community level.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Thank you, Jim. Who wants to ask questions? Yes, please. No, I see, Jenner, and then Jasmine, you will go next.

SAKSHAM JAIN

Can I ask? Yeah, yeah. Hi, I'm Saksham, and this is essentially the question I asked Kurtis when we were walking in here. I just want to know about how has the NextGen program involved since its start, because I've heard it's only recently gained more popularity. And then are there any plans to update the program to reflect the feedback from each cohort. Because I've heard that this time it's very technical and the last cohort was very different. So, how has the program updated?

This also relates to the discussion we had on our table yesterday about how we can raise awareness. So, it's such that once I go back to Australia, I can share the program's vision with my friends and others that I know there, and I guess Michael's here from OUDA, he runs the local APICA. So, I guess this is something he was asking me as well. So, I would like to know that.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

I think the best answer can be given by the NextGen mentor, Paolo.

PAULO DREWIACKI

Hi, Paulo Drewiacki here, NextGen mentor for this year. What a privilege! And, well, I'm going to give you, like, a very straightforward answer. I started as a mentor on the first meeting that we had this year. Why did I start as a mentor? Because when I

was a fellow in Hamburg, I saw that there were some improvement opportunities for the program. I talked to Siranush, talked to Fernanda's predecessor, and I said, let's do something different, let's implement something different for the programs. So they said, okay, what do you suggest? I said, let's do a session, joint session, fellows and NextGen.

We had a session in Prague that was to make you guys a bit more acquainted with each other and with what you guys would like to see from both programs. So, from my personal experience, I can see that everyone here is very open to change, to good change, and, like, ideas as well. So if you have an idea and you want to go for it, like, just go for it, suggest what you're thinking, and things happen.

So we delivered on that. Maybe this will become a permanent fixture for all the policy firms, because, as you should know, fellowship applicants are not allowed to go to policy firms unless it's their second fellowship onwards. So, this is very good. You can be sure that everyone's listening, and if you have a good idea, contribute. Don't keep it to yourself.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

And just to add what Paolo said, every cohort has the post-meeting report where we collect your feedback. And if you go to the fellowship program and to NextGen program webpages, you will see the reports from previous cohorts, and you will see how we evolved the program based on the suggestions coming from you. And so, as Paolo said, we'll listen to your feedback. So, come up

with feedback, and we are happy to implement whatever is possible. And yes, sir.

KURTIS LINDQUIST

Yes, I was going to say, one thing is that we, I mean, I wasn't here when it was founded. I've only been here 11 months. So, I've only seen this three times, but we started from Prague last time having the lunches, as I said, with the NextGeners. That's one change we did because we wanted to have a much more direct interaction with the NextGeners, and to build on that. So, I think the program is evolving.

The discussion we had at lunch last time about, I don't have any data points, but I said that the table I sat at in Prague was very heavily leaning towards people studying internet governance, and this time around, I ended up in a table with very technical people.

So, I don't know if there's a reflection or we have statistics of how you would even classify them, but of course, the applicants or the fellows in the NextGeners will have different backgrounds, different topics every time, and that's just a natural mix, and I think it's a good mix. I think, ICANN spans a very wide range of topics from law to governance to technology, right? And all of these need to be engaged, and I think it's great to have this mix and changing over time.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Yes, Leon, please.

LEON SANCHEZ

Yeah, I think it's actually a feature, not a bug, because we strive for diversity. So, the more rich and diverse this mix becomes, the richer we get our own organization.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Thank you. Jasmine, please.

JASMINE KO

Hi, this is Jasmine Ko from Hong Kong, also the current Fellow. So, I'm actually part of helping to organize my own local youth IGF and also a PGA recently, and also moving into a non-profit center. So, actually, in Hong Kong, it's also a lot of increasingly sensitive operating environments for civic society as well. So, I understand that here for online presence, stability and accessibility in ICANN is very important.

At the same time, I also noticed that this might be a quite sensitive question, but I just wonder, like, I see that ICANN previously has changing the language of diversity and inclusion in the documents, but then it's also something that my non-profit will be working on.

So I just wonder, like the change of language here in the sense, and also, how is the Board now navigating under, like, with the ever-changing political environment and also the demand from civic society, how can the Board help strengthen and also include, to ensure accountability for the communities, also the gTLDs, registries, that they are still accountable for the good values that

ICANN here, it's for one, accessible and also diverse internet. So, that's my question. Thank you.

KURTIS LINDQUIST

Many questions in one there. So, I'm going to try and maybe unpick. I think you're referring to diversity and equity change. So, this has been discussed many times. ICANN has a page, or two web pages, that relates to ICANN employment. Those pages reflect the employment policies that we have to follow in each country we operate in, where we have employees. That is currently the amalgamation of all the jurisdictions we operate in, or we have employees in. The guidance, one paragraph, was guidance based on a UN employment agency, and when they updated the language, we updated our language to match that.

The actual policy and work that ICANN does, all the community-driven policies, are unchanged. They're identical. We have 12,000 pages on the ICANN site about diversity and inclusion. That hasn't changed. That is what it is. This one paragraph, that is the guidance for US employment. That is from this agency. When it updated, we changed the language to match that, because that is the obligation we have to do. For the rest of it, the community policies and the community work that comes out of this is very committed to diversity and inclusion. That continues. There's no change to that.

When it comes to the gTLDs, I'm not sure exactly I fully understood the question about what that means. I mean, the obligations that

we enforce against gTLDs is from the contract that we have with them. That comes from community policies. And that's what that's anchored in. So as community policies evolve, or policies are being developed, we will hold them accountable under that to the contracts. That's how the accountability mechanism works.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Thank you. I see Michael Palage, the previous Board, former Board member, wants to have an intervention.

MICHAEL PALAGE

I just consider myself a member of the community. It's a long time ago. But Vanda Skarduzini, who I did serve on the ICANN Board, was instrumental in this program. The one question that I have is, what is the return on investment? And does ICANN track the metrics on fellows after they leave? Again, we have some instances of people that have moved up in leadership, but is there any broader metrics as to people that participate? I don't see a lot of that at the bottom, at least in the generic supporting organization where the policy work is done. So given that this is not an insignificant cost, does ICANN have any detailed metrics on participation over the life of this program?

KURTIS LINDQUIST

Thank you. So I will come back to it. Yes. I don't know. I think we're looking desperately, but I want to make a broader point there. It's really, really hard to measure the value of engaging the

Next Generation, right? I think your question is how many people come back. I'm not even sure it's relevant, to be honest. I think having the awareness of how the Internet is governed, what ICANN does and the work we have is phenomenal. I think every single individual in here contributes to the value of this program. That's really hard to capture in metrics and return on investment. I can probably generate some metrics for that, but it's very, very hard to capture that.

I think when it comes to returning fellows and what it means to bring people back, and I just want to stress that this is a session for fellows and NextGen. We keep getting questions that why don't they have enough airtime so we can maybe cover this tomorrow? But it is very hard to do that.

I think we do cover a lot of metrics on how many people come back, and we can dig out, and I don't have the numbers on top of my head. We do track the metrics of how many people are returning. I think you maybe walked in after we read out the numbers at the start of how many people have actually applied, how many people are here, and how many people raised through the ranks.

We do have the metrics. We do track that. Is that the success? I think the success is much broader than those numbers, to be honest. I think then we have to have a discussion of what that means. How do we generate that? Because I think trying to do a financial calculation of the value of awareness of ICANN is very hard to do.

MICHAEL PALAGE

Roberto here, a fellow Board member.

ROBERTO GAETANO

Yeah, I mean, you were pushing me to give you an answer. I think that there's another value here, even if they don't remain in the ICANN community, because they go back to their own communities and can bring the word of ICANN, can bring their experiences because of this and spreading the seed outside our core team, that will bring additional value in the future. I mean, I cannot provide metrics for that, but I have just the feeling.

And this is connected also to one other thing. There were several, I mean, all the NextGen has done presentations. There were lots of things that were related to the ICANN mission and DNS abuse. We had security. We had general internet governance. We had multilingualism. We had a lot of topics.

Now, a question for the Board. Can you guess how many presentations were there on new gTLDs? And this is not, you know, it's just a natural thing. I mean, new people will bring new ideas that are not necessarily rooted in what is the traditional business, but is in the wide area that is in the wider ICANN community, even outside the core business. The answer, the strict answer is zero, although there has been mention about the need for providing IDN TLDs for countries who are not represented. Thank you.

KURTIS LINDQUIST

So I do want to leave the time for the NextGen of fellows because that's the purpose of this session, but for Michael, the statistics and the success metrics is actually on the fellowship page. So, you can go read it yourself.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

There are different reports there available with the metrics, with the statistics and more to come. Ernest, please. Here, the first line.

ENERST MAFUTA KATOKA

Hello. It's good to be here. My name is Enerst Mafuta. I'm an ICANN fellow. Thank you to the Board for this wonderful opportunity to engage with you. I think this is so great. You are inspiring us. And I also just wish to congratulate you on the two programs that you have made, one, the grant program and the new TLDs. However, I was in the grant program yesterday on the selection that you made on this first round. Most of the things that were raised, they are of concern out there, and I felt like I should bring it out to you since you are the Board.

Number one, I really feel that the applications that were selected. Some of them kind of are not in what ICANN really does out of scope in the mission, but some are, to be honest. And I really feel if we want to have success in the grant program, I would suggest that ICANN focuses on applications that really brings closer to the people, connects to the internet, like bringing more people to the internet.

For example, you've got 2.6 billion people worldwide who are offline. They have never seen anything. Like, it's a blackout. So that's a gap in opportunities. It's a gap in connectivity. So how do you now bring these people to participate in the digital society? Okay.

Then the other issue is about the new gTLDs. I know weights has been going around about the value about these new TLDs. I would say also the price impact for underrepresented regions is also a concern. Because if you want to bring more people, to connect more people, look at the price bucket, more especially to underrepresented region. The goal of this fellowship also of ICANN is about fostering participation from the underrepresented and also those regions that do not have much capacity. So I would really encourage you to maybe look into this model and see how best you can reach more people.

And for what Roberto said before I go about fellows, about the impact of the fellows, I remember in 2022 when I came here, I was told by a friend about the ICANN fellowship. I flew all the way from Lusaka, Zambia with my own transport money, with my own money, and I attended that ICANN Fellowship in Malaysia. And it took me three years to come here and apply and here I am. So when you talk about the success and impact, look out to me. Thank you.

KURTIS LINDQUIST

Thank you. Just on the point of connectivity, the connectivity is actually outside ICANN's mission. So it's not really inside scope of what we do and that's why the grant program doesn't actually go to anything with connectivity. And we tend to not do very much work on connectivity because it's outside the scope of ICANN. ISOC, for example, the ISOC foundation does a lot more work on connectivity and working together with several grantee or grantees, but it's for partners, grant partners in connectivity in Africa. And they're very successful in that and they have a much, much larger grant program than we run at the moment for that, by the way.

On the selection of the grants, they were actually screened against ICANN's mission. That was one of the criteria they had to meet. So I believe that all the grants we had applied and sorry, all the grants we awarded were within the ICANN mission because that was one of the screening criteria we did, but the connectivity is not unfortunately one of them. Your example of the outreach of the ICANN program with yourself I think is very, very good. So thank you for that.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Thank you. And Leon has to respond as well.

LEON SANCHEZ

Thank you. So first, I think it's, I'm confident that I can speak for my fellow Board members who are here and it is us who have to thank

you for speaking and for letting us hear your thoughts and your contributions. It is refreshing for us. So we are grateful to you, not the other way around and the privilege is ours. And I'm glad that you said that you are an example of perseverance and getting a hold of trying to achieve what you want because I reflect that on myself.

I didn't tell you my story, but before becoming a fellow for the first time, I was rejected to the program three times. So that's why I tell you, keep going, right? Don't accept defeat as an answer. Don't take no as an answer. Go and do your things. And in the same fashion that the gentleman behind you was asking about youth programs in the strategic plan, I would say the strategic plan is age neutral. It doesn't have to do with youth or with the, or with elderness. It's about deciding what you want to get involved, what you want to push for, what are your interests? And believe me, ICANN need the youth that you carry to continue going. So we're literally sucking the energy out of you, if you get what I say, if you get what I mean.

And we have to remember that this fellowship program, yes, it builds leadership within ICANN, but it also returns leadership to the places from when you come from. You become leaders as Miriam was saying, you are ambassadors to ICANN and you help us spread the word and create awareness about ICANN by being part of this fellowship program and going back to your communities and exercising those leadership abilities that you may well already have, but that you continue to develop here in this fellowship

program. So thank you for not giving up and thank you for persisting in achieving your goals.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Return on investment is not only on the level of ICANN here within the fellowship or the community, but also within your own countries and communities. Paulo, I know you have a very short intervention. Please give Paulo and then I have Umair and one more question from here probably, if we have time.

PAULO DREWIACKI

Hi, Paulo Drewiacki here. Just to expand on Roberto's points, we didn't see any presentation about the next gTLD program and I believe that if we are talking about the next gTLD round and everything else, there's something that speaking in my personal capacity now, I feel that's missing and it's ICANN using .ICANN. So I know that it's a no discussion, but yeah.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Okay. Thank you, Paulo.

PAULO DREWIACKI

Umair, please.

AHMAD UMAIR SUHAIDI

Hello, everyone. I'm Umair, one of the NextGen from Malaysia. So I understand that ICANN provides a leadership training program for

current and incoming community leaders and that it is not open to everyone. May I suggest that ICANN to expand this opportunity to also include the NextGen and also fellows, because I understand that the NextGen and Fellowship programs focus on helping participants to understand the ICANN structure and processes. I believe if we can expand the leadership program to us, it can be something good to help us prepare to lead a change in our community, echoing to Leon just now. So what's your take on this idea of expansion of the leadership program? Thank you so much.

KURTIS LINDQUIST

So the leadership program is a very, very valuable resource. At the end of the day, it's going to come down to cost and resources on our side. We met with, interestingly enough, the IETF leadership on Sunday as part of the open session with the ICANN Board and decided that we also discussed that they had the same challenges as we do in training their leadership and grow leadership capability.

Maybe there's something to be done in more gradual steps of how we do this and how do we foster it. It's certainly worth thinking about, but at the moment it's just a matter of resources to be able to cope with even larger groups of training. That doesn't mean that there isn't something we should look at. You know, I'll take that as there might be other ways we can help foster future leaders and that we can do that for those who are interested. Certainly something we can discuss and look at.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Thank you. Shashi?

SHASHI RAJ

Yeah. Good afternoon. I'm Shashi, NextGen. Till yesterday before talking to Jim and a few members from SSAC, I believe I was facing a serious problem in finding where I can contribute toward ICANN as a technical background. Like I'm from a technical background on finding vulnerabilities investigating malwares and doing digital crime investigations. So, first of all, thank you to Paulo. He's my mentor and he guided me on this few of the points that how I can show to the Boards. And thank you for this opportunity. I have learned a lot that technical expertise should definitely meet with the policies and governance.

After reviewing ICANN strategic plans, I found security and stability is an important part in it. And I looked for it and I identified three gaps where I can contribute. The first one is there is no single DNS-based security intelligence platform that we can work on so that everyone can get the exact API integration and based on that registries and registrar can get all the security feeds. Second one is like we have NIS framework for cybersecurity. So, we can introduce from SSAC a security framework for DNS implementation, not for just registrars, but registries and registrants for all of them.

And third one is I'm a security researcher. So, when I try to find vulnerabilities, I don't know where I can start. So, I want a platform

where I can start to test to find the vulnerabilities where I can learn and test, find vulnerabilities and then report to ICANN. That's all.

KURTIS LINDQUIST

So, thank you. Luckily, we have the Board SSAC liaison in the room who might have more of an answer than I do. So, on the first point about the intelligence, I just want to stress one thing is that we have no authority over the ccTLDs. So, only thing ICANN can do when it comes to abuse or data is about the gTLDs. And ICANN has been working on something called domain metric that does give some of this data. Again, only where we have the data though. And I know that there are several different platforms that looks at abuse and insights. I don't know if Jim want to add to the other two points because they were a little bit beyond my knowledge of SSAC, to be honest. I don't know if Jim can get a microphone.

JAMES GALVIN

So, thank you again. And thank you, Shashi. You and I have had some discussion already about all this. I think the one thing that I would add, you're looking for a technical place to come in ICANN in general to add. It occurs to me to also call out in general that bringing technical expertise to ICANN in all of its places and all of its stakeholder groups and advisory committees is important. I mean, that's what has worked for me. I am essentially a technologist. That's the lane in which I operate in general. But

bringing that expertise to policymakers and the rest of this ICANN community is an important part of things too.

ICANN doesn't do research per se. I mean, the stakeholder groups and advisory committees don't. Although the ICANN OCTO group obviously does. Kurtis was just making reference to Domain Metrica. But I know that you're aware of that too. So, there's some data. They do publish what they know and some information about it.

But I think my main message at this point is to add to what we've already talked about knowing that bringing technical expertise and bringing what you know about how things work to this community, to the policymaking opportunity being a part of PDPs is important and an essential part of the process and certainly well appreciated in general.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Thank you. Om, please.

OM PRAKASH SHARMA

Just a quick comment. My name is Om and I'm from Nepal with NextGen program. This program has been really instrumental and we have been learning a lot. One thing what I think that's important is in getting back where we come from and see how these trainings will help us contributing there. So, I think it's important to recognize that one thing.

Personally, for me, I want to see the very low-level people applying for the gTLD program, especially the underserved ones. So, that's one thing that I'm looking forward for it. And I think continuing it, it's really important to have sessions like GAC meets NextGen and ICANN Fellow or similar to this so that we can connect to our community people inside the ICANN. So, I think that will be interesting one and then similar kind of initiatives. Thank you.

KURTIS LINDQUIST

On the GAC. So, I know that some GAC representatives actually will go and meet with their, they will actually organize a meeting between GAC representatives and the fellows and NextGen at every ICANN meeting. Not all countries do and I believe in Prague, it was raised to-- we actually told the GAC that some do this but not everyone and they should do so.

So, we have encouraged them to go and reach out and actually meet with all and have further interaction between the GAC members and the fellows. I actually don't know to what extent they have or what the success of that is, but we have raised this in the past. So, Maarten, do you want to add something?

MAARTEN AERTSEN

Yes. Just from my side, again, always a pleasure to be here and great that you show up. I heard also a question about how can we become leaders, right? And how can we go further in this? One thing I may recommend and I do to any new generations that I talk

with anywhere, take back what you hear here, bring it back in your community, engage with GAC members, business members or even just your school or organize a session in your local library.

It will help you to rethink what you learned, what you want to bring, what you really want to be about and it helps you to also to maybe raise more interest in that process. You learn more yourself about what you learned already, you learn more from the feedback you get and you learn to be even more of a leader than you are already today by showing up here.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Thank you, Maarten. And we are just close to closing this session, but before that I would like to give the floor to Kurt and Leon to say final words, call to action, whatever you would like to say to Fellows and Nextgeners. Kurtis?

KURTIS LINDQUIST

No, thank you, and thank you again for coming and for asking a lot of questions and providing a lot of very good ideas. I think this is really one of the great values of this program is that we get to hear from you. I don't think you necessarily get value from hearing from us, but we certainly get value from listening to you. And I think that's really good. I think having this discussion is really a valuable part of the program.

As we said, you going back to your home countries, your home environments, your home organizations and furthering this work

and discussing this is really what this program is all about and we add value. So thank you for coming. I hope you had a great program. I hope to see you all again. And yeah, that's all. Thank you. Leon.

LEON SANCHEZ

Thank you very much, Siranush for the invitation and Kurtis for maintaining this program alive. I think this is a program that's dear to me and to other Board colleagues as well, even if they might not have been part of the fellowship program themselves. But I know that they care about it and they see it as a very valuable resource and tool to continue and to further ICANN's mission.

So with this, my fellow fellows, I want to encourage you to keep going, to keep the good fight, to find your place at the ICANN community. Sometimes that place might not seem as natural to you in regard to your day-to-day activities. Sometimes your place might be in a very different place than that of your quotidianity and your regular activities.

So don't be shy. Dive into different sessions, even if you have absolutely no clue what the sessions are about. You might surprise yourself and you might find the space in a place in what you would otherwise wouldn't have imagined that you would have a place. So thank you again, and remember, once a fellow, you're always a fellow.

SIRANUSH VARDANYAN

Thank you, and I also would like to thank all Board members who joined this session and all those who were not able to join. I know many of you wanted to be here, but this is amazing support from you we are getting, and our thanks from both NextGen and fellows for you to be here with us. Thank you very much. We can close the session. Thank you.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]