
ICANN75 | AGM – GNSO IDN EPDP Working Session (2 of 2)
Saturday, September 17, 2022 – 10:30 to 12:00 KUL

DEVAN REED:

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With that, I will hand the floor back over to Donna Austin.

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DONNA AUSTIN:

Thanks, Devan. Welcome back, everybody. During the break, Ariel put a piece of paper where you're sitting. And it's not intended to be a joke, but it's just—if you all brought your magnifying glasses, you might be able to read it—but it's just illustrative. So what Ariel is going to take us through is the new gTLD process flowchart or process flow, and it will identify where we have recommendations on different bits. So we're just going to work our way through that. But it's just to give you in a snapshot what the process looks like. I apologize. We know the font is small, but we thought it might be representative and it might help you as Ariel takes us through that. So with that, I think I'll hand it over to Ariel.

ARIEL LIANG:

Today, we're going to focus on the process flow of the new gTLD program. And then before we talk about the details, I'd like to just give a quick background and context why we're doing this. And then with these goals in mind, it will be more useful of our time when we go through the process.

Just as a way of reminder why we developed the strawman process flow, it's because we have two charter questions that stem the discussion. One is D1b: What should be the process by which an existing registry operator could apply for variants for its existing gTLD? And then the other question is B4: What should an application process look like in terms of timing and sequence for existing and future registry operators with respect to applying or activating their allocatable variant TLD labels? These two questions we kind of parked right now because we need some additional understanding of the whole

application process to understand what should the process look like for existing operators and whether activating variants between rounds or having standalone rounds just for these existing registry operators is viable. So that's why we have this strawman process flow.

And then when we developed the strawman process flow, we have a better understanding of the purpose. So I just want to clarify that for the group too. So the first purpose is understanding which elements in the new gTLD application process will be impacted by variant implementation. That's the first one. And then the second purpose is consider how such elements will need to be modified to accommodate variant gTLDs. And then the third purpose is to analyze the level of efforts of evaluating variant applications and then the associated costs and fees for variant activation requests or applications. So that's the purpose to have the strawman process flow.

And then when we're going to go through the updated strawman process flow, there are also a few things we want folks to keep in mind. The first one is when we go through the chart, please consider whether the mapping of our current charter questions and preliminary recommendations are accurate. So that's basically to say in this stage of the application process, are variants applicable for this? And then what specific modifications are needed? We have mapped our charter question to the process flow, so we will appreciate your input for that.

And then second is that when we go through the process, there may be gaps that can be identified [is] that we don't have a relevant charter question applicable to that stage of the application process. And do we need a charter question for that, and do we need to develop additional

recommendations to address those gaps? So that's the second item to keep at the back of your mind.

And then the third one is basically going back to the root or the origin [is] to analyze the feasibility of a standalone round for an existing gTLD registry operator to apply for variant TLDs. So if you look at the process and you think basically everything is applicable for variants and a lot of modifications are needed, maybe the feasibility could be low. But we don't know yet, but that's something we have to analyze.

And then the fourth thing is also analyze the feasibility of acting variants between application rounds. So that's the fourth item to keep in mind.

And another note I want to mention is what the process flow is and what it is not. Basically, what we have done is to include all relevant charter questions that related to the new gTLD process in the chart. We do not include [any] post-delegation related charter questions or second-level related charter questions because they are not [super] related to the new gTLD application process. So it's not a comprehensive capture of all the charter questions of this EPDP.

And then also, some of the charter questions are still being discussed or deliberated, so we don't have a preliminary recommendation for those. However, we included reference to the charter question number just to be comprehensive. So that's something I want to not before we go through it.

And another quick refresher I want to mention is when we were deliberating on the question B1b, what should be the process by which existing registry operators could apply for variants, we sent out this

survey to the existing Chinese and Arabic gTLD registry operators. So those strings, basically those Chinese and Arabic gTLDs, they're the only ones that can have allocatable variants based on the RZ-LGR rules.

So I just wanted to quickly refresh your mind what the result was. We have received very good responses from the Chinese registry operators. We sent to 26 Chinese ROs, and then we received responses from 20 of them. So it's a 77% response rate. And then for Arabic ones, we reached out to nine but only heard back from two, so it's lower. And then for the ones that responded, 12 of the Chinese ROs said yes they're interested in activating variants. And then some of them said no or they don't know. So you can probably say that more than half of the Chinese ROs who responded to the survey indicated interest. And then for the two Arabic TLD registry operators, they both responded and said yes they're interested in activating.

And then we also asked them what's their desired timeframe to activate or request activation of variants. So just looking at the responses from both Chinese and Arabic TLD operators, five of them said on a rolling basis, three of them said before the next round of the new gTLD program, two want to activate as soon as possible, and then two said no urgency, and then there's one response that said after next round. So it's kind of all over the place, but also this question is a very hard one for folks to answer. They don't have enough background understanding knowledge what it takes for activating that variant, so it's understandable they have a response that's very diverse.

And then we also asked factors they may consider to decide whether they want to activate variants or not. We received a variety of

responses. They mention market conditions, the business potential for variants, the interest from registrars, and the use and access of variant domain names. So these are business considerations. And also, a lot of them want to know what the new applicant guidebook may look like and then the related policy for variant TLDs. And then what are the contractual terms they need to comply with. So that's related to the SubPro implementation, so that's also understandable.

And then there are other considerations that are very important. Costs and fees. That's not only related to the application for variant TLDs but also the other fees like transaction fees, fixed fees, and the management of hosting. So these are very practical concerns from the registry operators. And then also the variant domain name management. Some of them are not clear what the potential complexity for that. And also is there an expectation those variant domain names need to behave the same or not? And then whether there's a need to expand the capacity of the resolution system, or rather the design needs to be changed. So those are other factors.

So we have heard from these registry operators, but definitely there is interest but then there are also a lot of unknowns. And then we're hoping that our analyses of this new gTLD, the application flow can give us a better picture of what it takes for activating variants.

So with that background, I guess—oh, yeah. Donna, please.

DONNA AUSTIN:

Yeah, thanks, Ariel. Just a reminder that the reason that we sent that survey out, it was only intended to give us a sense of really whether we

needed to address the charter questions that were associated with existing gTLD operators. And I think what we can see from that is that there is interest from the existing gTLD operators in applying for variants. So we achieved that, but there are some other useful datapoints in there as well that Ariel has just gone through. But it was indicative only, so now we need to think about and we're developing policy for future new gTLD IDN applicants. But it's how do we do that retrospectively for those IDN operators that already exist. Hadia, I see your hand is up.

HADIA ELMINIAWI:

Yes, if you could go back to the survey, please. Yeah, thank you. Do we know the importance of those factors affecting the decision? Because you do have here the new applicant guidebook. You have the policy related to variant TLDs. So do we know if, for example, the policy related to variant TLDs, is this really an important factor? Does this really impact the decision of the operator whether to apply for the variant before? But again, we have three saying before next round, but then again this will depend if variants could be applied for between rounds. So actually, would we take this survey into consideration in the making of the policy, or is this only for guidance? And if we are actually going to use it, I think we need to know more.

DONNA AUSTIN:

So, Hadia, it's just a datapoint. We did get some feedback through the GNSO that there was some confusion about the survey that we sent out to existing IDN gTLD operators, so I think it's just a datapoint and it

doesn't have any real weight with the exception that it shows that existing IDN gTLDs operators do have some interest in having variants at some point in time. But all of those factors are pretty logical I suppose, but I don't know how we take that into consideration with the work that we're doing. Does that answer okay? Okay, all right. So, Ariel?

ARIEL LIANG:

Thanks, Hadia, for those comments. Now we're going to go through this process flow. I think one thing I'm hoping folks can do is maybe hold your questions and comments. And then once I go through the whole thing, maybe some of your questions may be addressed. But please hold it till the end.

I also realize it's a pretty big chart, so I will try to zoom in as much as possible. So let me know if you have difficulty reading it. This piece of paper is illegible. Not legible, but you can at least see the sections so hopefully that will help.

Okay, some of you have already seen this before. We presented it a couple of months ago. It's basically to showcase how the new gTLD looked like, application process looked like based on the 2012 round. And then we have a few assumptions. It's basically the new round, subsequent round will look very much similar because based on the SubPro's final report there are no dramatic changes. There are a lot of incremental improvements and there are definitely new elements introduced, but the general flow looks very much the same. That's why we developed it based on the 2012 round process.

There are a few updates. The first main update is we have included the new elements proposed by SubPro in this chart. So these greenish squares that I will go through, you will see these are the new process or new elements proposed by SubPro. That's the first update.

And then the second update is that we tried to map the EPDP charter questions to these specific squares for the stages in the process. So now you see what the impact of variant implementation is because there may be a specific modification or update needed to accommodate variants.

And then if there are any applicable recommendations developed in response to the charter questions, we also try to include a very brief summary of what the recommendation is. Of course, you have to go to the exact recommendation number to see the full text, but this at least gives you a hint what that recommendation is about.

And then the third update is, as suggested by the team, we included numbers to mark to the squares that when you want to mention specific stage you can just say Box 7, Box 6, for example. So that will make it easier.

And another thing I want to clarify is you will note throughout this chart we have two different kinds of labels. One is "Applicable." That's the dark green one. The other is "Specific." So what they mean is applicable means, this specific stage or element in the new gTLD application process is applicable for the variants. So it's basically no difference. Variant is no different from a regular gTLD application. They have to go through the exact same stage.

But however, there's no specific accommodation were updates needed to accommodate the variants. And then if they do have an update, then that specific means this stage because of variants we have to make some change or revision or additional things for the variants. And then it's also kind of evidence that we have relevant chartering [question] from the EPDP that corresponds to this stage and then there is a recommendation related to that. So that explains why those stages may have specific impact because of variants too.

So that's some overarching comment I have. Then let's just go through the process now. The first section in this chart is "Pre-Program" Processes. These are new elements proposed by SubPro. So that's the process that happened before the new gTLD application program starts.

And then the first one, Box 1, Predictability Framework and SPIRT (Topic 2 and Annex E), that's the Topic 2 and Annex E off the SubPro final report. What this box is about is the overarching element of the program system mechanism to predictably mitigate unforeseen issues that might arise. So it's to basically predict unforeseen issues that might arise. This is to address that.

And then Box 2, the Registry Service Provider Pre-Evaluation, that's another new element introduced by SubPro. What it does is to streamline technical evaluation process to allow applicants to identify providers [ahead of] the program. So that kind of makes sense. This is one of the pre-program process. And then at the same time, we believe we already have some charter questions that can map to this particular stage. So that's Question B1, B2, and B3.

And the relevant recommendations are 2.1 and 2.2. It's basically the same registry operator needs to operate the primary or source gTLD and its allocatable variants that are requested by the applicant. And then also, they need to be managed by the same backend service provider. So when someone wants to have an interest to apply for variants, they need to identify the provider that could do that to manage the primary string and the variant. So that's the first mapping we identified.

Then the second section is basically the application section. You can see in this flowchart it's a light blue box that indicates the application stage and Box 3, Application period opens. We think there may be some specific implications where changes or updates are needed to accommodate variants. The reason is that we believe charter questions A1 and A3 may be applicable to that due to the implementation of RZ-LGR. So it's possible that if someone wants to apply for IDNs or variants, they need to already check RZ-LGR to confirm it's a valid string allowed by RZ-LGR.

And then at the same time, implementation guidance 1.3 talks about this initial algorithmic check to ensure the label is valid. So that's also to comply with RZ-LGR. So we believe when the application period opens, the applicant should have the opportunity to utilize the tool to confirm the string is a valid string based on RZ-LGR calculation.

And moving on to Box 4, Submit application in system, here you see this dashed line leads to a big box of charter questions and recommendations that this group has developed. And indeed, in the application submission system there definitely seems to be a lot of

updates needed to accommodate variants. And I'll just quickly go through these relevant recommendations we have identified.

So the first two are kind of similar, you have seen earlier, is about 1.1, and 1.3 is about compliance with RZ-LGR. And then 1.4 is about there's no ceiling value needed for allocatable variants. So this group decided not to limit the number of allocatable variants because there may be other factors that may constrain how many the applicant wants to apply for.

And then 1.11, single character gTLDs, that can be allowed only for the Han script that's used in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean languages. So this group has confirmed that that's a possibility for the future.

And then 2.1, that's about same registry operator needs to operate the primary or source string and variant. And then 2.5 is about one application that covers both the primary and source string and the variants allocatable labels that are requested by the applicant. So basically, one application covers both.

The 2.6, that's the expectation that the applicant needs to explain why the variants are needed and then how to manage the variants. So in the application, that needs to be clarified. And 2.8, variants bound by same the same restrictions, so basically if the primary or source string is like a .brand TLD, for example, then its variants need to be that too. So that needs to be bound by the same restrictions.

And then for Recommendation 3.3 it says no application for reserved names' variants. So just a refresher, reserve names are the strings that are related to ICANN and the IANA function. It's a bunch of acronyms

basically. So this group has recommended that for the variants of these reserved, they can never be applied for. So in the application submission system we probably have to make some updates to reflect these recommendations.

And then related to Box 4, there's this Box 5. That's the outcome of the IGO-INGO PDP. They have identified a very specific list of strings ineligible for delegation. So that's the International Olympic Committee, the Red Cross/Red Crescent, and the IGOs and INGO names. So there are some specific changes to that. That will be reflected in the future new gTLD process. Those labels are being protected, and they cannot be applied for unless the relevant organization decides to apply for these strings.

And we do have a charter question mapped to it. It's asking whether variants need to be taken into account or need to be included in this list of strings ineligible for delegation. And we know this deliberation is sort of close to completion. We're developing a recommendation for that. But the text hasn't been drafted yet, so we don't have it. But we have a mapped charter question to this Box 5.

Following that is Box 6. It says submit application fee. So we do have a charter question which is D1b that maps to this box. It's about what would be the fee associated with variant applications or requests. This group has developed a recommendation. It's basically to uphold the cost recovery principle which already recommended in SubPro. So I want to just note that.

Box 7, ICANN begins admin completeness check. This is only applicable because we don't believe there's specific change needed to accommodate variants. Variants just need to be checked just like the rest of the regular gTLD applications. So no specific change to that. And then ICANN posts applications, that's also only applicable to variants. And then ICANN completes admin completeness check, only applicable for variants.

So now we have basically covered this application stage of the process, and now we're moving on to background screening. So that's at the beginning, I guess, of the initial evaluation. I think that's the second stage. It's only applicable to variants, Box 10, because it's just like the other gTLD applications. No specific changes needed.

And then going next is early warning. That's regarding Box 14, it's about whether GAC has any early warning for those applications. And that's also applicable for variants. Not any specific thing related to that. And then these are if the applicant decides, yeah, there's a GAC early warning. I want to withdraw. Then the process stops here. But then if the applicant decides to continue, then we go forward to the initial evaluation stage.

And actually before I go to the initial evaluation stage, I want to also call out some other boxes we put in the chart. So you can see they're not mapped to any specific boxes, but they're kind of floating in the space. We call them "Persistent" processes, and these are recommendations from SubPro. It means those processes can happen in multiple stages of the program, and it does not just belong to a very specific stage. So that's why they're kind of floating.

The first one, Box 11, registry voluntary commitments (RVCs)/public interest commitments (PICs), including to resolve singular/plural and to resolve GAC advice and/or objections. So this is a new element proposed by SubPro. So what this does is that the applicant can make commitments to resolve issues arising from the GAC advice, the GAC early warning objection and [word] string similarity review. So basically, it's just a possibility for an applicant to make commitment to address these specific concerns.

And then we believe there are several charter questions that can map to this element. It's B5, B4a, and E1. Maybe there are more, thinking about it. But if we have any mistakenly mapped something, please point this out.

And then we also think Recommendation 2.8 can be applicable to this box. It's that variants are bound by the same restrictions. So we're specifically considering the Category 1 TLDs identified by the GAC and if there's a variant application that's also Category 1 too. Something along that line. So that's the mapping we found.

And then the other persistent process box is Box 12. That's application changes requests, including limited ability for .brand to revise strings to resolve string contention. That's Topic 20 in the SubPro final report. What this means is that applicants can make changes to the application, and that can happen throughout the process of the new gTLD program. And then the changes submitted need to be subject to public comment. So that's what this box means. And then we believe it's just applicable to variants. Like other regular gTLDs, there are no specific updates needed for variants. And that's another floating box.

So now we're moving on to the initial evaluation stage. These are the yellow boxes in this chart. We focused probably already you're very familiar with these. So the first box is 17, string similarity review. And we know that we have already extensive discussion of that for variants. So definitely some specific updates needed for accommodating variants.

And the charter questions related to that are B4a, E1, E3, E3a, and E5. So that's currently the questions, but we haven't had a conclusion yet. We know the small [group] has a recommendation for a hybrid model, but that's still being debated by the full working group.

And another related element proposed by SubPro is Box 18. That's related to the string similarity review that's regarding singular/plural strings. Basically, singular/plural is not allowed unless they mean different things. So that's a specific additional element included by SubPro.

We didn't label this one because we don't know yet whether that's applicable for variants or, if applicable, is there any specific changes needed. I think that's something Jeff brought up and then we haven't really discussed in this group. So we just don't have a label, but maybe we'll add a label later when we have a clarity of the question or the context.

And then the other element of the initial evaluation is the DNS stability review. So we do believe there are some specific changes needed for that, and that's related to charter question A3. So we have a recommendation here. It's Recommendation 1.2. It's basically we

believe the DNS Stability Panel will have the responsibility to evaluate whether to apply for string as valid or not. So then if the applicant believes that the panel made the wrong decision, it can challenge that using the limited challenge mechanism that I will cover shortly. So definitely some specific changes will need to be introduced here.

And then related to DNS stability box, we have Box 20 that's a new element proposed by SubPro. It's the name collisions, Topic 29. I understand that's a very complicated topic. What it means is that there are some strings maybe using private networks, and then they're only intended for use in private networks. So if they were to be delegated in the DNS, that can potentially cause name collision. So if someone actually intends to go to the private network using that string and they end up in the gTLD, that could potentially cause data leakage and other grave consequences. So that's what this name collision means. We believe it's only applicable for variants because variants are just like other individual gTLD strings. They may have a potential name collision that we need to address, but no specific updates are needed to accommodate variants.

The next box in the initial evaluation is geographic names, Box 21. There are some specific updates needed because we have this Recommendation 2.8 regarding variants bound by the same restrictions. So if the primary applied for string is a geo-name, then the variants need to be geo-name too. That's what this group recommends.

The next box also part of initial evaluation, technical and operational capability, Box 22. Also specific changes need to be considered because we have the Recommendation 2.2 which is the same backend service

provider is expected to manage the variant and the primary string. And then [Recommendation] 2.6, the applicant needs to explain why they need the variant and how to manage it. So there's a lot related to technical operational considerations and their capability to handle variants. So that's why specific updates are needed.

The next one, Box 23, financial capability, we believe there also may be specific updates needed. It's related to 2.6 recommendation that's also about the need to have variants and how to manage that. So there may be some financial consideration needs to be clarified in the application and needs to be checked by the panel.

Next box, registry service, Box 24. Also, some specific updates may be needed. That's due to Recommendation 2.1. It's to have the same registry operator having the primary string and the variant and the same backend service provider manage that. So that's related to registry services.

The new box here, the green one, Box 25, highly sensitive or regulated industries. Actually, we labeled that as applicable but I think it may be specific too. But it's basically the GAC Category 1 gTLDs that are highly sensitive or related to regulated industries. So we have Recommendation 2.8 that explains that variants for those primary strings that are Category 1, they also need to be treated as Category 1 and then bound by the same restrictions. So it could be specific too, but at least applicable. That's our assessment.

Before I move to the next one, I just want to show there's another floating box here which is Box 13. It's another persistent process box

that's a new element proposed by SubPro which is about the limited challenge and appeal mechanism. So basically what it means is that if an applicant disagrees with the panel's decision for initial evaluation, it could utilize the limited challenge mechanism to challenge that. So all these elements for initial evaluation can be challenged using that mechanism.

And then the appeal mechanism is basically related to the objection process which I will cover later. So the applicant—or, I don't know, it can be another entity—can use the appeal mechanism to challenge the decision regarding objection. So that's another floating box. And we believe that it's applicable for variants because variants can just be a regular string and you can use the same mechanism to challenge the decision.

And then we have Recommendation 1.2 that's related to the DNS stability review. And then I just mentioned that the DNS Stability Panel is expected to evaluate whether the applied for string is valid, is RZ-LGR. And then if the applicant disagrees with the panel's decision it's something invalid, they believe it's actually valid, they can use the limited challenge mechanism to challenge that decision.

So now we're going to the next segment. That's basically the initial evaluation is completed. ICANN posts the results. That's Box 26. That's just applicable for variants. Nothing special needs to be done there. And then we also have this stage of whether there's additional GAC advice related to the initial evaluation results and then the Board consideration of that. So we believe it's just applicable to variants, not specific changes needed.

And then if the application passes the initial evaluation, we are moving on to the objection process which is this dark blue section. So it's Box 30 here. And we believe some specific changes. I think I forgot to label this. This is specific because we do have a charter question that addresses objections. And then these are B4a, E1, and E2.

And so far, the group has developed the Recommendation 3.1. It's that all requested variants must be subject to objection processes. So that's the first recommendation related to that topic. And then we know there's ongoing deliberation of those specific types of objections and how to handle variants in these different types. So that's an ongoing process, but we already labeled these Box 31, 32, 33, and 34. Probably specific updates need to be done to accommodate variants.

And then if the application passes and there's no objection—and now we're moving on basically, but back just to backtrack slightly. If the initial evaluation does not pass, then the application can pursue the extended evaluation. That's Box 36. And then Box 37 includes some elements, I guess, different types of things that need to be considered for the extended evaluation that we believe are just applicable for variants and not really specific changes needed. So these are the orange ones.

And then we're moving on to the next segment which is these lavender boxes. That's related to string contention. So that's very much a next step of the string similarity review and also the string confusion objection. So there's a possibility that strings in contention there will be placed in a contention set and will go through this purple segment of the flowchart.

We do have a charter question that's address, this string contention resolution. That's E4. And this group hasn't discussed this yet because we haven't closed off the discussion of string similarity review and string confusion objection. So we're parked now. We don't have a recommendation, but we will get to that.

And then in this purple section it's basically the flow of a string contention resolution. And then there may be some specific changes needed, so Box 43, community priority evaluation, and then Box 45, auction proceedings, these are the elements covered in Question E4, and then this group needs to discuss.

And another thing is the community-based application Box 42. We do have this Recommendation 2.8. That's variants bound by the same restrictions. So basically if it's a community TLD, the primary string is a community TLD, then the variant needs to be a community TLD too. So we've just done the mapping here.

And now we're at the end of the flowchart which is these light green boxes. So just this is basically talking about a successful application. Basically passed through all these stages and finally we are at the contract execution stage, Box 47.0. And we believe there are some specific updates needed because we have this Recommendation 2.4, means that one registry agreement covers both the primary resource string and the requested allocatable variant that also has the evaluation. So there are some contractual updates that need to be done to reflect this recommendation.

And then pre-delegation testing, Box 48. We have the Recommendation 2.1 and 2.2 that talks about having the same registry operator and the same backend service provider covering both the primary string and the variant. So pre-delegation testing needs to be done to make sure this is happening or there are no technical issues, I guess, as specific updates need to be implemented.

And then delegation, we also think there are some specific updates. Right now, we just have these Recommendations 1.12 and 1.13 that talk about label states. So folks may remember for variants you may have different label states from delegated, allocated, withheld-same-entity, rejected, and I think there's one more. But basically once we're at the delegation stage, the label states need to be changed to reflect the variant labels. So some specific updates need to be implemented.

And I think that's the end of the process flow. I know this is a lot of information, so I also welcome the folks who are expert in SubPro and the process flow to chime in if you believe there are any corrections needed or further clarification needed to explain the stages. But this is basically the staff initial assessment of this flowchart and our understanding of the variants impact. So I will stop here.

DONNA AUSTIN:

Thanks, Ariel. It is a lot to take in. For those of us who have some understanding of the SubPro process, it might be a little bit easier than others. But I wonder if we can start with where we think there might be some gaps in our work if anyone has identified any of those areas. I've

got a couple that I just want to call out. And it may be that it's not really a gap.

But with Box 2, Ariel, the RSP pre-evaluation, that's something that obviously will need to be developed as part of the SubPro work. But I wonder with an IDN gTLD registry operator wanting to operate variants as well whether there's a different process or a different pre-evaluation that would need to be undertaken by the RSP. So I don't know if anyone has any thoughts on that. My sense is that there would have to be something in the pre-evaluation to see whether the registry operator has the wherewithal to manage the primary source label and the variants. And I don't know that we've covered that in any of our work. Dennis?

DENNIS TAN:

Thank you, Donna. I'm not sure I'm going to answer your question, but it just made me reflect on registry service provider and the process. In the conversations that we are having within the CPH TechOps it has been [transparent] that at least there are two models by which a registry operator could manage [variant] domain names. And we're talking about not just the TLD but the domain name, right? Second-level and top-level.

So two models. I'm just going to put a name there because that's what we are describing, but maybe they're not used widely. So one is the variant as object and the other one is variant as attribute. So two models. We don't have to go through the specifics. So I wonder if we are—my understanding is that in the future a registry service provider

would go through one testing process and that will be used in order to not repeat the same or duplicate the process.

So potentially, it seems we are having two models that registry service providers will need to prove that they can manage either one or both. So probably, that will...some duplication, if you will. But I'm not sure that was what you were referring to, but just made me think about those two models and how to manage variants and the implications on the testing process.

DONNA AUSTIN:

Thanks, Dennis. I think we're talking about the same thing. I think in one of our recommendations we've identified it as an application question that the applicant has to say how they're going to manage the strings operationally. And it could be that that's something that is picked up in the pre-evaluation at the RSP. So I think we maybe just flag that at the moment as something that potentially we have to look at.

And it could also be—I don't know, Jeff, what happens with the pre-delegation testing. My understanding was that if you had the pre-evaluation, maybe you don't need the pre-delegation testing. But I think if the pre-delegation testing stays, then this might also be something that we need to think about there as well. Jeff?

JEFF NEUMAN:

Yeah, thanks. I think there are a couple of different questions there. Sorry, I was just thinking about the last one that you asked, Donna. I think IANA has its own testing that's required, so that's going to be done

regardless separate and apart. But we also need to separate the business rules from the operational/technical rules.

So the pre-evaluation is only going to evaluate the backend provider for all the technical questions. But when it comes to managing variants, there's a lot of policy/business related questions that are in there too. So I don't think that part of it can be assessed in the pre-evaluation. I think that has to be the frontend applicant in the actual application describing how they're going to manage those. It's going to be separate than the technical evaluation that occurs in the pre-evaluation, if that makes sense. The pre-evaluation process was really to assess the technical capabilities of the backend provider, not the business rules or policies or anything like that of the management of variants.

DONNA AUSTIN:

If the backend provider is going to be the one responsible for managing the source label and the variants operationally, then I would think that something has to be flagged at least in the RSP pre-evaluation. I take what you're saying about the business rules, but I think there's still a technical part associated with the RSP.

JEFF NEUMAN:

Yeah. Sorry. I was saying both, yeah. That it's both. It's not just one or the other.

DONNA AUSTIN:

Sorry. I misunderstood. Hadia?

HADIA ELMINIAWI: Hi. This is actually a question. Is it possible that the registry service provider for a string, for the principle string, is good but actually when you apply for one variant or more then when assessing the registry service provider it turns out that that registry service provider cannot actually handle all those strings? And then what happens if this is the situation?

DONNA AUSTIN: I think we have to flag that as something that we need to look at because there are no rules around that at the moment.

JEFF NEUMAN: I think, again, that would also come down to a separation between business rules and technical. I think it's not, as we've been hearing over and over again, the technical backend operator—the issues are more about the management of the variants from the business rules, the policies, and things like that as opposed to the technical backend.

So, yes, I think it is very possible for someone to have an IDN TLD that has a backend that's certainly qualified to run variant TLDs in addition to the primary. But when ICANN reviews the business rules and the management policies, then perhaps that's deficient. So I think you can have someone that fails later on. But again, that's just my own thoughts.

DONNA AUSTIN: Thanks, Jeff. Satish?

SATISH BABU: Thanks, Donna. I'm not able to fully understand the discussions at this point. I'd like to know, are we proposing some kind of a one-time certification for registry service providers on their operation and business competency? And if so, is this certification script specific or is it just general? Thank you.

DONNA AUSTIN: Thanks, Satish. Jeff, are you in a position just to give us a little bit of the background on the RSP evaluation? Sorry.

JEFF NEUMAN: No, that's okay. I'm going to do this from memory because it's been a little while, and someone can jump in if I misstate it. So we definitely spent a lot of time on terminology because of what we're discussing now.

So the pre-evaluation is specifically called a pre-evaluation because it's the same criteria that you would evaluate if they were to do the evaluation during the application process. So that evaluation is string agnostic. It doesn't look at what string anyone may be applying for. It's just so that frontend applicants can, when they apply, just check off a box that says "I'm using so-and-so provider because you've already evaluated them as being able to run a top-level domain."

But as you're pointing out, as we're pointing out here, there are certain things that the pre-evaluation may not cover because they can only be covered once the string is known. And in this case, once the primary string is known and any variants. So only part of it will be evaluated in the pre-evaluation process, if that makes sense.

And again, it's not a certification, but it's just answering the questions earlier, once for each entity, so that unlike what happened in 2012 where you had, let's say, Verisign was the backend for a lot of registries and it had to be evaluated every single time as a technical operator for strings that pretty much all had the same technical and operational rules. And that just really didn't make sense. So that's the problem that the pre-evaluation is trying to solve. You do it once. But if there are new things in an application that weren't previously evaluated, then you have to evaluate those during the application process.

And it's completely voluntary. You're not required to be pre-evaluated. You can actually be evaluated at the time the strings and the applications are accepted. So you have a choice.

DONNA AUSTIN:

Thanks, Jeff. And you're nodding, Satish, so I...okay. All right, so any other gaps that people have identified? So I've got another one, and I hate to raise this. So geographic names—and I'm not 100% familiar on what the resulting recommendations were for geo-names—but if an IDN TLD happens to be a geographic name, I'm wondering whether there are specific things that we have to think about there. Probably not because we're saying it's bound by the same restrictions, but I'm just

wondering whether the.... So the ISO 3166 list that country and territory names are derived from, we've been looking into strings ineligible for delegation or reserved names. So do we have to have a similar discussion around geo-names that are on the ISO 3166 [on this]? And we don't have to answer that now, but just flag it as to whether that's something we need to look at. Jeff?

JEFF NEUMAN:

Yeah, I think the prequel to that is, is there a list of variants of ISO 3166? Because that's a definitive list. I don't think they put any kind of variant labels in there. It's just the list is what it is. And, yeah, I think we would need to talk about whether any variant of that list should have the same treatment or not. I don't think that was discussed by SubPro or any group, as far as I'm aware.

ARIEL LIANG:

Actually, I think I omitted a charter question. So I think it's about the two-character TLDs and then the [inaudible] version of that, can that be applied for? So basically, can someone apply for a two-character TLD that's a variant? And then I think we have a charter question covering that topic, so it may related to geo-names. But I will post the wording of the charter question in the chat for folks to review that.

DONNA AUSTIN:

Thanks, Ariel. Jeff, is your hand still up?

JEFF NEUMAN: Yeah. Sorry, Ariel, I didn't.... Say that again. A two-character...?

ARIEL LIANG: Actually, just give me one moment and let me get the charter question wording and I will post that in the chat.

JEFF NEUMAN: Okay.

ARIEL LIANG: It's variants of two-character TLDs.

DONNA AUSTIN: Okay. So on the registry services which I think is Box 24—and I might need some help from you again, Jeff—that registry services is related. It's not really about the backend provider. It's really about if there are different services that the registry operator wants to provide. That's what that's related to rather than the RSP?

JEFF NEUMAN: Yeah. So in the SubPro final report the backend's ability to perform the normal registry services, the everyday services, would be evaluated in the pre-evaluation process. In the registry services it really generally means additional registry services above and beyond the normal everyday services.

Plus there are some new services that have been added. Kind of ones that everyone does since 2012. So there are the registry lock, the awfully

named BTAPPA. Yeah, all of those. So there are some more of those that are added to the kind of standard registry services. And then they'll all be related in Appendix A of the registry agreement. And if there are any new ones, which in theory could be variant management, that would be what's evaluated here.

DONNA AUSTIN: Okay, thanks. So I'm not sure that Questions B1 and B2 are the right ones here for that. But I guess I just wanted to call out the registry services here is a little bit different to the same registry operator and the same RSP. And I note that we've had a couple of questions in chat looking for this flowchart.

ARIEL LIANG: [inaudible]

DONNA AUSTIN: You posted it? Okay, so Ariel has now posted that. All right. So any other gaps that folks have identified? You want to come to the...?

ABDALMONEM GALILA: I like this process diagram, but I am wondering if it's applicable to consider the IDN gTLD retirement process or not. Thank you.

DONNA AUSTIN: I think that's outside the scope of what we're doing here.

ABDALMONEM GALILA: Yeah, you are right. But if during my application process I need to know or I have a commitment when I retire my business what should I do.

DONNA AUSTIN: So there are—and Jeff or Steve might have to help me out here—but there are existing processes at the moment. So if you don't want to continue with your gTLD, I think it's different for a brand. I think there's a two-year period that's set aside that the string can't be used depending on the reason that you've decided not to continue with the TLD. If it happens to have registrations associated with the TLD, then it will go to the EBERO provider, I think, and there's a process, which is an emergency backend registry operator. So ICANN has a process for that, so that process wouldn't necessarily be in a different [view]. So that's covered under something that already exists at the moment. Okay?

Okay, so maybe if we can have a look now at the flowchart in the context of the questions that are related to existing registry operators, I think one of the things that we're trying to understand is whether an existing gTLD operator...do we want to do a separate process for existing registry operators that already have an IDN gTLD that they've been using or maybe they're not using it but was approved during the 2012 round? And what that application process would look like.

So one option that is available is just roll it into the next round whenever that may be if we think that makes sense. Because one of the consequences, I suppose, of not doing that is we would have to recommend a policy that basically you're creating. You have to do all the infrastructure and get a process up for existing IDN gTLDs. And if we

look at the cost recovery model, then that could be quite expensive if the IDN gTLD operator has to pay for that.

So I guess if we can have a look at these questions and get some thoughts from folks on what their thinking is. If you have any thinking on these questions. Michael? Sorry.

MICHAEL BAULAND:

Thanks. I was a bit late. I wanted to comment to the retirement question. Maybe it's still something we have to consider because if you have a variant TLD and want to retire just one variant but not the other TLD and you have registrations, you cannot just have the variant go to EBERO because then you would have to have two different registry backend operators running two of the variants which would not be possible due to the same entity. So in that context, the retirement would have to be somehow different from the usual retirement.

DONNA AUSTIN:

Thanks, Michael. That's a good point. So I think that's probably something we need to flag as something for us to look at. And I think in the context of the conversation we had earlier today, I think we can put that into part two of the tracking exercise. So we'll pick that up when we get to that. Jeff?

JEFF NEUMAN:

Thanks. Yeah, I've been thinking about this question too for a while, and I think the best way to do it given, again, the cost recovery nature is at least for this next round it should be combined. It should be just a

different path that the application goes down, but it should all be done during the new gTLD process. That should reduce the costs for existing operators to apply but also is fair because there are quite a number of elements that would still have to be done. There's a bunch that don't, and we probably should go through the chart and think about which processes may not need to be done.

For example, contention sets I don't—well, it might actually now that I'm thinking about it. So there are a couple, right? Because of contention sets that would have to apply, but perhaps not the same type of financial evaluation. Maybe not the same type of operational business review but a different type. So I think that would be the one that makes the most sense from an economic perspective.

DONNA AUSTIN:

Thanks, Jeff. Do folks have a view on that fundamental question of whether to have a standalone process for existing IDN gTLD operators or whether it makes more sense to roll it into the next new gTLD round perhaps, as Jeff said, with something that's not the same process but is very close to whatever the future applicants will go through? Does anyone have views on that? Even a gut sense of what you think makes the most sense?

ANIL KUMAR JAIN:

Adding to what Jeff was saying is that, yes, I think we have to consider the technical evaluation and stability evaluation different for the registering TLD who are applying for the new gTLD. And also, I am adding one more thing, if an existing ccTLD applies for the new gTLD.

Again, because they are operating and they have the infrastructure already available with them. We may only in case it is required to understand whether they can handle the variant and the new gTLD or not commercial point of view. But from technical point of view I think we can have a separate system for this. Thank you.

DONNA AUSTIN: Thanks, Anil, and welcome. I'm sorry I didn't see you there earlier, so welcome. Okay, any...? Yep.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Hello, this is [inaudible]. Another question that I have in my mind regarding an existing gTLD applying for a new one, that is the brand protection and those kind of things. Because already the registry has some namespaces and has some names. So when you're enabling actually a new TLD for that registry there might be some sort of conflict in the brand protection and auctions and sunrise name because they are not [inaudible]. So I think that there should be some evaluation [in that terms] as well.

DONNA AUSTIN: Do you mean generally or do you mean specifically for IDN gTLDs?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I think it is specifically for the gTLDs that already have some name registered. Then you're enabling another TLD for that as a variant, then they're going to be, I mean that some process should be in place that

basically makes sure that it doesn't arise any kind of brand conflict because it's a new TLD and basically it's a new name actually that's going to have it. Although it's that there are variants, but maybe another company has that name and something like that. So I think that there should be some actual evaluation [in that term].

DONNA AUSTIN: Okay, thank you. Okay, Jennifer?

JENNIFER CHUNG: Thanks, Donna. Correct me if I'm wrong. I was wondering, I mean this seemed to be the question whether or not we're doing a separate round or rolling into the next round, but I believe we haven't really confirmed or really said no to having it on a rolling basis. So I'm looking at also Question 4 for existing IDN registry operators. So I wasn't quite sure if that was also an option that we hadn't quite discussed yet.

DONNA AUSTIN: So the question of a rolling round, that's a fundamental question from SubPro. And I don't know where that ended up. Yep, Jeff?

JEFF NEUMAN: Yeah, thanks. So for gTLDs SubPro came out and said that there should be application windows but that they should immediately follow each other. So in other words, you wouldn't have this indeterminate gap between rounds. So it's not a rolling basis, but it's supposed to be very predictable. You have a round, and you've already announced that the

next round after that will be a year and a half or two years, whatever it is, later and so on. But I think the question that Jennifer is raising is, should existing gTLDs be allowed to just apply for a variant on a rolling basis outside of the new gTLD process, right?

DONNA AUSTIN: Yeah, sorry, Jennifer, for my misunderstanding. So we're not there yet, but it's something we probably should think about when we consider this question. Right. Justine? Sorry.

JUSTINE CHEW: Thanks. I think what Jennifer, if I understand you correctly, your question is perhaps targeted to requests for activation between rounds. I think that's probably a better description of that. If I could just remind folks, I think one of the reasons why we spent time building this flowchart was to try and establish whether we could check and see whether any of the processes can be dispensed with in order to see whether it makes sense to allow a special route for the existing registries to get their variants if they want them.

I think the same situation would apply once the next round happens, and if we were going to let registry operators then. Because if an applicant succeeds, they become a registry operator. So once the next round happens, the registry operator, can they then apply or request for activation between rounds? So it's the same conceptual question that we're trying to answer.

So back to this flowchart thing. I think that, or at least from my perspective, I wanted input from folks here as to whether they think any of the processes can actually be dispensed with in order to allow an existing registry operator—so leave aside in the next round—an existing registry operator to be able to request for the variants if they wanted to. Because if we think that that a large number of processes can be dispensed with, then it is a viable option to think about the route. Then we have to look at the cost.

But if we think that it's only going to be a tiny handful of the processes that can be dispensed with, then it actually makes no sense to consider the separate route. And it's more sensible to just fold it into the next round. So that's something that I personally want to get input from folks here. Thank you.

DONNA AUSTIN: Thanks, Justine. Jeff and then Sarmad.

JEFF NEUMAN: Yeah, thanks. So again, I like the distinction Justine made between applying for a variant and activating it. I think we should separate those out. I think every variant, because each variant is its own TLD, needs to go through the application process. Once it's been approved, I think it's up to that registry as to when they want it activated. They still may need to do some testing, for example, or whatever else needs to be done. But I think as far as the application process, I think the majority of these boxes will have to apply. And especially out of fairness and other principle, I think it needs to be through this full process. And again

remember, it's not just the registry that gets evaluated and the string at the business and operational rules but it's also public comments, objections, early warnings from governments, GAC advice. All of that stuff still would apply to the application process for a variant whether it's an existing TLD or a new TLD. So in my mind at least, there are going to be a couple processes that may not be required, but I believe that the bigger ones and the major ones for the community will still apply.

DONNA AUSTIN:

Thanks, Jeff. I think something else to bear in mind too is that there is going to be a significant cost associated with bringing forward the next round because as we've seen with the [RDP] work that's going on, there are going to be significant startup costs I suppose in getting that process together. But perhaps on the occasion that an IDN gTLD wants to activate another allocatable variant maybe, once those startup costs have been covered, maybe that next step wouldn't be so costly or onerous. Sarmad?

SARMAD HUSSAIN:

Thank you, Donna. So this process which we just looked at, eventually I think they're going to be three views of the same process. Not three different processes but three different views. One would be obviously the regular process where somebody is applying for a TLD. The second view of the same process is when somebody is applying for a TLD along with some allocatable variants. And then eventually a third view would be maybe in subsequent rounds but that becomes compatible with the case where somebody is also applying for variants of an existing gTLD.

And that is if somebody is just applying for a variant without the primary or source string.

So I think it would be useful to look at all those eventually three views—we're not there yet—to eventually see what would be the scenario where an existing gTLD is actually applying for one of its allocatable variants. Thank you.

DONNA AUSTIN:

Thanks, Sarmad. So I think what we're recognizing here is that there are...variants introduce interesting process [paths] that we need to think through. And I guess some of the hurdle here is that there isn't currently an existing new gTLD process that we can readily go to. And so that needs to be established. So the best that we can do is make some assumptions and just see where we get to.

But I think it does make sense to have a look at that process flow and maybe consider it in three different lights or two different lights, whatever we come up with, just to see if we can answer the questions that are in front of us about existing gTLD registry operators. And then we'll have to pick up on what Jennifer's raising about what makes the most sense to activate an allocatable variant outside of a new gTLD round.

All right. So I think we're pretty close to time. So thanks, everybody. I think we got through some good stuff today. And, Ariel, thanks for the process flow. I think everybody's appreciated that. Just a reminder that we won't...oh, sorry, Hadia. Go ahead.

HADIA ELMINIAWI: Hi. I just had a question. Maybe what made me think of it, Sarmad's discussion now. Is it possible that you apply for a variant and you don't apply for the primary? And then what here defines the primary? Wouldn't the variant be the primary? I'm a little bit confused here. Thank you.

DONNA AUSTIN: So the primary's already been applied for and maybe delegated. So really—and, Sarmad, I don't want to speak for you—but I think what Sarmad is talking about is the current situation where an existing IDN gTLD registry operator already has the source label because that's the label they applied for but in 2012 they couldn't apply for the variant.

HADIA ELMINIAWI: But in case we are talking about a new applicant, could you actually test a primary and say this is my primary and then decide to apply for the variant? This is where I'm confused.

DONNA AUSTIN: Okay. Sarmad?

SARMAD HUSSAIN: Yeah. So I think what I was referring to was that in the next round you could actually apply for a primary and then in the subsequent you could actually apply for a variant. So that would be a similar scenario as what we're talking about with the current gTLDs right now. Thank you.

DONNA AUSTIN: Michael?

MICHAEL BAULAND: Thanks. I think what Hadia mentioned is also a possibility. So to say that you apply for a new TLD and one of its variants but you do not want to activate the main TLD which you applied for but just the variant the first time. Because that can make a difference between applying for one of the variants and later wanting to activate the main TLD and vice versa. Because not all variant relationships are in the same direction. Some are not allocatable but locked in one direction. Thanks.

DONNA AUSTIN: Thanks, Michael and Hadia. Jeff?

JEFF NEUMAN: Yeah, sorry. I signed on Zoom. Sorry, I would have raised my hand. So that's not actually possible because, first of all, there's no definition of what is a primary string. The primary string is whatever you want it to be. And according to, in SubPro, you have to apply for a string that you intend to use and delegate within a year after the application. So you cannot apply for something you're calling the primary string and say I don't want to activate it at all, I want to activate a variant. Because then the variant becomes your primary.

You see what I'm saying? There's no set definition as to what a primary is other than it is the string you intend to apply for and for which you

intend to serve as a registry operator. And you have to comply with all the other rules which includes signing a contract for it and delegating it within a year after you sign that contract. So I don't see how that scenario could occur.

DONNA AUSTIN:

Thanks, Jeff. So I'm really sorry, but we're getting booted out of the room so we have to leave this conversation. But just to say, Hadia, I think I understand what you're saying. And I think if we were to allow that, maybe that feels that's a conversation we need to have. I don't think it sounds like good policy to allow that. But if we want to take it up, we'd have to.... Well, so I think—and I understand that we need to leave—what Hadia is suggesting is that if you, what I think Hadia is suggest, if you have a source label, it has allocatable variants underneath it. It has block variants underneath it. But you may not want to use the source label as the primary, but you see more value in using the variants.

JEFF NEUMAN:

But then your variant becomes your source label.

DONNA AUSTIN:

Well...okay.

JEFF NEUMAN:

Sorry. There is no definition of an official source label like you're saying.

DONNA AUSTIN:

Well, maybe my head works the same as Hadia, but I think I understand what Hadia is saying. Okay, so we need to draw a line under this and we can maybe have a conversation about it later. All right, thanks, everybody.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]