
ICANN85 Mumbai | CF – GAC Capacity Development Session (2 of 2)
Saturday, March 7, 2026 – 16:30 to 17:30 IST

GULTEN TEPE Recording in progress.

GULTEN TEPE Welcome to the second session of GAC Capacity Development on new gTLD next round, on Saturday, March 8, at 04:30 PM local time. Please note that this session is being recorded and is governed by the ICANN Expected Standards of Behavior, ICANN Community Participant Code of Conduct, and the ICANN Community Anti-Harassment Policy.

During this session, questions or comments will only be read aloud if submitted in the proper form in the Zoom chat pod. Interpretation for this session will include all six UN languages and Portuguese. If you would like to speak during this session, please raise your hand in the Zoom room. Please remember to state your name for the record and the language you will be speaking in case it is other than English. Please speak at a reasonable pace to allow for accurate interpretation. With that, I will hand the floor over to Kang Ying-Seng. Thank you.

KANG YING-SENG Thank you, Gulten. Thank you for coming back for the second CDS meeting. In this session, we are going to discuss two unique

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acronyms: one is RSP and the other is ASP. It is very difficult for me to pronounce. Anyway, we have Lars and Kristy to help us understand the relationship between these two names, which are actually two different programs.

Same as the previous section, if you have any questions, we encourage you to raise your hand. We want the session to be interactive. Now I will give the floor to Lars. Thank you.

LARS HOFFMANN

Thank you so much. Kristy, are you going to do the intro slides? I believe there are a few, actually. So, Kristy.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Thanks, everyone. Kristy Buckley here for the record, serving as the lead of ASP. You might have noticed in the title slide that Gustavo is the lead for the RSP, Registry Service Provider Program, and this is actually being presented concurrently in a separate, dedicated RSP evaluation program session.

The reason why we are presenting it here to the GAC is because we thought it might be a useful topic and a good primer in preparation for the planned facilitated dialogue at ICANN86 on previous GAC advice regarding support for the RSPs, such as providing some sort of discount for registry service providers that want to be pre-evaluated.

There were also some questions from the GAC previously with regard to providing capacity development and training for

supported gTLD applicants to become their own RSPs. While all of that is planned to be discussed at ICANN86 and not here, we thought that providing a presentation about RSPs, a bit of a 101 so to speak, might be helpful in preparation for the GAC to participate in that dialogue at ICANN86.

While neither Lars nor I are Gustavo or necessarily subject matter experts in the RSP program, we do have some introductory slides that we can cover here today by way of priming the GAC for that facilitated dialogue. Lars, feel free to introduce the slides and I am happy to jump in later.

LARS HOFFMANN

Thank you, Kristy. Gulten, are you running the slides? I think two more. Quick disclaimer here: the RSP program is currently not open for applications, but it actually was open last year. The program is in the process of evaluating those applicants.

You will see in a moment that those applicants for the new gTLD program who plan to apply for a new top-level domain in April will have to select an RSP from those that have been evaluated. The window for evaluation of new RSPs will also open concurrently with the new gTLD window, and we will get into more details. Having said all that, the RSP handbook, which is the applicant guidebook for RSPs or potential RSPs, is published.

Anything related to the program can authoritatively be found in that handbook. We do not expect that to change or be amended

prior to the opening of the next RSP window in April this year. This is very quickly some information on the round and the journey. These are some pre-recorded presentations and recordings that the team has done in the past. For those interested, you will find more information there.

Those recordings are available on the gTLD website as well. The next slide gives an overview of some upcoming sessions. We see here the session that Kristy just referred to. Our colleague Francisco is running that session at the moment. That also will be recorded, so in the unlikely event that the information we are sharing here on the RSPs is not sufficient, you can get more detailed information there from the recording.

We are covering a wide breadth of the program. One really interesting session will be happening on Tuesday, where there will be an introduction and demonstration of the TAMS system, the system that applicants are going to be using when applying for a top-level domain.

The purpose of a registry service provider, an RSP, is that they perform critical registry services on behalf of the registry operator, the RO. A registry service provider might be the same entity as the registry operator. There are companies out there at the moment who perform both those tasks or play both those roles.

Alternatively, the RSP and the RO could also be different companies, whereby the operator outsources these technical aspects of operating a registry to a registry service provider. The

functions that an RSP usually provides are fourfold: domain name system services, essentially connecting the IP address to the domain name to allow users to navigate the internet; DNSSEC, which allows the authentication of responses to domain name lookups; RDAP, which is the WHOIS replacement enabling public access to domain name registration data; and finally the EPP, the Extensible Provisioning Protocol, which allows for electronic communication between registries and registrars for the provisioning of domain name registrations.

When the round opens on the 30th of April, legal entities, businesses, and communities can apply for TLDs. When they are doing so, they will have to identify during the application process an evaluated registry service provider that has been successfully evaluated by ICANN's RSP evaluation program. While an applicant can pick an RSP they would like to work with, they can also choose to apply themselves in the upcoming window to become an RSP.

If they are successful in being evaluated as an RSP, they can become their own registry service provider. They can also indicate that they will select the RSP at a later point, meaning they do not necessarily have to commit at the outset of the registration to a specific RSP. However, it has to be done before the application evaluation takes place. We estimate that to start at the earliest about 12 months into the program.

Potential applicants for the next round are strongly encouraged to review the list of evaluated RSPs. The last submission period closed

in May last year, and there will be a new window opening in parallel with the next round. An RSP provides different technical services required to operate a registry. The applicant can choose whether they want to work with an RSP or be one themselves. Approved RSPs may offer all services or only some.

I suspect it is a market issue of who you would like to work with based on financial and other aspects. That is really a matter between the applicants and the potential service providers; ICANN does not get involved. All of them that have been approved by ICANN will not be evaluated again. This is a big difference from the 2012 round, whereby every applicant had to undergo a technical evaluation. In this round, the RSPs are already evaluated.

It does not matter to us who the applicant is working with as long as they have been pre-evaluated and are on the list. ICANN is also not involved in any pricing or other negotiations. The idea of the RSP evaluation program came from the community, who saw in the 2012 round that these technical evaluations were done over and over again on the same entities. This time, there is a pre-evaluation program recommended by the community and implemented by ICANN with the help of the implementation review team.

Every organization that has successfully cleared the evaluation through the RSP program is eligible to support an applicant or be an applicant in the 2026 rounds going forward. The window will reopen, and those RSPs, if successfully evaluated, can then also work with applicants in the next round. Regarding the timeline, the

gTLD submission period is from the 30th of April until the 12th of August.

The RSP evaluation application submission period runs concurrently. The payment deadline is the same for both, which is upon submission and the receipt of the invoice or seven days after the closure of the window. The evaluation period for the RSPs that are submitted this year is expected to be completed by October 2026, which is more or less at the time when we have the reveal day.

At that point, the applicants will be able to pick an RSP from that list. We will regularly update the list of evaluated RSPs throughout the program and continuously. The community recommended that this upcoming round is not the last round of new gTLD, but that there will be future rounds at regular cadences. The RSP list will be maintained for those future rounds if and when they happen.

We have come to the end of this section. If that all made sense, my name is Lars Hoffmann. If it did not make sense, my name is Gustavo. You can email me at my ICANN email address. Christine?

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Sure, thanks, Lars. Thanks for stepping in for Gustavo and playing the subject matter expert on that without being one. I posted a few links in the chat, for example, the website for the Registry Service Provider Program, the handbook for the program, and the list of pre-evaluated RSPs that is already published.

Relating this back to the Applicant Support Program, we do have a number of pro bono or volunteer professional service providers offering technical services or RSP services. I included the link to that list in the chat. Those are posted on the ASP website and are available to any ASP applicants or supported gTLD applicants as they are preparing their gTLD applications.

Are there any questions about what an RSP does? Is there anything else that would be helpful to the extent that Lars and I can answer it in advance of the facilitated dialogue?

LARS HOFFMANN

Tracy, just very quickly. By that, Kristy means any or all aspects of the new gTLD program, not just RSPs. We cannot guarantee that we know the answer, but we will try our best.

TRACY HACKSHAW

Hello. Thanks. Tracy Hackshaw, UPU. I was just wondering in that discussion if there would have been or is there any open source registry software that could be utilized by prospective applicants as opposed to utilizing an RSP? Is that something that has ever been looked at or does it exist?

Obviously, you need some sort of software to run a registry. Has there ever been the case where open source software has been made available? Is ICANN aware of that, and therefore, can prospective applicants also look at that as an option as opposed to outsourcing it to an RSP? Thank you.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Thanks for that, Tracy. Since that is a more technical question, I am actually going to ask Gustavo, who is online. He is not here, but I will see if I can get an answer for that. Thank you. Any other questions or questions in the chat? I see a hand from the GAC representative from India. Please go ahead.

SANTOSH

Thank you for the presentation. Santosh for the record. Coming back to the earlier capacity building session, my question to the gTLD team is: do we have a centralized portal coming up shortly? In the centralized portal, will we be having an XML format of all the strings after the reveal time? Thank you.

LARS HOFFMANN

Thank you for the question. Yes, we have the TAMS, the TLD Application Management system, that is being used by applicants to submit the application. It is also the platform for the interested public stakeholders and applicants themselves to review applications at their leisure. You will be able, on reveal day, to see in that system the applied-for strings, who is behind them, and what the purpose is. The answer is yes.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Any additional questions? I haven't heard back yet from Gustavo on that, but when I do, I can let you know. Further questions or comments?

LARS HOFFMANN

Nobody is raising an arm, so I am going to raise an arm, and you can refuse to answer. As somebody working on the program, I am curious if any of you are willing to share how you plan to review the strings that come in, and whether you have any criteria already that you thought about that you may take into consideration when reviewing applications.

Is this something you expect to just happen during ICANN meetings, or is that something that you think will happen in the national capitals? I am just curious whether you have thought of the process compared to 2012. I am sure some of you have spoken to those colleagues who were around at ICANN at that time to see how that worked for your organizations or your countries in the last round.

Maybe there is some capacity building among yourselves as well. From our end, we would also be very interested because that may help us get the information that you need in the time that is helpful to you. It is a question back to the audience. Tracy, as one of the topic leads, I do not want to cold call on you, but I am going to do it anyway.

TRACY HACKSHAW

Sure. I am happy to respond briefly. We have had feedback from GAC members, especially those who are new and weren't around in 2012, as to exactly what happened then. How do the discussions go? The recordings are a bit iffy and the archives are not that helpful because, for obvious reasons, some of the discussions were not documented explicitly.

This is why we have been trying to do this scenario-type work. From my perspective, I was around and sat as a Vice Chair for some of the period seeing what was happening. This is why I have been very keen on trying to get this done, because I know what is going to happen.

The challenge is that it is only when you see the string that you understand what needs to happen. If the string is sensitive, offensive, or problematic, you only realize it when you see it because you might not think about it now. The unknowns are creating problems for many members who have come to us, and that is why they want help to understand what happened before and how that worked.

That is the gap we are trying to plug, which is why we are trying to focus on the case studies. Before we get to how we do it, many members who are not as well-resourced want to understand what happens if a geographic name turns up. What do we do? How do we deal with that? Until you actually do it in a practical way, you won't know. We are trying to focus on the case studies. Thanks.

LARS HOFFMANN

Thank you, Tracy. I think Marco also had his hand up in the chat. Marco, please.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Thank you. Good day, colleagues from remote. Lars, I think it is a good question. Tracy already mentioned some points, and my takeaway is that it is really hard to predict. I can explain what we have done in the Netherlands. There has been some preparation not only among government people but also among other stakeholders.

What do you do if you indeed spot a string and you think there is something wrong with it? As Tracy said, it depends on resources, but I highly recommend to my colleagues to start that conversation early. With regard to the GAC process, there is another session tomorrow in which we will explore the early warning system.

We need to find some working methods within the GAC to streamline this. What some people think might be offensive, other people might see as a great opportunity, and we have to come to grips with that. I hope I am speaking on behalf of all the Vice Chairs: participate in tomorrow's session and help us further refine this process.

We need to know where to find each other in the process steps, like early warnings and objections, to make sure things are done as efficiently and smoothly as possible. No doubt there will be a lot of

strings and opinions. We are waiting for reveal day and then plowing through. I hope for your sake it is 2,500 domains; for myself, I hope it is slightly less.

LARS HOFFMANN

Thank you, Marco. No comments on the numbers.

KANG YING-SENG

The next will be Bob from ICANN Org.

ROBERT HOGGARTH

Thank you, Renate. Bob for the record. I also work with the program team, especially on the outreach side of things. I work with Lars and Kristy. An element I wanted to point out here so that we don't lose it is the fact that part of the reasons or objectives of trying to keep the GAC in the discussion is to ensure they understand it as much as possible.

This is also for them to be able to support applications in cases where they can, because governments can also support applications. Beyond early warnings and objections, governments can actually legitimately support applications which they agree with. Part of this will come from different entrepreneurs who would approach their respective governments for such applications.

If they are well-informed, they are in a better position to make an informed decision on whether to support or not. For geographic names especially, there is a requirement for supporting

documentation in the form of letters of no objection, and that is only possible if that particular government body understands what this is.

In addition to being aware of how and when to make objections or warnings, governments can accurately support applicants which they agree with. This is why we are sending separate letters to governments to formally highlight the opportunities to interface with the program. It is the same objective to ensure that you are aware of this process. Thank you.

KANG YING-SENG

Thank you, Bob, for your input. The next one is Ian.

IAN SHELDON

Thank you. Ian Sheldon, GAC Australia, for the record. A couple of points I would like to make, picking up on Bob's point. We found that letter process to be incredibly useful, whereby ICANN sends a letter to our senior executives to flag that this is a process that's coming. We can use that internally to flag that this will be an involved process.

Depending on how many strings there are, our governments may need to mobilize to evaluate all of them in a consistent manner. If you haven't explored that option, I suggest reaching out to your regional VP and seeing if you can get one of those letters sent. ICANN won't send it unless they have been given the all-clear from your government.

As far as Australia's preparations go, we will be looking to develop a set of criteria. It is important for us to be even-handed and consistent in the evaluation of strings. We will also be looking to rely on our local community as much as possible for what is important to them, what our business needs look like, and what our cultural needs look like. It is vital to have that discussion early.

I take Tracy's point that we won't know until we know, but it is important to be aware of what your country thinks before that string reveal happens so you are not spinning your wheels or trying to assess these things on the fly. It could be a large number of strings. Looking back in Australia's history, we coordinated a huge effort to review these strings very quickly, and it placed a huge amount of pressure on the team.

If this is important, make sure you start the process now and figure out how to tackle these things. Ensure you have processes and systems in place and you aren't being surprised on string reveal day. Thanks, that is all I wanted to share at this stage.

KANG YING-SENG

Thank you, Ian, for sharing your experience and insight. That is very helpful for all of us. The next one online is Giacomo. Yes, please.

GIACOMO MAZZONE

Thank you. Giacomo Mazzone for the record, WBU representative observer to the GAC. What we are doing within our community is spreading the news and trying to make people aware of the

opportunities and the risks. We have tried to discuss this issue with many of the members and others.

There is also an initiative made in Italy by the Italian coordination of the IGF trying to create awareness. There will be contact made by the government to the organizations that are potentially interested in submitting applications for a top-level domain. There are a lot of questions about technicalities and it is complex to explain all the issues.

At least there is a certain interest in the geographic names communities, and we hope that this will bring some fruit. One of the weakest points of the previous round was the community priority evaluation. I want to stress the importance of selecting who will be the advisor for ICANN in dealing with this application. Last time, the selection was inappropriate.

The GAC needs to be involved in the selection and scrutinize carefully. If we make a mistake again, the consequence will last forever. Remember that some of the issues of the CPE remain for five years after the launch of the call. Let's try to avoid this this time.

KANG YING-SENG

Your comments are well noted. We will take note of that. There is no one else raising a hand. Please continue.

LARS HOFFMANN

I think then Nigel.

KANG YING-SENG

Nigel, please.

NIGEL CASIMIRE

Thank you very much. Nigel Casimire from the CTU. I have a simple question. There was mention before of a proxy RSP, and I realize I do not understand what that means. Is it something analogous to a registrar for the DNS? What is a proxy RSP?

LARS HOFFMANN

I will try my best. A proxy RSP is essentially a middleman. They provide some front-end services, for example, the access to the database, but the actual technical aspects are being done by the back-end registry. It is a middle person in between that is working with the registrar on one hand and with the registry on the other.

It makes it easier to communicate between what is essentially a business and essentially a technical operation.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

My understanding is also that a proxy RSP is often used in jurisdictions which have specific licensing or jurisdictional requirements, so they are more closely attuned to the local requirements. They work locally and then build that relationship with the domain name registries outside of that.

JULIA CHARVOLEN

I do not see any other hands or questions. I see a question in the chat from Marco: "Is that truly FOSS or does it require me to contract Google Cloud in order to run it?" I think it's in relation to the answer Kristy gave in the chat.

LARS HOFFMANN

I can ask Gustavo, Marco. It is a good question. I do not know that. He said yes to the question that there are open source services and he gave that one example. I do not know if that is the only example, but let me ask him and I will see if I can follow up. Thank you.

JULIA CHARVOLEN

Now we can open the floor for all questions. Please raise your hand if you have any questions on RSP and the ASP. If you want to know the relationship between the two to understand more, it is a good opportunity.

NIGEL CASIMIRE

Thank you. Nigel Casimire again. I am a nonprofit organization that wants to apply for a string when the round opens. I have missed the Applicant Support Program window, but I am clearly a qualified applicant in that respect. Have I lost my opportunity? Do I now have to pay \$227,000 or do I still have any access to a reduced application fee?

LARS HOFFMANN

Who wants to deliver the bad news? You have lost the opportunity, I am afraid. The ASP window closed at the end of last year, and so for this round, there is no more opportunity to apply for the discount via the ASP program.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

The hope and the plan is that there are future rounds. One of the things that we are appreciative of is how much interest and awareness about the Applicant Support Program was gained in the lead-up to the 2026 round. This is not the only opportunity. The idea is that there are successive rounds in the future and there will be future opportunities to apply for Applicant Support.

LARS HOFFMANN

One other aspect which may not really apply to your example, but the ICANN Board resolved a couple of years ago that joint ventures post-application are not possible because it is considered a private resolution of contention sets. However, you can get together with others before you apply.

If you are someone who would like to apply for a string and you may not have the funds, you are free to form a joint venture with one or more entities to pool your resources to apply for a TLD. That is perfectly legitimate to do. That may be one way to raise additional funds to be able to do this this time around. Thanks.

TRACY HACKSHAW

Tracy. On that matter of the ICANN Board and their decisions, we saw the note that came out recently reinforcing the news about using auction proceeds to potentially help supplement the budget now that we look like we are going over forty-five. Good news. I guess you see what's coming here.

Has the discount of the 75% to 85% range been looked at as well? If we are finding funds to support 75 applications, is it possible that funds can be found to support 85% of the fee for 75 applications, or some variant in between? I think there was advice that if it is more than X, it is only 75%. You know the GAC's position will be as much as possible. Thanks.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Excellent question, Tracy, and thank you for raising that. For those that didn't see Tripti's blog in the lead-up to ICANN85, it does mention this. In light of the 75 applications received for the ASP, which we will provide a status update on to the GAC tomorrow, the Board is trying to anticipate a scenario in which more than 45 that were budgeted for may qualify.

They would like some input from the community on whether and from what form the additional funding might come, given that at this stage, it is pretty late to increase the gTLD evaluation fee in order to get cost recovery to cover that additional money. In terms of the percentage of support discount, this was decided through guidance from the GNSO guidance process.

There should be a floor of a minimum level of support that is meaningful and significant to supported applicants but also provides as much support as you can. We landed on a range of 75% to 85% with the IRT. According to the handbook, if more than 40 applicants qualify for support, then the discount should be 75%.

There is maybe an opportunity to raise that question to the Board now that they are looking for community input. We do still have some degree of flexibility. I know that applicants in the pipeline right now would like certainty sooner rather than later about what the discount is. They will definitely get 75% if they qualify; it is just a question of whether we can go a little bit higher. Thanks.

KANG YING-SENG

The Q&A has been going for a while. Any last questions? If not, I am going to close this section. Thank you to the ICANN Next Round team for your collaboration and engagement, and thank you to all the GAC members for listening to this capacity building session. Thank you.

IAN SHELDON

Thank you very much to the Next Round team for jumping in at short notice to cover this. We had some challenges in travel from the leadership, so we very much appreciate you stepping in and helping to cover this session for us. That's the end of day one. Thank you very much. Please join us back here tomorrow at 09:00 AM for our session with the RSAC. That's all. Thanks, guys.

GULTEN TEPE

Recording stopped.

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