



85 | COMMUNITY
FORUM



2026 Round IDN and Variant Applicant Journeys and Q&A

8 March 2026

Welcome Message

Sarmad Hussain

Senior Director, IDN and Universal Acceptance Programs

Readiness Content Disclaimer

The authoritative source for all information about New gTLD Program: 2026 Round rules, evaluations, restrictions, processes, and systems is the English version of the [New gTLD Program: 2026 Round Applicant Guidebook](#). All New gTLD Program: 2026 Round readiness and training content is supplementary to the Applicant Guidebook, and has been developed to provide a high-level summary of key topic areas of interest to prospective applicants and the broader ICANN community. In case of discrepancy, the Applicant Guidebook prevails.



New to the gTLD Program?

ICANN85 attendees **who are new to the New gTLD Program** are encouraged to review the foundation webinars below to build knowledge of the program. The webinars provide context for ICANN85 sessions.

	Introduction the 2026 Round	2026 Round applicant Journey Overview
LINKS	Recording and Presentation	Recording and Presentation
AUDIENCE	All prospective gTLD applicants.	All prospective gTLD applicants.
DESCRIPTION	Foundational information for anyone interested in learning about the New gTLD Program: 2026 Round. The course is designed to equip those who are brand new to the New gTLD Program: 2026 Round to understand everything from generic top-level domains and strings, to the purpose of each stage of the applicant journey.	End-to-end view of 2026 Round application processing stages and milestones. The course creates context for ICANN Community stakeholders and applicants to understand the requirements of the application process, and the role(s) different groups play throughout.

New gTLD Program Sessions at [ICANN85](#)

New gTLD Program sessions at ICANN85 provide a **detailed view of the Application Submission process** and the **TLD Application Management System**, as well as sessions for **specific audiences and applicant types**. All times are in local time (IST).

ICANN85 SESSIONS

TOPICS:

AUDIENCE:

SAT 7 March
16:30-17:30

Registry Service Provider (RSP) Evaluation Program

Prospective applicants to the RSP Program

SUN 8 March
16:30-17:30

IDN and Variant Applicant Journeys with Q&A

Prospective IDN and Variant gTLD applicants

MON 9 March
13:15-14:30

Application Submission Overview (PLENARY)

Prospective applicants to the New gTLD Program

MON 9-March
16:30-17:30

.Brand Applicant Journey with Q&A

Prospective .brand gTLD applicants

ICANN85 SESSIONS

TOPICS:

AUDIENCE:

TUES 10 March
13:15-14:30

TAMS Introduction & Demo (PLENARY)

Prospective applicants to the RSP Program

TUE 10-March
16:30-17:30

Geographic Names and Reserve Name Applicant Journeys

Prospective geographic names and reserved names gTLD applicants

WED 11-March
16:30-17:30

Community Applicant Journey with Q&A

Prospective community gTLD applicants

THU 12-March
09:00-10:00

Wrap up and Open Q&A

All prospective gTLD applicants

NEW gTLD PROGRAM: 2026 ROUND

01

Introduction

Agenda

01 Application and String Types

02 IDN Applicant Journey

03 Variant Applicant Journey

04 Resources and Support

Session Objectives:

By the end of the session, participants should be able to:

- Understand the unique requirements of applying for an IDN and/or Variant TLD.
- Identify and prepare application question responses specific to IDN and Variant TLDs.
- Know which 2026 Round Applicant Guidebook content to refer to for detailed information.



01

Application and String Types

2026 Round Application Types

Application Type determines relevant preparation, application questions, conditional applications and fees, prioritization order, contention resolution options, and contract requirements.

General Applications

.link

A general gTLD application does not fall into one of the specialized categories and is subject to a standard set of defined requirements

Specialized Application Types

.Brand

.nike

Community

.eco

Geographic Name

.paris

Reserved Name

.redcross

Variant

شبكة (gTLD)
شبكة (variant)

**Internationalized
Domain Name (IDN)**

.例子 (.example)

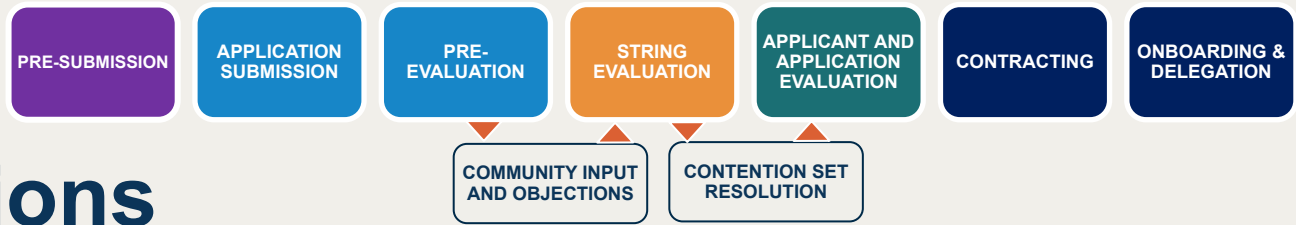
What Are IDNs and Variants?

Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs)

- Domain names represented by Unicode characters with at least one character in addition to the ASCII characters (letters a-z, for top-level domains).
- Domain names in different languages and scripts (e.g., Arabic, Chinese, Devanagari).

Variants

- Strings considered the “same” as another string by the relevant script community, and therefore, generated as a variant of a primary string according to a particular set of Label Generation Rules.
- For the top-level, the variant string of a primary string is defined by the Root Zone Label Generation Rules.



IDN & Variant Applications

Three application options are available:

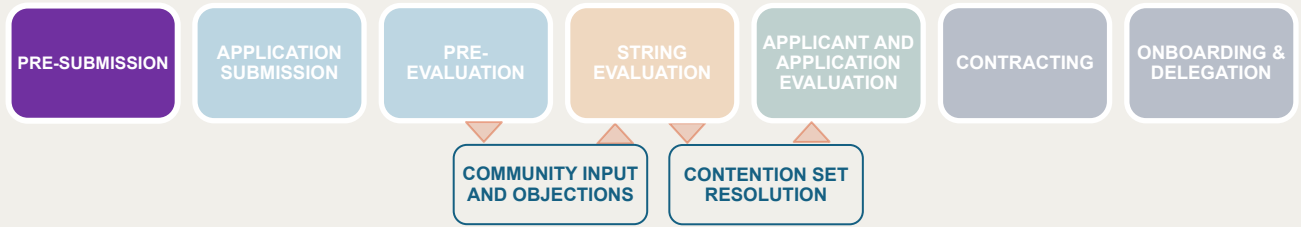
- 1) gTLD with no variants
- 2) gTLD and one or more variants
- 3) Allocatable variant strings of an existing gTLD

****Application questions, prioritization, evaluations and fees, and contract requirements are determined by the type of string applied for.***

NEW gTLD PROGRAM: 2026 ROUND

02

IDN Applicant Journey



Pre-Submission

String Requirements

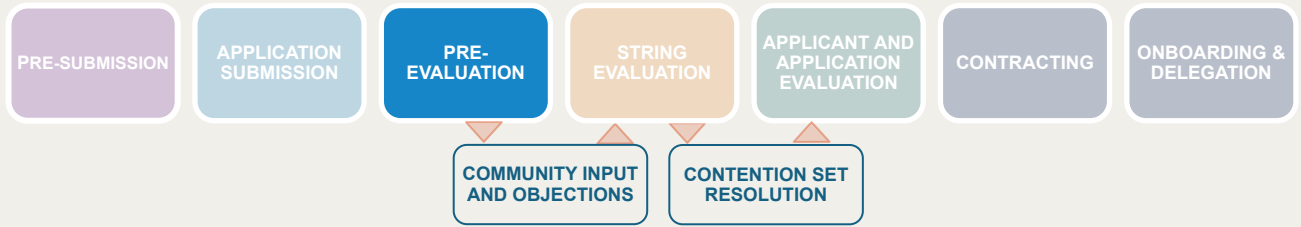
- IDN gTLD strings must comply with IDNA2008 (RFCs 5890-5893) and all standards-track RFCs that update IDNA2008.
- IDN gTLD strings must comply with the applicable Root Zone Label Generation Rules. See Section 3.1.8.3.1 Root Zone Label Generation Rules for additional information on RZ-LGRs and processing of applications.

Application Submission



Application Questions

- IDN applicants must complete AGB Question Set 5, Questions 116-121
 - If the application includes variants, applicants must complete AGB Question Set 6, Questions 122-130. See additional details in the next section on variant applications.
- In Questions 116 and 117, IDN applicants must provide an IDN string in its three forms:
 - A-label beginning with “xn--”.
 - U-label in UTF8 format
 - Unicode code points, the form of "U+0000" separated by space



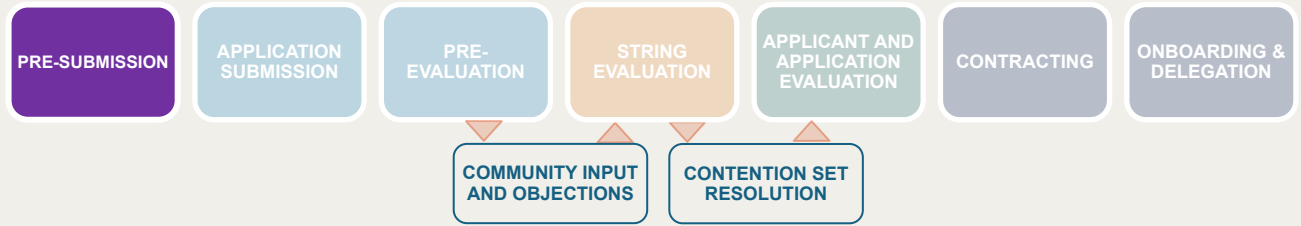
Pre-Evaluation

Prioritization Draw

- See details in the Variant section slide titled, “Pre-Evaluation - Prioritization”

03

Variant Applicant Journey



Pre-Submission

Requirements for Variant strings of existing gTLDs

- Can apply only if it is the same legal entity as the registry operator for the existing gTLD.
- Must share same back end Registry Service Provider (approved through the RSP Evaluation Program) as the existing gTLD.

Application Submission

Application Questions

- Variant applicants must complete AGB Question Set 6, Questions 122-130
- Applicants will be asked to provide answers for **each** applied-for variant string:
 - Justification for the string
 - A-Label, U-label and code points (if an IDN)
 - Script
 - Meaning or definition
 - Explanation (with examples) of how the primary applied-for and variant strings are considered the same by the relevant user communities.
 - Benefits for the community from the variant string.
 - Steps that the applying entity will take to minimize the operational and management complexities of variant gTLDs and variant domain names that impact registrars, resellers and/or registrants.

Application Submission

Fees

- **Existing registry operators** applying for allocatable variant strings of existing gTLDs will have the gTLD evaluation fee waived for up to four variant strings; applications for more than four variant strings will incur additional fees.
- **For new applicants:** the gTLD evaluation fee covers one application for a primary gTLD and up to four variant strings.
- If an applicant wants to apply for **more than four variant strings** of a primary string, the applicant must pay the USD 227,000 gTLD evaluation fee for each additional allocatable variant beyond the fourth variant string.
- For details, see [gTLD Evaluation Fee for Applications with Variant Strings](#)

Pre-Evaluation - Prioritization

COMMUNITY INPUT
AND OBJECTIONSCONTENTION SET
RESOLUTION

IDNs and Variants

1. **IDN Applications for allocatable variant strings of 2012 IDN gTLDs** will be processed ahead of other new gTLD applications, including all other applications for IDN primary strings. These applications will be automatically included in the draw without the need for tickets.
2. **Remaining IDN applications (and variants)** will be drawn first if there are fewer than 125 remaining IDN applications electing to participate in the draw.
3. **However, if more than 125 IDN applications remain**, 25% (125) of the first group of 500 applications will be IDN applications selected at random as part of the draw.
4. **For each subsequent group of 500 applications**, the first 10% of each group will be IDN applications selected at random. Remaining applications in each group will be randomly selected from the pool of all applications.

Note: Participation in the Prioritization Draw is Optional

See [AGB Section 3.7.1 Prioritization Draw](#) for more details

Variant String Evaluation

COMMUNITY INPUT
AND OBJECTIONSCONTENTION SET
RESOLUTION**What is it?**

An applicant seeking one or more allocatable variant strings of an applied-for primary IDN or existing gTLD must provide justification for the necessity of each variant string. This justification will be evaluated by a panel using a general standard of reasonableness.

Fee:

N/A

Application and String Type:☐ Standard☐ .Brand☐ Geographic☐ Community☐ Reserved☐ IDN☒ Variant**Eligible for Extended Evaluation?**☒ Yes☐ No or N/A**Eligible for Challenge?**☐ Yes☒ No or N/A

🎯 Scope of Evaluation (Criteria)

A. The meaning of the applied-for variant strings is consistent. B. The variant string is recognized as equivalent by the intended user community. C. The benefits and the user communities who will gain from the introduction of the applied-for variant string D. Steps the applicant will take to minimize the operational and management complexities of the variant gTLDs and resulting variant domain names that impact registrars, resellers, or registrants.



What triggers it?

The applicant designates an application for a variant string of a new or existing gTLD



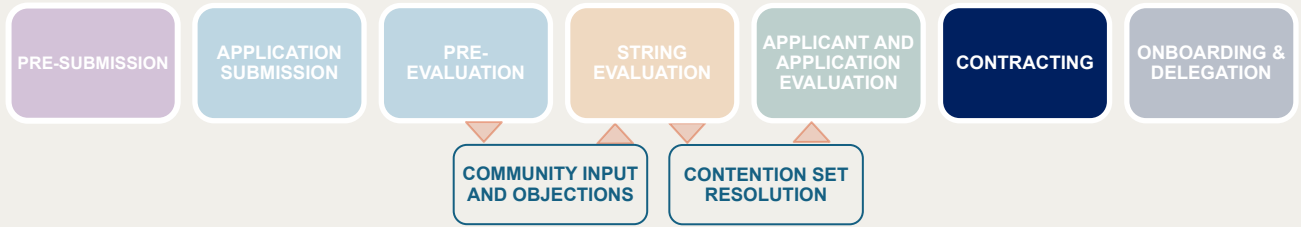
What are the potential outcomes?

The applicant must meet each criterion for each applied-for variant string to proceed. The evaluation outcome of any one variant string will not impact the outcome of a primary applied-for IDN or any other applied-for variant string.



What else do you need to know?

If a variant string does not pass, applicant submits a change request to remove the variant from the application. Remaining application can continue.



Contracting

Specification 14

- If eligible, Specification 14, which outlines contractual obligations for management of variant TLDs, would be included in its Base Registry Agreement for execution.
- See details in Applicant Guidebook Section [1.2.15 Contracting](#).

04

Resources and Next Steps

IDN and Variant TLD Resource Links

AGB Links (IDNs and Variants)

- [3.3.1.1 gTLD Evaluation Fee for Applications with Variant Strings](#)
- [3.1.9 Internationalized Domain Names](#)
- [3.7.3 Prioritization of IDN Applications](#)
- [Appendix I, Question Set 5](#)
- [Appendix I, Question Set 6](#)
- [7.6 Variant String Evaluation](#)

Other resources:

- [Application Types: Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Topic Overview gTLD Application Types](#)

Where to Direct Questions

General Program Questions

- Open public forums (ICANN meetings, webinars)
- Refer to New gTLD Program resources, including the AGB
- Email: globalsupport@icann.org

Application-Specific Questions

- After a gTLD application has been submitted, applicants may use the **Create Inquiry** button in the TLD Application Management System (TAMS)



Important: ICANN staff members have been directed not to field questions from individual applicants – whether by email, social media messaging, or in-person – in the interest of fairness, transparency, and equal access for all program participants.

NEW gTLD PROGRAM: 2026 ROUND

Question and Answer



Q&A

Submit further questions to: globalsupport@icann.org

Key Applicant Resources

New gTLD Program: 2026 Round Applicant Guidebook

- The authoritative document outlining the rules and procedures of the 2026 Round.

New gTLD Program: 2026 Round Website

- Source of 2026 Round news, announcements, information, and resources.

ICANN Learn

- eLearning courses to build knowledge of ICANN and the DNS Industry.

Applicant Readiness Pathway

- Curated learning resources organized by phases and learning outcomes (coming soon)

2026 Round FAQs

- Frequently asked questions, organized by category.

ICANN Global Support

- Dedicated ICANN team available to answer inquiries and provide support throughout the application process. globalsupport@icann.org

New gTLD Program Webinars

- Register for future webinars, or access recordings of past events.

Evaluation Survey

We kindly request you to take a few minutes to complete this brief feedback form.

A large, dark blue speech bubble with a white outline, pointing downwards and to the right. It is positioned on the right side of the slide. Inside the bubble, the word "Survey" is written in a large, white, sans-serif font. A smaller, lighter blue speech bubble is partially visible behind it.

Survey

gTLD

Thank you for your participation.

Visit us at <https://newgtldprogram.icann.org>



@icann



flickr.com/icann



facebook.com/icannorg



linkedin.com/company/icann



youtube.com/icannnews



instagram.com/icannorg

