
ICANN85 Mumbai | CF – 2026 Round: 2026 Round Comm Applicant Journey & Registry Voluntary
Commitments/Public Interest Commitments with Q & A
Wednesday, March 11, 2026 – 16:30 to 17:30 IST

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Hello, and welcome to the 2026 round community applicant journey. My name is Kristy Buckley, and I'm a participation manager for this session. Please note that the session is being recorded and is governed by the ICANN Community Participant Code of Conduct, the ICANN Expected Standards of Behavior, and the ICANN Community Anti-Harassment Policy. Please observe the following guidelines to participate in this session. I will also post them in the chat for your reference. Only questions posted in the Q&A pod will be read aloud during the session as time permits and when directed by the chair of the session. If you wish to speak, please raise your hand in Zoom or otherwise as directed. When speaking, please state your name for the record and speak clearly at a moderate pace. And with that, I will turn it over to Jared Erwin. Thank you.

JARED ERWIN

Thanks, Kristy. Hi everyone, this is Jared Erwin again. Thanks for joining us today. I know we're all getting tired at the end of the day and also the end of the week, but I appreciate you joining. If we can go to the next slide, please.

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Just as a reminder for all of our sessions here this week, the same thing applies here, that whatever you see on the screen is intended to be taken from the Applicant Guidebook, but in the case of any discrepancies, the Applicant Guidebook prevails. So just a quick reminder on that. Again, the other presentations we've given, which are more intro to the next round and all things applicants, are available on the New gTLD website. Just a reminder about those. And then where we are in the week, almost done. This is our last applicant journey session, but we have one more session tomorrow for wrap-up and open Q&A. Anything that we weren't able to address in the other sessions and today, we can discuss tomorrow as well, and anything else that comes up.

Today, we are talking about the community applicant journey and any special requirements for those applicants, including a core part of the applicant journey, which is related to the PICs and RVCs and community registration policies. So those are our two big topics for today. By the end of the session, we hope that you have a better understanding of the unique requirements for applying for a community gTLD. Again, that you're able to find the application questions, of which there are several related to community gTLDs, and hopefully have a good understanding of where to go and how to answer those. Maybe not how to answer them necessarily for your community, but understand registry agreement commitment types and all the other relevant Applicant Guidebook content.

So here again, the context. We've gone through several different types this week: brands, geo names, reserved names, variants, and

IDNs, and now we're at the last one, community. Just to set the scene. All right. So now getting into more of the details of community gTLDs. A little bit of background here, which I think is important in setting this up and why we have them and what it means, which is of course the big question there. But the concept of a community gTLD stems from policy recommendations from 2007, and then that was codified in the 2012 AGB, so this is something that comes from the previous round. However, the 2007 policy recommendations, neither those recommendations nor the SubPro policy recommendations provide a definition of community, as the thinking was at that time that any kind of definition would be viewed as potentially limiting and potentially detrimental to the many different types of communities that there might be.

And then a key point here was also that the community gTLD should also have specialized registration policies in its registry agreement related to its community and who can have a domain within that community space, and those registration policies are incorporated into Specification 12. Next slide. Thank you. So for this round, for the coming round, 2026 round, the concepts are largely the same, but the information on the screen is taken from the current AGB just to set the context there. But any applicant may designate its application as a community application, so there's no restriction on who can say that they're a community. It's essentially what comes after and how that community is defined and comes down to the registration policies as well.

In general, an applicant for a community gTLD is expected to demonstrate a relationship with an organized community. It will have applied for a gTLD string that is strongly and specifically related to the community. It will have proposed dedicated registration policies for its gTLD, and those should be commensurate with the purposes of the identified community. And also, it will have its application endorsed in writing by one or more established institutions representing the community.

In addition, of course, any discussion on community applications quickly evolves into a discussion on CPE, Community Priority Evaluation. Ho to reiterate, those are separate concepts. Again, anyone can apply as a community. Your community status is not determined by CPE. That is a contention resolution mechanism. That is an optional contention resolution mechanism that is given to applicants that find themselves in contention, and an applicant could potentially say no to participating. So that is an opt-in situation there. In addition to CPE, the other key evaluation related to community applicants is the registry commitments evaluation, which again relates to the community registration policies that community applicants are required to incorporate into Specification 12 of their registry agreement, which we will be discussing in the latter half of this presentation. Next slide, please.

Okay, so now moving into more of the application process and things to look out for. These questions related to community applications are found in question set seven. As I mentioned, there are quite a few. These questions generally relate to the community

and how it's defined, organized, and supported, and how the string name relates to the community that's been identified. But also, there are several questions about the community registration policies themselves. The questions also adhere directly to the criteria for CPE. The answers to the questions are taken, in the case that an applicant participates in CPE, they would be used to evaluate the application according to the CPE criteria.

In terms of unique documents required for this type of application, as we've already covered, applicants should have their applications for community gTLD endorsed in writing. So that should be submitted along with the application: written endorsement from one or more established institutions representing the identified community. Thank you. So then, as I was just mentioning, community applicants have the opportunity to participate in community priority evaluation, which is again a contention resolution mechanism, and it is only available to community applicants, and it is an opt-in evaluation. It's also an evaluation conducted by a third party, which evaluates the application according to the CPE criteria, which are in the AGB, Section 5.4.

The key outcome of the evaluation is whether that application should receive priority in the contention set. Again, it's not focused on whether that community is valid or exists; an applicant can be a community at all, but is rather focused on determining whether it should receive priority in the contention set. Applicants that designate their applications as community-based are required to

respond to a set of questions in the application form. Again, the answers to those are what are used to evaluate the application against the CPE criteria. And again, it's optional to participate in CPE.

In terms of prerequisites, this is in relation to eligibility to start CPE. As contention resolution generally will occur after string evaluation, applicants should have completed string evaluation. They should have resolved any objections or appeals. Any challenges related to string evaluations must also be complete. And the applicant shouldn't have any open change requests related to their application in order to proceed. Another key point, at least from the last round, something that often held up applicants in terms of proceeding to different phases of the program were accountability mechanisms. Those should also be resolved prior to participating in CPE.

And then, it's not very obvious on the slide here, but it is an important note that for those applicants participating in CPE, they must complete registry commitment evaluation prior to participating in CPE. Essentially, applicants will be asked if they want to participate in CPE if they are in contention and if they are a community applicant. If the response is yes, then that will trigger the registry commitment evaluation, which must be complete before starting CPE. The fees for CPE are currently estimated to be between 50,000 and 80,000 US dollars. As we've mentioned in a couple of sessions now, we are at the tail end of a request for proposal process to identify the vendor for CPE. We're at the very

end, so we're hopeful to announce soon who that is. And we would also, alongside that, provide more information regarding the exact fee.

This shows visually what I was just referring to in terms of timing and steps for CPE and community applicants as it relates to contention. Assuming that an applicant has passed string evaluation, there'll be a question of whether or not they want to participate in CPE. If not, then they'll proceed to auction with the other applicants in their contention set. If they do want to proceed to CPE, they will first go through RCE, registry commitments evaluation, then CPE, and then based on the outcome of CPE, perhaps either move to auction if they don't prevail on CPE, or if they do prevail on CPE, they would move to the next phases of the application process, including the applicant and application evaluations, and then onto contracting.

Here we can see more of the detail on the criteria for CPE. I'm just debating in my head if we need to go through these, but maybe I'll just mention them at a high level. Of course, the AGB lists these all out in more detail and how the panel is to evaluate these criteria, including the guidelines as well as some of the evidence that is expected of the applicant in order to show that they meet these criteria. So of course, I would suggest that you peruse the sections there on the screen of the AGB. At a high level, the criteria are community establishment, essentially how and whether the community is organized; Nexus, so does the name of the string match the name of the community; registration policies, this is

more of a binary look at does it have the appropriate policies for its community, yes or no; and then community endorsement, does it have the support of the community that's been identified? And also, is there opposition from others within or outside of the community?

I just talked through these different scenarios, but the possible CPE outcomes are: first scenario is that an applicant is successful in CPE and would then thereby obtain priority in the contention set and is the prevailing applicant and moves on to the next phases of the program. If they do not prevail in CPE, and if there's only one CPE applicant in that contention set, then the whole contention set goes to auction. There might be two community applicants in a contention set; that happened in the last round. Should one prevail and the other doesn't, then of course the one that prevails would resolve that contention set, and that one would move forward. However, if there are multiple community applicants in the contention set and none of them prevail in CPE, then the contention set would move to auction, just like if there were no community applicants in the set. Okay, I ended a little abruptly, but any questions on community applicants or CPE before we move into the community registration policies, RVCs, and RCE? I think there's one question in the pod. I think I can answer that.

GRANT NAKATA

Sure.

JARED ERWIN

Feel free to speak. I think it's important to highlight, just because I think this point of CPE versus community applicant is important to drive home. The question is, can you still withdraw from CPE after reveal day, and will the CPE cost be reimbursed? I think the timing of the question here is making an assumption about the timing. Again, at the outset, when you submit your application, you are indicating whether you want to be a community applicant, but you're not indicating at that time or participating in CPE at that time. If you want to do CPE, that comes later after contention has been determined and string evaluations are complete.

So if, in the case that you do opt to participate in CPE, you'll be asked the question, "Do you want to participate in CPE?" At that point, you would receive an invoice to pay for CPE and RCE. And I think up until that point of getting the invoice, you could still choose not to do CPE. But once you've paid, I would imagine you would want to proceed with completing CPE. Or if you don't pay, then yes, you would be disqualified from participating in CPE and it wouldn't happen. I hope that answers your question. There's a few different ways that could happen, I think. And I think Kristy answered the other question regarding this RFP sufficiently so.

GRANT NAKATA

You answered it earlier.

JARED ERWIN Well, yes, we answered it together. There we go. Okay, any other questions in the room, the physical one or the virtual one?

GRANT NAKATA Somebody else in the chat says, "If you don't pay, you don't participate."

JARED ERWIN Yes, exactly. Okay, looks like not, so I guess I'll turn it over to Grant, who's going to walk us through the RVC stuff.

GRANT NAKATA Hey, thanks, Jared. Good to see everyone throughout the week. I guess seeing as this is a community applicant journey presentation, we'll highlight the evaluation related to commitments, and that would be memorialized in the registry agreement. Next slide, please. This is our standard summary slide. Here within the registry commitment evaluation, we'll evaluate the community registration policies intended for the registry agreement to ensure that they're enforceable under the ICANN bylaws and can be included in the RA as contractual obligations.

The evaluation occurs as part of the application evaluation stage, but as Jared was just running through a few slides earlier, it could happen earlier in the event that a registry voluntary commitment or the review of community registration policy is on a critical path. For example, going through CPE, we would do that earlier. And then what's highlighted here is really this is a conditional

evaluation subject to a one-time fixed fee of 15,000 USD. If you proceed through CPE, this fee is then deducted from that amount. It's also not subject to extended evaluation or evaluation challenges.

But just to keep in mind, this is a process where ICANN and the applicant are expected to engage in dialogue and align on what these proposed contractual obligations will be. In terms of timing, we expect that this evaluation will take two to three months, where the applicant then has to meet the five criteria specified in the Applicant Guidebook, which is referenced in Table 7-3. And then maybe one thing to note is our evaluation does not determine whether the proposed commitments have actually addressed the concerns raised by a potential third party, should that be the reason why the applicant then submits these commitments. As expected, ICANN encourages that the applicant engage with that third party just to ensure that the concerns are addressed. Pause, but if not—

JARED ERWIN

There's a question in the Q&A pod. I don't know if you can answer on the fly.

GRANT NAKATA

Yeah. Where can I find—

KRISTY BUCKLEY

There's a question in the Q&A pod. I'll just read it out loud. It's from Katrin Ulmer. She says, "I thought RVCs can also be established for standard applications. I'm asking because in this slide, only the radio button 'community' has been checked."

GRANT NAKATA

Yes. Thank you for the question. Registry voluntary commitments can come through standard applications, any type of applications. Just highlighting here that for community applications, we'll go through RCE, which embeds this criteria for the review of the community registration policies.

JARED ERWIN

Kevin has a question on fees.

GRANT NAKATA

Kevin, it's 15,000 regardless for RCE, but if you participate in CPE, that's included as part of the CPE fee. Yes. Is Kevin here? No. Okay. Thanks, Kevin. Maybe next slide then we can come back to questions. This slide really just highlights the additional areas where it relates to commitments within the registry agreement. First column: mandatory public interest commitments. These are those commitments that are across the board, embedded in all registry agreements. Second column: safeguard public interest commitments, being reflected as a part of the evaluation that happens a little bit earlier within string evaluations, the safeguard

assessment, but relate to those where the evaluation is considering the category of the string, such as highly regulated sectors.

And then the third, and maybe this is part of what questions were coming in on, is registry voluntary commitments subject to any type of application. And it's all subject to the same criteria that community registration policy is being evaluated against as well. These first three columns will live embedded within Specification 11. This last column, the focus of the community applicants, these will live within Specification 12 of the registry agreement, which they do today as well. And we'll touch on eligibility and the name selection criteria. I didn't have much else to say on this slide, but we can pause to see if anyone has further questions. Okay.

JARED ERWIN

There is actually a question that was more about CPEs that Marika already answered from Jan, but Katrin was just adding on, so I'll go ahead and answer verbally. Jan was asking if we submit a community application and they're the only party and there's no contention set, could we just withdraw the CPE evaluation to save on the fees? As Marika indicated in her response, in that situation, CPE wouldn't even come up as a question because you are not in contention then, and CPE is a contention resolution mechanism. There would be no need to even say yes or no to the question of participating in CPE. So the fees aren't applicable at all in that case.

And then for Katrin, again reiterating what Marika has said, yes, that's correct. The fees would still apply, though. If you are a

community applicant, you are required to have Specification 12 community registration policies in your registry agreement. Those must go through RCE, registry commitment evaluation, regardless of whether you are in contention or participating in CPE or not. So that is a requirement, and there would be a fee for that. And I think I may have preempted your question there, Jan, about the registry agreement and community application. So again, it's not related to contention; that RCE or the community registration policies must be included regardless, and you must participate in RCE. Yes. Thank you. Martin, I see your hand.

MARTIN SUTTON

Thanks very much. I just wanted a bit of clarity here on the safeguard public interest commitments. I'm not sure if this is the right time to raise it, but I just wanted to clarify whether it's today's or tomorrow's session. You're hoping to come back with some clarity and guidance with regards to brand gTLDs because the way the wording is in the application, it's very confusing for brand applicants because on the section where it covers all of the safeguard public interest commitments, it is expected to be a safe environment for users. So I just wanted to check if you're going to clarify what the process would be in completing that section for brand gTLDs, whether it's today or tomorrow.

JARED ERWIN

I think that would have been tomorrow, though I think the follow-up there was more to focus on drafting an FAQ that we could

publish. But I think the response that we provided in that session still stands, but I can reiterate now. What we discussed in that session and the guidance that we would provide in an FAQ is that those questions are not binding in the sense that if someone responds as a yes to the 164, 165, yes they think it's safer, it does not mean that a safeguard commitment must automatically be put into their respective RA. Instead, it is a signal to the safeguard assessment panel to review those strings more closely, perhaps. The safeguard assessment panel is looking at all strings regardless. So again, it's not binding to say yes to that. And so for brand, it's a question required of all applicants. And if a brand says yes, it does not mean that they have to have a safeguard commitment in their registry agreement.

MARTIN SUTTON

Okay, thanks.

JARED ERWIN

Okay. Paul, please.

PAUL MCGRADY

Paul McGrady. So same question but flipped. I don't know where the feedback's coming from. My answer to that question would be no, it's not going to be more safe because it's an ICANN gTLD. If I'm a brand, it's safe because I'm a brand.

JARED ERWIN

Correct answer.

PAUL MCGRADY

Right. I mean, you're already bringing the safety to the table. Is there a penalty for saying no, or any extra evaluation list you get on, or anything else that we need to be worried about if we say no? Thanks.

JARED ERWIN

No, there would be no penalty. It's the same; it's again just a signal. I think, and my team can correct me if I'm wrong, the safeguard assessment panel is looking at all strings. So regardless of what an application says, we're also having that check. So you could say no; there's no penalty for that. It could be that the safeguard assessment panel determines actually your string requires safeguard commitments, but there's no penalty for you saying no.

PAUL MCGRADY

I want to dig a little deeper into it because the way that the application system's set up is it's a checkbox or it's binary. There's no way to explain. There's no commentary. And so if it is a signal, it's a signal to who? And what is—the goal is to keep applicants out of extra work, struggle, pain, and delay. And so since there is no commentary field, and if I'm wrong and there is a commentary field, please tell me, then we need to know who we're signaling when we say no.

Because technically, like I said, for me, the answer technically is no. An ICANN gTLD itself is neither more or less safe than any other ICANN gTLD. The safety in the space comes from being a brand, but we showed up with the brand. So we're not buying anything from you guys that makes it more safe, if that makes sense. And so who are we signaling and what? Because once we know who we're signaling, whether we signal yes or whether we signal no, what are they going to look at? What will that signal tell them to look at? We just need for you to take it and peel the onion back two or three or four layers and let us know what our signal is doing. Thanks.

JARED ERWIN

Thanks, Paul. I don't want to misspeak. I don't know if anyone from my colleagues can feel more definitive in responding, but I think what I've said so far stands, which is the signal is to the safeguard assessment panel. There will be a panel for safeguard assessment that will review all strings to determine whether they may require safeguard commitments in their registry agreement. Ho the applicant also can provide information, which will be used by that panel by saying yes to the answer to that question, which will also be viewed by the panel. So I'm not sure if there's much more to drill down, but yeah.

PAUL MCGRADY

Okay. I mean, you just repeated what you just said, so there wasn't any new information there.

JARED ERWIN

Sure.

PAUL MCGRADY

I'd like for you guys, when you do your FAQ, to do the drill down and to tell us who's going to be looking at what and what the consequences are for a yes and what the consequences are for a no, and if there are any particular consequences for a dot-brand versus not a dot-brand and those kinds of things. I just think there's... I don't think of you guys as people who would try to hide the ball. I just don't think you guys have necessarily found the ball yet, but you need to go find it and tell us where the ball's at. All right, thanks.

JARED ERWIN

Okay. Yes. We'll come up with a clear answer for you. Thanks.

MODERATOR

Ashley.

ASHLEY ROBERTS

Thank you. So yeah, Ashley Roberts. So on that same point, just to try and put it a slightly different way. I think what would be helpful is to get some clarity on what the actual intent of the question is. So when it talks about, is your gTLD a trusted gTLD, does it or does it imply trust? Does it mean trust in terms of the semantics of the actual gTLD string? So, say, .law, the semantics of that imply trust

with the legal profession. Or is it trust in terms of or by virtue of the fact that it's a dot-brand and a closed gTLD with no third-party registrants? So if you get clarity on that, that'll probably help in terms of how people interpret the question and answer it.

JARED ERWIN

Okay. Thank you, Ashley, for the additional input. Ashley, I assume that's an old hand. Okay. Martin, please.

MARTIN SUTTON

Hi. Sorry. So on the same point, it's Martin Sutton here, and I think the origins of this I can understand. It is the likes of .bank, .pharma, .law that really gave rise to these public interest commitments. So I can understand where the question comes from and why it's in there. That's not the issue, and I think you've heard the reasons why there's some concern in terms of the way that the application form is set up for this. So while you're thinking this through and before you put pen to paper in terms of the FAQ, it might be worth just having a check to see whether this needs to be removed from the path for a dot-brand, for instance.

Is it necessary? Do they just skip on to another question? So just as a thought on that, I understand the background to this and why it's important to have it, but I think the consequences of the way that the application form's been set up wasn't particularly thought through to the point where dot-brands would typically tick the boxes in the way that they're phrased at the moment. Thanks.

JARED ERWIN

Thanks, Martin. So yeah. We'll take that back. We've heard the feedback, and I don't know if we can promise something by tomorrow, but again, the ultimate goal is to develop an FAQ with a little bit more guidance on this. Thanks. Any other questions on preferably community or anything else in this presentation?

Okay, so a question here from Balash. Once the selected CPE evaluation organization is selected, will this group have any say on enforcing and interpreting the point system set forth by ICANN? It looks like it's a double question, so I'll stop there to try to answer that one. The point system, I assume, is a reference to the criteria and the points required to prevail in CPE. The total number of points possible for CPE is 16. You have to obtain 12 out of 16 to prevail in CPE. Each criterion that I went through on the previous slide—community establishment, Nexus, registration policies, endorsement—are worth a varying set of points.

And again, the AGB lists out how an applicant can achieve those points and what it means to get four out of four or three out of four, for example. All of that is in the AGB. And again, the CPE panel will be the one evaluating those criteria against the application. So I think if I'm understanding the question correctly, the short answer is no. Maybe I've misunderstood what you mean by "this group." I guess you mean the panel. Yes, the panel is the one evaluating the applications according to the criteria. So they are the ones enforcing that. They're the ones completing the evaluation. I don't

think "enforcing" is the right word, but I hope that answers that question.

Number two, RCE. Is there a set of examples or recommendations from ICANN that will be published so brands volunteering RVC applications can have a better understanding of correct examples, perhaps in an extended FAQ example? This is a good question. I believe the AGB does have some examples. There's some language in Appendix 1 and there's also some examples in Appendix 1 in the questions that relate to these commitments. There are FAQs; either they might be up or forthcoming, but it's a good question. We'll double-check on that. So thank you for raising that.

GRANT NAKATA

Any other questions?

JARED ERWIN

All right. If there's no other questions, then... Oh, sorry. Yeah, we have a few more slides. But these you've seen before. Again, the resources, the different locations in the AGB for information regarding CPE and RCE. Also, a couple of different resources on the website: application type, frequently asked questions, and topic overviews.

And then here, the usual other key resources that are available across the website. And again, a plug for ICANN Global Support. If you do have further questions, whether here or as in walking around the halls or after we all go home, we would kindly request

that you put those through Global Support, as that's the best way for us to ensure that we get you the best answer and are transparent for all. Thank you. And then again, a plug for a survey. Please kindly take our survey and provide any feedback you may have on this session. Thank you. But yes, if there are no more questions on the topic, then I can let everyone go. And as a reminder, we have another session at 09:00 AM tomorrow for Q&A and wrap-up. So thank you again. Have a great day.

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