
ICANN85 Mumbai | CF – 2026 Round: Geographic Names and Reserve Names Applicant Journeys with Q and A
Tuesday, March 10, 2026 – 16:30 to 17:30 IST

MARIKA KONINGS

Hello, and welcome to the 2026 round Geographic Name and Reserved Names Applicant Journey session. My name is Marika Konings, and I am the participation manager for this session. Please note that this session is being recorded and is governed by the ICANN Community Participant Code of Conduct, 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. Please post your comments in the Q&A pod. We will read those aloud during the session or try to answer them in the pod as time permits, when directed by the chair of this 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. I will now hand the floor over to Jared Erwin.

JARED ERWIN

Thanks, Marika. Hi, everyone. This is Jared Erwin. Good to see everyone again. Thanks for joining. I saw many of you yesterday in our session on brand TLDs and earlier this afternoon on the TAMS demo. Today we are going to continue our series on specialized

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applications, and we are going to talk about the geo names and the reserved names.

I think we have a couple of intro slides here that you have seen before. Again, just a reminder that the information that you see here today is taken from the Applicant Guidebook. In any case of discrepancy between what you see here and the Applicant Guidebook, the Applicant Guidebook is the authoritative document for that information and for the 2026 round. Thank you, Renata.

Again, we have some webinars that are already up on our website, the New gTLD program website, so please feel free to have a listen to those if you haven't already. Those provide a more general overview of all things 2026 round related. As I mentioned, we have a couple more sessions after today. Tomorrow afternoon at the same time is the Community Applicant Journey, and then on Thursday morning, we have our wrap-up and open Q&A. As we have mentioned before in other sessions, that is intended to address any questions we were not able to get to in the previous sessions or answer new questions that may come up in that time.

Our agenda for today is first to go through the geo names applicant journey, followed by the reserved names applicant journey. I have George here from ICANN staff to walk us through that, and then we will finish up with any questions, but also a brief overview of resources that are available for potential applicants. For our session objectives today, we hope you are able to better

understand the requirements of applying for a geo name or a reserved name gTLD. We hope that you are able to identify and prepare application question responses specific to these types of gTLDs and know where that information can be found.

Again, I am repeating some slides here just to set the scene and the context of the other types of applications that will be available in the 2026 round. The geo names and reserved names are two types of those and are the subject of today's session. Thanks, Renata.

Here we go into more of the details on the geo names applications. Of course, the AGB is much more detailed in all the criteria for what counts as a geographic name and what is not allowed as a geo name in the 2026 round. Geo names that do qualify are those that meet the criteria here. A geo name is a gTLD, including its allocatable variant labels, that is either a capital city of any country or territory listed in the ISO 3166-1, a city or region where the applicant declares that it intends to use the gTLD for purposes associated with that name, an exact match of a subnational place name such as a county, province, or state listed in that standard, a UNESCO region, or appearing on the geographic region section of the standard country or area codes for statistical use (the M49 list).

Those strings that do not qualify or will not be approved as geo names in the 2026 round are those that are country or territory names. There is a long list of what counts as a country or territory name in Section 7.5.1 of the AGB. As you may know, the ISO list is where most of those names come from. Feel free to ask any

questions as we go. We have folks monitoring the chat if you have a question that you want to put in there as well.

In terms of preparation, there are some things to be aware of as a potential applicant for a geographic name gTLD. I think the biggest takeaway for these potential applicants is that those applicants must secure the support or non-objection of the relevant governments or public authorities for the geo name in question. That documentation of support or non-objection must be dated no more than four months from the opening of the program, so four months prior to 30 April 2026. If it is older than that, then ICANN would expect a newer letter of support or non-objection to be submitted.

That letter must clearly express the support or non-objection of the relevant authority related to the application. That letter must also demonstrate the government or authority's understanding of that string being used as a geographic name as requested. In the AGB, Appendix 2 has a sample letter of support or non-objection that could be used for working with the relevant government or authority, as well as a checklist of items for this evaluation. I think I see a hand. Amadeo?

AMADEO ABRIL

Hello? I am Amadeo Abril from CORE. I have a question here because the assumption in the Applicant Guidebook is that the applicant is not the government and therefore needs the support letter. But in many cases, if I think of the ones we prepared in 2012,

like Paris, Madrid, or Barcelona, it was the local government that was the applicant itself. Can you confirm that in that case, if the city government of a city applies for the name of the city to run that for purposes related to that city, no support documentation is needed because the applicant is the one that should provide the support? It would be ridiculous to have the requirement to support yourself. Is that correct?

JUSTIN HO

This is Justin. I definitely understand the point of view you are bringing forward about the entity applying for its own name and needing to provide this documentation. But from our end, we need the entity to provide the documentation so we can verify. It is part of the verification to make sure that you are who you say you are and that the appropriate part of the municipal government is providing approval. We want to ensure that there is no dispute within the municipal government that would cause issues for this. Did you also ask about fees for this as well? I am sorry, I did not catch that part.

AMADEO ABRIL

No, but I am not sure I understand you. Let's take the example of my city, Barcelona. In 2012, it was the local government, the only legal entity, which applied for that. What kind of support letter or documentation can they provide? You certainly will check who the applicant is. But do they have to write a letter saying, "We ourselves

support ourselves being ourselves"? It is something that I do not know how to explain to them. It sounds ridiculous.

JARED ERWIN

Sorry, there are some conversations off-mic. I think the short answer to your question, Amadeo, and I understand your confusion, is yes. That letter of support would be required, and potentially that is a letter to itself. I understand the awkwardness of that, but as you say, we need to check the applicant, and the way to check the applicant is via the document of support or non-objection.

AMADEO ABRIL

You will help me explain that to the local authorities because there is no normal brain that can understand that, but thanks.

JARED ERWIN

Okay. Thanks, Amadeo. Understood. Any other questions? Next slide, please. The questions, as we mentioned, are in Appendix 1 of the AGB. Question Set 8 specifically is related to geo names, so please review those as you prepare an application for a geo name.

The first step that the geo name application will go through is what is called string evaluation. This is where all strings submitted to ICANN in the application submission period will go through the string evaluation, and the Geographic Names Panel will review that list of strings to determine whether any of those are a protected geographic name or a geographic name as per the criteria in the

AGB. In many cases, I would expect that applicants would know that they are applying for a geo name and mark themselves as such when they submit their application, but it could happen that an applicant unintentionally applies for a name that is a geo name. For that reason, all of the strings are checked.

If a string is determined to be a geographic name based on the criteria in the AGB by the Geographic Names Panel, the second step following this would be Geographic Names Review, which occurs later in the application evaluation. It is important to note that in the case of contention for geo names, which is described in detail in the AGB, that Geographic Names Review would be moved up as contention resolution occurs before application evaluation. If there is no contention, then it will occur with the rest of the evaluations during that phase. Hopefully, that made sense. Next slide, please.

Here you can see more about the evaluation I was just referring to. This is the second step where the Geographic Names Panel is going to confirm that the applicant has the necessary support or non-objection to apply for the geo name that is being requested. As you can see from the note there, it does occur before contention if required. The fee for this is not to exceed USD 12,000. We have an open RFP process to identify that vendor, so that vendor is not yet known and the final fee is not either. But as we have said multiple times, and as is in the AGB as well, that fee will not exceed 12,000 US dollars.

This evaluation is eligible for extended evaluation; however, it is not eligible for challenge. The extended evaluation is there to give the opportunity for the applicant to clarify any concerns regarding their support from the relevant authority. In terms of the scope of the evaluation, the Geographic Names Panel would review the input from the applicant and the governments and conduct its own research and analysis to confirm that the applicant has provided the required documentation and that the communication from the government or public authority is legitimate and contains the required content.

The trigger for this is that during string evaluation, the panel will have noted that the string is a protected geographic name and that it should go through this second step of the review to consider the support or non-objection. The outcomes of the evaluation are that it qualifies, it is eligible, it has the appropriate support from the relevant authority, and it can continue in the program as a geographic name gTLD. It might be determined that it is not eligible if it lacks the relevant support or non-objection by the relevant authority. In some cases, it may be determined to be eligible as a geographic name but it is in contention with other strings, whether identical or confusingly similar, and it may have to proceed through contention before it could proceed to contracting or other evaluations.

All the details on geo names are in Section 7.5 of the AGB. In Section 5.5, we list out some very complex scenarios as they relate to geo names and contention. I would direct you there to learn more

about potential scenarios for contention for geo names. I will pause there for a second. I think there was some chat, but if there are any questions, feel free to go ahead.

MARIKA KONINGS

Thanks, Jared. There are a couple of questions that we are working on. I do not know if you prefer to look at them and come back to them while we cover the other topics.

JARED ERWIN

Maybe we go through reserved names and then can talk through those questions at the end. Thanks. George.

GEORGE SARKISYAN

Thanks, Jared. Hi, everyone. I am George Sarkisyan. I am in the GDD Accounts and Services team working on the 2026 round. Just a few slides on reserved names. This should be quick and painless. Next slide. Reserved names are the IGO and INGO names. This includes the Red Cross, Red Crescent names, and the International Olympic Committee names. A limited number of these names are eligible to be applied for at the top level through the exception process and only by the relevant entity with the appropriate documentation.

Reserved names are distinct from the block names, which are not eligible to be applied for. In 2012, the reserved names were referred to as the strings ineligible for delegation, and the block names were referred to as the reserved names. Hopefully, that is not too confusing. To prepare for the submission once the application

window opens, those IGOs and INGOs interested in applying for their full name through the exception process will need to provide documentation of support or non-objection from the relevant parent organization or public authority. The AGB goes into more detail in Section 7.2.2.3. Next slide, please.

Reserved names are split into two sections. There is the reserved name identification, which happens during the string validation, and then there is the reserved names review during the application evaluation. During the reserved name identification, once the applicant enters the string that is identified as an eligible reserved name, the exception process will be triggered and TAMS will populate the reserved name question set that the applicant has to respond to and provide the relevant documentation. When the applicant proceeds to the application evaluation, the reserved names review will take place as a conditional evaluation.

The reserved name must be applied for as the primary string, as mentioned in the AGB Section 7.2.2. During the reserved name review, the panel will verify the applicant's supporting documentation to confirm they are indeed the eligible entity. Those are the certification of incorporation and, if applicable, the letter from the parent organization and the documentation of support or non-objection from the relevant public authority. The review is eligible for extended evaluation. If the applicant completes the evaluation successfully, they will continue in the program. If the applicant does not have the proper support or relevant documentation and is not eligible at the time, they can

proceed to extended evaluation. You can find the AGB section on reserved names in 7.2.2. That is it for me. Thank you.

JARED ERWIN

Thanks, George. Now we have time for questions. There you can see some of the resources. I think we are answering them actively in the chat, but I am wondering if there are a couple we could discuss. Paul, your questions about Springfield, I think we are posting it now. First of all, the AGB clarifies that a capital city name is in reference to a country or territory that is listed in the ISO 3166-1. I am not an expert on the ISO, but I do not think that Springfield, Illinois, is on that list. Marika says here that a letter of support or non-objection is only required in case the city name is also the name of a country or territory's capital city name.

JARED ERWIN

Okay, we were answering another question. Are you in the room? Are you able to raise your hand? Otherwise, first we have Mohit and then we have Marta. Marta, if you can join the Zoom room to raise your hand, that is the easiest way for us to track who is asking questions, but otherwise, I will try to monitor hands in the room. First we will go to Mohit.

MOHIT

Hi, Mohit here from Alldata. I have a general question. I noticed that every session on gTLDs starts with the statement that anything in the guidebook is the final word and whatever discussions we might

have here might be guidance, but the final word is the guidebook. I understand you also have an FAQ section on your website and new questions will be added. Are the FAQs to be considered an extension of the guidebook, especially in cases where there is no guidance in the guidebook but it is additional information being pointed out in the FAQ? Can we take the guidance given on the FAQs as binding as well? Thank you.

JARED ERWIN

I do not know if my legal team would let me say that it is binding, but I would imagine in any case that the AGB is the authoritative document. In situations where there is information in an FAQ that is not in the AGB, we would have to take that on a case-by-case basis. Anything we are saying in an FAQ should not be changing anything in the AGB; it would just be an expansion. It should be understood to be the guidance, but I do not think I can say definitively that the FAQ would be the new binding document.

MOHIT

Just a clarifying question. If we see something in the FAQs, we can take that to be true and we do not have to check if there is a conflict in the guidebook? Can we perfectly rely on the FAQs?

JARED ERWIN

I would say you need to check the guidebook in any case.

LARS HOFFMANN

Just to reemphasize, in case something were to go wrong, it is not because the FAQ said something different from the AGB. You cannot rely in that sense on the FAQs. They are there to make things easier, so in some cases, the wording is more friendly. From a legal perspective, the AGB is what the rules state.

MARTA BAYLINA

Hello. I had a follow-up question on Amadeo's point. We were talking about the scenario where the applicant for a geographic TLD is itself the competent authority for the relevant territory. You confirmed that even in that case, the support letter is still needed. My follow-up question is whether the amount of conditional fees would be modulated or diminished for the fact that there isn't really too much work to do by ICANN. Marika answered that it is not ICANN carrying out the evaluation but a third-party provider and that you are in the RFP process and will discuss scenarios with the vendor. How can we have more clarity on these conditional fees? We are very close to the time where we have to tell our customers how much this will cost. If all companies need predictability, I think it is even more so for public administrations that need everything budgeted. I wish we would have more clarity. When are we going to know what the fees we should expect are exactly?

MARIKA KONINGS

This is Marika. As I said in the response, we are currently in the RFP process. I will check back with the team to see when they expect contracting to happen and I will come back to that question on

Thursday during the Q&A. Having said that, we did already include in the Applicant Guidebook that the fee will not exceed 12,000 dollars. For current planning, there is an amount there.

MARTA BAYLINA

But 12,000 to check that I am myself is not easy to justify. If that is the case, okay, but can you please confirm?

MARIKA KONINGS

Yes, but you are not checking whether you are yourself. The third-party vendor is checking that you are you and that you have the authority to provide that support. As we explained previously, we will work with the chosen vendor to identify whether there are scenarios in which this work is easier. I understand that for you it is obvious that you are working with the government, but the vendor needs to independently verify that. Annabeth also put in the chat that this is in the interest of government authorities. In the case where we do not do that check properly and someone has a really great letter and says they are an authority and we just say sure, then we realize later that it is not the case, that is a big issue. We will talk with the vendor to see if there are circumstances that make this process easier through which there could potentially be a tiered type of pricing, but this is for the vendor to determine. They will need to carry out that work and take ownership of giving us that confirmation. As I said, I will follow up to see if we can get a more specific date on when we expect to have a contract in place.

JARED ERWIN

I posted in the chat the link to the RFP document, which usually includes an RFP timeline. The dates show that we are expecting the RFP to close soon in a few days. Then we would move into the selection process, and then contracting and award is proposed for before the opening of the round. So, soon.

AMADEO ABRIL

Marika, completely understood. The wording "not to exceed" means it could also be zero, correct? Or it could be tiered. For example, if the supplier says that verifying that Barcelona testified itself as being Barcelona only costs 500 euros, but verifying Amazon involves nine or 12 governments and will not exceed 12,000. LARS HOFFMANN, you confirmed it yesterday that it is a pass-through fee. If the vendor says there are circumstances because the GAC representative has already signed that this is the correct information, why does he go back to the GAC to say that he is the GAC? We can make this circling go forever. It cannot be more than 12,000, but it can be whatever the vendor decides.

MARIKA KONINGS

Correct, this is a pass-through fee. This is not something where ICANN inflates it. This is whatever the vendor will charge us and what they are able to tell us they can do from a tiered pricing perspective if that is an option. We will work with the vendor once we have the contract in place and confirm what the fee per

application is and whether there are specific conditions under which a different fee may apply.

ANDREAS

This is Andreas from TLDBox. You have to negotiate with the vendor, and I think this is the point that people are stressing here. When you are starting negotiations, there can also be a zero fee if it is very clear that the applicant is basically the city. I think that should be taken into consideration when you negotiate the contract with the vendor. Then, if there are cases like Amazon, that is the part where you really earn the money. That is the message that the people want to convey here.

MARIKA KONINGS

Thank you. Just to make clear, per the AGB, it will need to go to a third-party vendor. I do not think we can say that if certain information is provided we do not even need to review it. I think zero may be unlikely, just to set expectations. But we need to hear from the vendor what they need to do to confirm this and whether there are different cases in which different work is involved for them to be able to say that they have met the requirements of the Applicant Guidebook.

ANDREAS

It just needs a level of negotiating so they understand the whole thing. I do not think they are really from the industry, so ICANN needs to give a little bit of guidance.

JARED ERWIN

All right. Thank you. Thanks, Marika. Thu Tri, please ask your question.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER

Thank you. My name is [inaudible] from Vietnam. May I have a question related to the geographic names for new gTLDs? In Vietnam last year, we had 63 provinces and cities, but due to a geographical reconstruction, at the moment there are 37 cities and provinces as some were merged into one. My question is if the previous cities and provinces are still considered the geographical names, because at the moment this city was already merged into another but its name should still be reserved because it can cause confusion if someone uses it for an unsuitable purpose. That is my question. Thank you.

JARED ERWIN

Thank you. That is a very interesting situation. Unfortunately, I do not know that any of us here are qualified to answer how that would happen, as that is likely handled by the ISO and other UN bodies that manage those lists of regions and determine what goes on or comes off the list. I cannot tell you exactly how that would be handled. Your question may bring up other questions of what happens if an application is approved as a geo name and then that geo name changes. I think that is a question we would have to consider in the context of the program. If the government changes

its support, we would have to evaluate that at the time. I cannot say definitively what would happen right now, but I welcome other folks from the team to say something if they would like.

LARS HOFFMANN

Just a reminder that there are objection processes that can be used here in certain circumstances. If they have standing according to the guidelines in the guidebook, the relevant entities can object to the string and the use thereof. If that is upheld, then obviously the application could not go forward.

JARED ERWIN

Thank you, LARS HOFFMANN. We are still in the background trying to answer questions in the chat. There is another one in the Q&A pod with another interesting example regarding an Irish county name. I would just caution folks that we are not the Geographic Names Panel and we are not experts in geographic names, so it is difficult for us to comment on how certain situations might be handled regarding name changes. These are all very complicated and potentially political things, and that goes back to the reason why we have a third party evaluating these things. We may not be able to provide the answer you are looking for today. I see a hand from Paul.

PAUL MCGRADY

Thanks. Paul McGrady. I tried to suss this out in the chat and it just got worse because we kept saying that if it is not on the ISO list, it

is not a problem, but then I saw other chats that said it is. Let me give you a scenario. There is an applicant for .phoenix. They intend to use the .phoenix to promote Phoenix. They are not the city government of Phoenix, but they are going to use it for tourism. Do they need a letter from the city of Phoenix in order to apply?

LARS HOFFMANN

In that example, the applicant would use the string to promote the city of Phoenix. Thereby, it is a geographic usage of a geographic name. If it is about promoting mythical birds, then it would not have to provide that letter.

PAUL MCGRADY

So yes, if they are going to use it to promote tourism in and around metro Phoenix, they would need a letter? And that is whether or not Phoenix happens to be the capital city of Arizona?

LARS HOFFMANN

Correct. It has nothing to do with whether it is the capital city of Arizona or not. National capital cities are a separate qualification. Phoenix, under the capital city qualification in the guidebook, is not a capital city. The same would be true for Sheboygan. It is a geographic name as listed in the guidebook. If Phoenix were the capital of the United States of America, then that would only be possible with a letter from the capital regardless of intent. If it is not a capital city, then it could be used differently. I would expect the city of Phoenix to possibly object if it were to be used for mythical

birds because they may suspect that registrants would use it differently, but that is a different issue. From our perspective, we would not require a letter for .phoenix if it was for mythical birds. But we do if it is for any geographic name as listed in the guidebook.

PAUL MCGRADY

But if you file the mythical bird application, you are begging for it from the city of Phoenix or from the GAC.

LARS HOFFMANN

Yes. The example from last time is obviously .spa.

JARED ERWIN

Thanks, LARS HOFFMANN. Thanks, Paul. We have Mohit in the queue.

MOHIT

This is a completely hypothetical question. There is a city in New York called Buffalo. There are companies like Buffalo Boots who hold trademarks to Buffalo. Do they have a valid contention if the city name is the same as a company that has a trademark for it? Basically, is this a conflict between a geographic application and a .brand? What is the resolution?

JARED ERWIN

This is actually a scenario we have described in the AGB in detail. If both qualify and there are both applications in the next round, and

Buffalo the city qualifies for support and the brand Buffalo also qualifies as a brand, they would proceed to contention.

LARS HOFFMANN

With the caveat that I think the brand would have the opportunity to change the string. It also may have standing, depending on the circumstances, for a rights protection objection. Whether that is upheld is a different issue, but they have a trademark, so I guess they can have a shot at that.

JARED ERWIN

We kind of pushed reserved names to the side, not that I want questions about those, but just to give it a little time. Are there any questions about reserved names or other questions about geo names? I am not seeing anything else in the chat or any other hands. Amadeo, I think you have had your hand up.

AMADEO ABRIL

I have two questions, a simple one and the other. The simple one is a difficult political situation. Some countries have an uncertain status for capitals. The Dutch constitution says the capital is Amsterdam, but everybody else will tell you that the capital is The Hague. Other countries are transitioning capitals, like Ivory Coast or Indonesia. In those cases, I guess the advice is, just in case, get the letter of support from the government? Or will you take a strict approach of what the highest legal rule says is the capital at that given moment? It is not completely clear in all cases.

JARED ERWIN

The onus is on the applicant for whatever string they are trying to apply for to obtain the relevant support, whoever or whatever that might be at that time. They provide that with their application, and then that will be reviewed by the Geographic Names Panel, who will use their expertise to determine whether in fact that is the right support based on their research.

AMADEO ABRIL

The second one is again on the self-supporting letter. Please understand I am not against letters of no objection or support. Probably you remember that this was invented for the .cat case and I was the one proposing to use a non-objection letter to solve political problems. In the concrete case of a local government, a non-objection or support letter is strictly speaking impossible. A document from a local government in most European jurisdictions will be done by a secretary general, who is a civil servant. He has no authority to object or support a decision. At maximum, he would certify that the decision was taken. Would that certification be equivalent to your language of support or non-objection letters?

JARED ERWIN

I feel like it is the same answer that I just gave. The applicant needs to show the support that they think they need, and then the onus is on the panel to verify that. I am sure the situations you are

describing are true, but I do not think I can say right now whether it is valid.

AMADEO ABRIL

I hope you understand that public authorities are used to a special kind of legal certainty in what they do. If they have to play the game, they would like to know what they have to do. I do not think this is such a difficult question. I would appreciate if this could be solved later on and provide a little more legal certainty on what we expect from them, because they cannot invent procedures.

JARED ERWIN

Thanks, Amadeo. I understand the awkwardness and the complexities of these situations, but this is also adhering to the policies that have been given to us by the community. This is also how it was conducted in the last round. We have heard your comments. Thank you. Let me look at the room again. I am not seeing anything else. Any other comments or questions?

JUSTIN HO

There was a question in the chat about whether the applicant entity gets checked first. I think in the general sense, the applicant entity check or background screening check and the geographic name review happen in parallel. There is a case where if you are in a contention set with multiple geo names we would do that first, but in general, they happen at the same time.

JARED ERWIN

Thanks, Justin. Maybe just to wrap up, thanks everyone for this discussion. We know this is a complicated and high-interest topic, so I appreciate the discussion. For any other further questions you may have after the session, please direct those to globalsupport@icann.org. That is the best place for you to get the answers that you desire. Thank you again for doing that. We also have a survey. Please feel free to scan that QR code and take the survey about this session. We appreciate your feedback. If there is nothing else, then I will let everyone go. Thanks very much and have a great rest of your day.

MARIKA KONINGS

You can stop the recording now, please. Thank you.

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