
ICANN85 Mumbai | CF – 2026 Round: Registry Service Provider (RSP) Evaluation Program
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JUSTIN HALL

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governed by the ICANN Expected Standards of Behavior. With that, I pass to Francisco to start off this meeting.

FRANCISCO ARIAS

Thank you, Justin, and welcome, everyone. As you can see, there is plenty of space here at the table if you want to join. It is a little bit strange to have everyone at my back instead of being able to see you. But, of course, you are free to do whatever you want.

I am not Gustavo; I am Francisco. Unfortunately, Gustavo was unable to come to Mumbai, so I will do my best to do this presentation. Next slide.

Here is the agenda for today. Next.

Okay, first, a little bit of a disclaimer. The authoritative source of information is the RSP handbook. That is the rulebook for the RSP Evaluation Program, so you can find all the details there on how this works. We have done our best effort for these materials to match the handbook, but in case there is any discrepancy, the RSP handbook prevails. Next.

There are a couple of webinars that are recorded and the slides are also available, so you can see the links. If you go to the session page, you will find the slides, and you can find the links to those materials if you are interested in learning more about the 2026 round. You can find all the information there. There is foundational training and also the applicant journey, which describes the application processing stage and more important milestones for

the program. I encourage you to go through those if you are interested. Next.

Also, this is the first of a few sessions that we will be hosting during ICANN 85 about the 2026 round. You can see there all the different topics that will be covered throughout the week. If you are interested in any of those specific topics, you can find information on the ICANN 85 schedule. Next.

Let's start. First, what does a registry service provider do? Registry service providers, or RSPs for short, are the organizations that provide the registry services—the technical functions that are required in order to make a registry work. The typical services that are run by an RSP are DNS, obviously, the system that makes the domain names work. DNSSEC, which is the way to secure DNS so that we can authenticate that responses are coming from who they should come. RDAP is the protocol that replaced WHOIS about a year ago, a little bit more than a year ago, for most of the gTLDs and all the registrars. This is a protocol through which one can learn the information about the owner of a domain name, modeling obviously the legal requirements that apply.

The other typical registry service that is offered by an RSP is EPP. That is the protocol that is used to communicate between registrars and registries for the creation of domain names, updates, deletions, and so on. In general, the provisioning of domain names registrations. I should mention that RSPs can offer additional registry services to those required by the registry agreement. If

there are any new ideas that a registry wants to provide, they need to work with their RSP so that those services are approved as part of the RSP Evaluation Program. But more on that later. Next.

How does the RSP Evaluation Program relate to the New gTLD Program? As part of the New gTLD Program, applicants of new gTLDs need to select one or more RSPs that are going to be offering the services for their intended TLD. They can do this from the beginning when they submit their application, but no later than just before the start of the application evaluation. As a reminder, just before that is the string evaluation stage of the program. As mentioned before, you can find all that information in the webinars that are recorded that we talked about at the beginning.

There is a list of evaluated RSPs. We already had the first round of applications for the RSP Evaluation Program that ran last year. I cannot remember the exact dates. I believe that we ended the last window in May last year, and since then, we have been evaluating the RSPs. We are mostly done with that process, so most of the RSPs that are already evaluated are listed on that page. Again, you can find the links in the slides that are posted in the session webpage. Next.

Again, this is just a graph showing all the different services. In the RSP Evaluation Program, we have four different types of RSPs. An organization can apply to be one or up to these four types of RSPs. The most traditional or most widely known would be what we call the main RSP that is offering almost all the services: RDAP, EPP, and

data escrow, which in turn needs a data escrow agent. But we also have DNS RSPs, those that offer only the DNS service. DNSSEC RSP, one that is offering only DNSSEC. And we have a very special type, which is the proxy RSP, which is used in certain jurisdictions where there are certain legal requirements that need to be complied with, and they typically require the use of an additional EPP and RDAP service for that specific jurisdiction.

Those are the four types of RSPs, and so an applicant in the RSP Evaluation Program can apply for one or up to the four types of RSPs with the same fee. But each is a different application, so they are evaluated independently. A gTLD applicant must identify at least one RSP for each of the critical registry services. Proxy RSP is not a critical service; that is only for certain jurisdictions, so that is where the applicant has the option to indicate that proxy RSP. Next.

The RSP Evaluation Program is a new thing in this 2026 round of new gTLDs. In the previous round in 2012, this did not exist, and as such, the way things worked back then was each application was evaluated independently. That meant that there was a lot of repetition in the evaluation. If an organization was an RSP for, say, 200 TLDs, they would have been evaluated 200 times on the technical side of things. It would be basically the same responses. As such, there were policy recommendations that directed ICANN to correct that situation and be more efficient, and that is how the RSP Evaluation Program was created. In this case, in the 2026

round, an RSP only needs to be evaluated once, regardless of the number of gTLDs they will be supporting. Next.

Here is the high-level timeline of this, which is going to be, as I mentioned before, the second window of application for RSPs for organizations that are interested in becoming RSPs. The window is going to run in parallel exactly with the gTLD application window. The intended opening is 30 April, exactly the same as the gTLD application window, and the end of the window is 13 August. Again, exactly the same window. Same thing for the payments deadline. It will be the same that applies for the gTLD applications. The applications are going to be evaluated. We are aiming to end that towards the end of the year. Next slide.

Like I said, this is a new window of application for organizations that are interested in becoming RSPs. If you did not submit an application in the previous window, this is your opportunity. If you did, then you probably do not care much about what we have to say in this session. Let's move to the next slide, please.

What do you need to know before applying? As I mentioned before, we have the RSP handbook, which is the set of rules that govern the RSP Evaluation Program. It is very important that if you are interested in applying to become an RSP, you read the entire RSP handbook. There is a lot of detailed information that you need to know before applying to be an RSP. You need to decide on which type of RSP you want to be. As I mentioned before, there are four types. You can be one or up to the four. It is only one fee, but you

need to select which of the type of RSP applications you are going to submit. In the RSP handbook, in Appendix A, there is a set of questions that need to be answered as part of the application, depending on the type of application. You need to be familiar with that and prepare answers to those questions before you can apply.

Also important to note is that the evaluation is composed of basically two types of evaluations. One is directed at documentation only. That is basically reviewing the set of questions that are in the RSP handbook. The second phase is the actual testing of the systems of the RSP. That is done through the Registry System Testing, or RST, system. More on that later. You will also need to have the list of people that are related to your organization because there is going to be some background screening on them, as described in the RSP handbook. And of course, there is already a detailed set of FAQs, frequently asked questions, that have been developed based on the questions we have been receiving through the first application window that we have in the RSP program. You will have already some additional materials that might be of interest to you. Next, please.

The fee. The fee is going to be the same as in the previous window, \$92,000. You can see it there. As I mentioned before, you only pay one fee, regardless of how many applications for the four types of RSP applications you submit—one or up to the four with the same fee. In addition to the type of RSP, a main RSP, and only the main

RSP, can be evaluated for one or more additional registry services. That includes IDN tables. I believe we have more on that later. Next.

About the registry services. Main RSPs, like I mentioned before, need to be evaluated for the additional registry services, additional as in beyond the ones that are required by the registry agreement. If a gTLD applicant wants to offer a certain new registry, they need to work with their intended RSP, and that RSP needs to submit that service for evaluation to ICANN. New gTLD applicants need to identify those services when they, in turn, submit their application.

There are different paths for the registry service evaluation, depending on the type of service. The first one is for the Fast Track registry service. I believe we have three in that category. You can find the link to that there, and they are automatically approved for all main RSPs. In the case of an incumbent RSP, there is a quick evaluation that is applied for services that are already approved for that incumbent RSP.

FRANCISCO ARIAS

Registry services are already approved for that RSP that are already being offered by that incumbent RSP. In the case of totally new services or a totally new RSP, they need to apply to a process that is similar to the registry service evaluation process, and basically, it is an evaluation for security, stability, and competition on that service. This is about registry services. Next slide, please.

Regarding IDNs, there are a couple of things. First is the type of IDN service that is supported. There are three types that have been defined. The first is the simplest of all. It is a main RSP that does not intend to support variant TLDs and also does not intend to support variant IDNs at the second level. This is a very simple type of support. The second type also does not support variant TLDs but supports variants at the second level. The most complicated of all is supporting variant TLDs and also variants at the second level. As a reminder, variant TLDs is a new concept that is going to be introduced in this round. As of today, there are no variant TLDs in the gTLD space. So, this will be the first time we have them.

Additionally, all IDN tables, including those previously approved for an incumbent RSP, will be evaluated during the RSP evaluation. The only exception is if an RSP applicant says they are going to offer IDN service using one or more of the second-level label generation rules with a full variant set. These are basically a set of LGRs developed with the community that have been thoroughly reviewed already. And so, if you say you want to offer IDN service using this, then you are automatically approved to offer those. Next.

The evaluation process. First, intended applicants need to apply through the RSP portal. To do that, you first need to have an ICANN account. You can find the links there to create your ICANN account. Chances are you already have one, as the ICANN account is the service used for many other ICANN services. You need to have an ICANN account, and then once the round opens, you will be able to

get access to our RSP portal; that is the tool you are going to use to work on your submitted applications and later deal with any other interaction you need with ICANN. The next step will be for you to provide the information about your organization. There is a set of evaluations on the organization itself. The applicant can then start drafting their RSP applications, pending payment. Once the payment is confirmed, the submission of the actual applications can proceed so evaluation can start. As I mentioned before, there are two phases to the evaluation. One is what we call technical screening. That is the review of the documentation. A second phase after that is clear, which is the technical testing through the RST system. Next.

Here is a process flow of how the evaluation works. I think I covered that in the previous description. Next slide. Next. Technical screening, as I mentioned before, is about the responses to the questions in Appendix A of the RSP handbook. Depending on the type of application, there are a set of questions that apply to that. A main RSP has a set of questions, DNS has its own, and so on and so forth. Every question needs to be answered. There is no option to leave a question unanswered. Every question is graded on a pass-or-fail basis. In order to clear evaluation, you need to pass every single one of the questions. Having said that, more than half of the questions are yes or no, making it very simple. Another thing is that you as an applicant will have the option to clarify information upon request from the evaluators should the need arise. Next.

Regarding testing, as I said before, this is done through the RST system. This is an automated tool. It is done through an API. So, it is completely automated. It is something for which you will need to develop the integration with the system. We provide a testing environment, the OT&E environment, to allow applicants to prepare for those tests. One of the lessons learned from the previous round is that we highly encourage you to start testing early. This is very important so you are ready and not in a rush later to get things done. It takes some time to develop that integration with the RST system. Having that OT&E environment, which is the exact same code as the production environment, allows you to practice. It is an important tool for being ready.

Some additional tests found in the RST include RDAP. We are testing using the RDAP conformance tool through the RST. We test that the RDAP output conforms with the policy and contract requirements for gTLDs. There is testing for DNSSEC algorithm rollovers. This is something we learned from the previous round, where we saw, especially in the first years of the program, many RSPs having issues with DNSSEC algorithm rollovers. Maybe this was because DNSSEC was being introduced in the gTLD space at the same time. But this is something that is being tested as part of RST. There is also testing on minimum rights protection mechanics, including support for TMCH and the launch extension. You can see there are links for the RST API specification, which details how to connect to the API. You can also find the test specifications for what is going to be tested on your system through

the API. You can find both there. The links are in the slides published on the session webpage. Next.

Once you clear RSP evaluation, you will receive a notification through the system and be listed on the page of evaluated RSPs. That will allow a gTLD applicant to select you as an RSP, and again, the gTLD applicants need to select one or more RSPs. They need to have an RSP for each of the critical functions. On that page listing evaluated RSPs, we are publishing not only those that have cleared both technical screening and technical testing, thus completely clearing the RSP evaluation. We are also listing those that have cleared technical screening—the documentation evaluation—and we list them with the proper status indicating that technical testing is pending. Next.

Since this is the second round of applications, there are some things we have seen that the applicants in the initial round struggled with or that are important to note. In this section, I am going to talk about those things so that you can benefit from that experience from the initial round of RSP applications. The first one is very practical. The RSP portal has a four-hour timeout limit, so that is something you need to take into account so you do not lose your work. If you are working on your application and four hours elapse without you saving it, you may lose your work. Regarding clarification questions, these are the questions sent by the evaluators. The evaluation panel can ask you about a certain response to one of the questions, asking for clarification of what you meant or if something is missing. It is important to respond

promptly to these to avoid delays in your evaluation. One thing to note on how this works is that applicants are limited to one active change request per application. You need to work through the process of that change request, which is basically changing the response to one or more questions, before you can submit a new one. You have to see through the whole process. Once the change request is accepted, the response to that question will be overridden. As I mentioned before, we have FAQs. There is already a good set of those from the initial round, and as new interesting questions come to us, we try to keep those FAQs up to date. It is highly recommended that you take a look at those FAQs because you may find answers to questions you may have. Maybe someone else already went through that process, and the answer to your question is already there. The language for the application is English. Any documentation submitted is required to be in English; for some questions, we give you the opportunity to provide materials like certifications. Those materials need to be submitted in English. If the original is in another language, you can submit a translation. In some cases, a certified translation might be required. Another thing we noted in the first round is that some applicants use Large Language Models or AI. One thing to note is that we found some interesting responses that went beyond reality. Please make sure if you are using LLMs that the responses make sense to avoid wasting people's time on those responses. Regarding the yes or no questions, it is important to note that just because you say no to a question, it does not mean you are going to fail. What it means is you will be requested to explain why you

answered no to that question, and that explanation will be evaluated by the panel. Next.

Another common issue we found is that we are asking for the applicant to explain the transfer of information between the four types of RSPs. Even though you may be applying for all types of RSPs, we are still asking you to explain how the transfer of information will work between the different elements. For example, we need to know how EPP is going to talk with DNS or DNSSEC and how the flow of information will happen in a secure manner. Another thing we saw is related to capacity. There are a few questions that relate to capacity. We saw some responses that basically either stated or implied that they had unlimited capacity. That is, strictly speaking, impossible. There has to be a limit, and so we are asking you to provide a realistic upper limit on your capacity. Next.

Another thing is the use of EPP extensions. There are some examples where people submit items as EPP extensions that are not, which you can find listed there. That is a common occurrence we found in some of the applications. A similar thing occurs with RDAP. Regarding EPP status codes, it is important that they are consistent with the different RFCs that specify the different EPP statuses. There is more than one, as the EPP standard has been around for a while and there have been updates and additions to the set of EPP statuses that can be used.

FRANCISCO ARIAS

Again, this is coming from some of the issues that we saw during some of the applications. So you may want to take a look at those so that you have an easier time when your application is being evaluated.

Similarly for DNSSEC, we have some issues with some of the applications related to the level of compliance with the FIPS 140-3 standard, so it is something that you need to consider. Also new algorithms, since the IETF recently—and by recently I mean I believe last year, maybe just a few months ago—they released a new RFC obsoleting some algorithms for DNSSEC and adding some new algorithms, or at least requirements on what should be supported in a DNSSEC implementation. It is important to take note of those, and for example, ensure that you are not proposing that your infrastructure is going to support an obsolete DNSSEC algorithm. Another thing that we saw in some applications is they were proposing to use Unicast DNS services. In the requirements of the RSP, we only support Anycast. Unicast is no longer something supported. And so if you, in your application, are saying you are going to do Unicast, you are going to receive clarification questions about that. Next.

RST, as I mentioned before, is a tool that we saw in the initial round. We think it was useful for the applicants to use and prepare for the testing in the production environment. We encourage people to start early and test often in their applications so that you are ready for when time comes to do your RST testing in production. And again, you have the link to the test specifications so that you can

prepare yourself. Another thing where we saw people struggle a little bit was regarding the client authentication. It is important to note that we are expecting people to use TLS client authentication, so they need to be prepared for that. You can find the link to the relevant section on RST on that. Next.

So if you are interested in becoming an RSP, you can find in that website link there all the different materials that I have mentioned here. You can study those and prepare yourself for that application. If you have questions about the RSP program, you can submit them to Global Support. You can see the link there to our Global Support team. Once you start on the process, however, we request applicants to use the RSP portal tool to submit any questions. Again, once the application window opens and you have access to the system, we encourage you to use that instead of the Global Support email. That is for questions before the opening of the application window. Another important thing to note is that we as staff are directed not to answer questions from individual applicants via any personal email or social media to ensure fairness and equal access for all participants. So please use the other channels that I mentioned before to submit any questions you may have. Next. And that is it. So with this, we transition now to the question and answer section of the presentation. Any questions? Jim?

JIM PRENDERGAST

Yeah. Thanks. Jim Prendergast for the record. I will put my hand down in the Zoom room since I was not sure how you were going to run the queue. Just for clarification for newcomers, so to speak, for those people who are applying and want to serve as their own RSP, they will have to pay the \$92,000 plus the \$220-something thousand dollars for the application, correct?

FRANCISCO ARIAS

Correct. The two programs are independent. And thank you for reminding me of that. I think I failed to mention that during the presentation. If a gTLD applicant would like to be their own RSP and they do not want to contract someone else to be their RSP, they can do so, but they need to go through the RSP evaluation program themselves. And so as such, they need to pay the two fees.

JIM PRENDERGAST

And then just to follow up on that, if in fact an applicant does apply to serve as their own RSP, and that is it. Do you have to opt in to be listed as an available RSP for other applicants to select? In other words, is an approved RSP automatically added to the list of service providers even if they do not intend to provide services to others?

FRANCISCO ARIAS

Oh, that is interesting. Right now, yes. It is automatic. I guess we assumed that everyone that would go through the program would be interested in being listed there. We currently do not offer the

option to opt out from being listed, but I am happy to discuss that if that is a need.

JIM PRENDERGAST

Yeah. You might want to look into that. And then last question, and then I will let others speak. Did I see one other hand? Slide 27 had some good feedback and tips. It is good to bring it up. To me, that seemed like that was all information gleaned from ICANN and your experience with the first round. Have you done a survey of people who have already gone through the first round to see what suggestions they may have to improve the testing going forward?

FRANCISCO ARIAS

Gustavo, I do not know if you can help me with this one. I believe we have not done a formal survey. We have had conversations with a few of the applicants. I myself certainly have had conversations with a few of them, and we collected feedback in that sense and have made, for example, some changes to the system through this initial round. I do not believe we have done a formal survey as you suggest, but I think that is a great suggestion. Ashley?

ASHLEY ROBERTS

Thank you. Ashley Roberts. So you mentioned essentially the two application windows for people that want to become an RSP. There was the one that was last year, which is now closed, and then the one that is going to run in parallel with the gTLD application period. If we think ahead maybe four or five years and potentially a new

entrant that wants to become an RSP, would that be possible? I assume they could utilize the MSA process or a variant of that.

FRANCISCO ARIAS

Yeah. Thank you. That is a great question. That is something that we are discussing internally how we are going to offer it. We need to offer a solution to your point. There may be new entrants to the market later, as we had certainly in the previous round. And so we need to offer a solution for that, and we are looking at what is the best way to offer that. Yes. Thank you.

JUSTIN HALL

Yeah. We also have a question from Elaine in the Q&A pod. I will read it out now. RSP data transfer questions: The responses regarding data transfer to an external provider would be hypothetical for RSPs that provide all services in-house. Will ICANN provide the correct response, or are RSPs required to describe hypothetical situations?

FRANCISCO ARIAS

Sorry, where can I read the question? Gustavo, I see your hand. Is that to answer that question?

GUSTAVO IBARRA

Yes. I can take that one. I was typing the response in the pod, but I can take it here. The criterion and the program were developed from the perspective that RSPs and the different types of RSPs that

we have—main, DNS, DNSSEC, and proxy—can interact in the market, meaning in-house or with external parties, because we have noticed in the market that different organizations interact with each other to provide the services to the registry operators. So you may be the main RSP, but your registry operator may also select DNS RSPs as, let's say, secondaries. So there is that interaction between the main RSP and external DNS or DNSSEC or proxies. What the evaluators are going to be looking for in those responses is to understand if the RSP applicant understands and has the knowledge on how that interaction will take place. For example, if you are a main RSP and you are going to interact with a DNS RSP, probably you are going to use one of the standard mechanisms to transfer some files. Or if you are a DNSSEC RSP and you are going to interact with a DNS RSP, then again, you may use one of those standard mechanisms like XFR or TSIG. So even if you are going to provide your services in-house, we are looking to understand if there is that knowledge on how to interact with external parties. Hopefully that answered that question.

FRANCISCO ARIAS

Thank you, Gustavo. Elaine, I see your hand is up.

ELAINE PRUIS

Yes. Can you hear me okay?

FRANCISCO ARIAS

Yes.

ELAINE PRUIS

Good. Okay, thank you. I am about to lose my voice, so I will try to be brief with my words. An RSP that provides all services in-house—let me say for example, Verisign, my employer—we do EPP, we do the DNS, we do DNSSEC. We would not work with another DNS or DNSSEC provider typically. I mean, maybe there is some strange case where that might happen. So I am just trying to wrap my head around why we would be required to provide information that is purely hypothetical if we are able to provide these services all internally and we can describe to you how we do that. Why do we also have to describe to you a hypothetical?

GUSTAVO IBARRA

Because that is the criteria that was defined for this program based on what we have seen in the market. Maybe right now all of the services are provided in-house, but maybe once you start providing services to a registry operator and they have interest in having additional Anycast clouds or additional DNS providers, you start propagating that zone file—where you are the originator by being the main and DNSSEC RSP—to those DNS RSPs. So in that future, when you start offering those services and that registry operator selects those secondaries through an MSA, we need to be sure that you are prepared to do that. We need to evaluate that that preparation is there.

ELAINE PRUIS

Okay. That is where I was going to go with the next part of my question: wouldn't an MSA be required for an RSP to choose a different DNS or DNSSEC service provider? If that is the case, wouldn't they go through that sort of technical evaluation at that point? Another part of this would be selecting a proxy registry service provider. Are we to respond to questions about proxy services, thinking we might at some point engage with any and every proxy registry service provider?

GUSTAVO IBARRA

The proxy RSP application is for those entities that are interested in offering proxy services to other RSPs. If you are in a jurisdiction that requires certain laws that require local presence, and you are in that jurisdiction, you may start offering those services to other RSPs. If you are going to interact as a client of a proxy RSP, you do not need to apply as a proxy RSP. I do not know if that clarifies the question.

ELAINE PRUIS

Okay. So there are not any questions that require a main RSP to describe how they would interact with a proxy service provider, but you do have questions that require the main RSP to describe how they would interact with an alternative DNS or DNSSEC provider. Is that right?

GUSTAVO IBARRA

That is correct, yes.

ELAINE PRUIS

Okay. Well, I am not doubting that we are incapable of answering the question in the way you want us to. I just think that it is not necessary. Thank you.

FRANCISCO ARIAS

Okay. Thank you, Elaine and Gustavo. I believe we have one more question.

JUSTIN HALL

Yeah. This question comes from Paulo Marcos in the Q&A pod: For applicants who have started the application process before April, will their application be prioritized, or will they be evaluated alongside the April applications?

FRANCISCO ARIAS

The way we evaluate this is based on when the applications are submitted. There is a service level target defined in the RSP handbook for when the applications are submitted. It is independent of the round when the organization applied to be an RSP. For example, in the current round, there are still a very few organizations that have not submitted any application, at least as of a few days ago when I last checked, for main, DNS, DNSSEC, or proxy. Once they submit an application, the SLT for us to respond kicks in. It does not really matter if it is an organization that applied in the previous round or the upcoming round; the service level

targets are tied to when the application was submitted. I hope that makes sense. Do we have any other questions?

Okay. It does not seem we have any additional questions. Giving a few more seconds. So I guess this is it. Thank you, everyone. With this, we close the session.

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