
ICANN85 | Prep Week – New gTLD Program: Next Round Implementation Status Update
Wednesday, February 25, 2026 – 08:30 to 09:30 PM IST

RENATE DE WULF

Hello and welcome to the session New gTLD Program: Next Round Implementation Status Update. My name is Renate de Wulf and I'm the Remote Participation Manager for this session. Please note that this session is being recorded and is governed by the ICANN Expected Standards of Behavior and the ICANN Community Anti-Harassment Policy. The moderator will read questions from the chat room out loud during the Q&A part at the end of this session.

If you would like to ask your question or make your comment verbally during the Q&A section, please raise your hand. When called upon, you'll be given permission to unmute your microphone. Interpretation for this session will include French and Spanish. Please state your name for the record and the language you will speak. If speaking in a language other than English, please speak at a reasonable pace. I'll now hand over the floor to Marika.

MARIKA KONINGS

Thank you very much, Renate. Hello, everyone. Thank you for joining us today for another New gTLD Program 2026 Round Status Update. My name is Marika Konings and I'm the lead for the New gTLD Program. I'm supported in this role by an amazing team, several of whom are joining me for today's session.

Note: The following is the output resulting from transcribing an audio file into a word/text document. Although the transcription is largely accurate, in some cases may be incomplete or inaccurate due to inaudible passages and grammatical corrections. It is posted as an aid to the original audio file, but should not be treated as an authoritative record.

If we go to the next slide, Renate, with the agenda. We have a pretty packed agenda covering a range of topics, as you can see on this slide, starting with a review of the status of implementation, then looking ahead at the processing phase. And in particular, our launch readiness processes and other aspects of making sure that we're ready and prepared once we start accepting applications.

We'll also have a look at the status of processing for two programs that are already in that phase, namely the Applicant Support Program, or ASP, and the Registry Service Provider Evaluation Program, or RSP.

We'll finish up with a look at what's in store for ICANN85, as well as applicant readiness. And hopefully by that point, we'll still have a few minutes to address any questions you may have. But of course, in the meantime, please feel free to drop any questions that may come up during our presentation in the chat.

If we go to the next slide, please, Renate. And the next one. And I think the next one. So, first, we turn our attention to the status of implementation. As I only have a few minutes to cover this, I would like to encourage you, if you're interested to dive into further details on this topic, to review our pre-ICANN85 briefing, which provides a lot more detail on the different projects that are supporting the implementation of the 2020 Sixth Round. And I'm hoping one of my colleagues can drop the link in the chat channel for you.

This slide is just a brief reminder on the critical path of getting to the opening of the application window, which is scheduled for the 13th of April, 2026. As you can see on the slide, there are already a lot of green boxes, which means a lot of work that has already been completed. Blue boxes, which is work that is well underway. And then we do have one orange box where we do have some risks, where we're actively mitigating those as we move closer to the date. And just to be clear, although the box says gTLD application processing systems development, the system development part has been completed.

The work that's currently underway, and my colleagues Steve and Eduardo will provide some more details shortly, relates to the testing of the systems and making sure these are ready for use. And just to be clear, this focuses on the systems that we need for opening up the round, because there is still some work that will remain after we've opened the round in relation to aspects that are needed for a later point in time.

And the completion of all these pieces will then get us to the opening of the application window. Although there is still, as I said, some implementation work that will continue beyond that date, most of the activity at that point will move to the processing phase, which we'll also talk about in a couple of slides.

Go to the next slide, please. Thank you. Just a few pieces of information that may be helpful here. The 2026 Applicant Guidebook, which is the source of information for anyone

interested in applying for a New gTLD, was published last year on the 16th of December.

In the meantime, the translated version in the five UN languages is also available on the New gTLD program website. As stipulated in the guidebook, the opening of the 2026 round is set for 30 April 2026. The window for applications will remain open for a period of 15 weeks, which means that applications must be submitted by the 12th of August 2026 at the latest to be considered.

During a back of the [inaudible – 05:21] calculation, and it's really important to remember that our assumptions for these dates are based on receiving 2000 applications, Reveal Day may occur prior to ICANN87. But as I said, this is an estimate at this point in time. We will confirm dates after the close of the application window, and once we've confirmed the number of applications that have been received.

If we go to the next slide, please. Thank you. So, for those of you that have attended these sessions before, this slide should look familiar by now as it's how we've been tracking progress for the different projects in the program. I won't go into further detail here. Obviously, happy to answer any questions. But as I said before, the pre-ICANN briefing includes details for each of these projects, their status, as well as recent and upcoming activities. So, please review that if you're interested to dive into some of the details for each of these elements.

Next, I'll be handing it to Karla, who will speak to you about one of the boxes that you saw on the critical path slides, one that was in Bulu, namely related to the 2026 base registry agreements. Karla, the floor is yours.

KARLA HAKANSSON

Thanks so much, Marika. Hello, everyone. So, I think most of you are probably aware of this, but we have had two Public Comment proceedings on the full proposed 2026 Base Registry Agreement. I've provided the links for both the proceedings and the Public Comment summary and analysis reports for both of those Public Comments.

If you can go to the next slide, please. Since our last discussion in Dublin, we have completed also the Public Comment proceeding to Specification 14. And just as a reminder, this is a follow-up from the board taking action on the IDN EPDP Phase 1 recommendations 7.4 and 7.5. From that, we updated Specification 14 and posted it for its own separate Public Comment proceeding from the 10th of December through the 27th of January.

The proceeding is now closed, and the Public Comment summary and analysis report is also posted. In addition to that, we had a Public Comment proceeding on the trademark clearinghouse requirements, TMCH requirements. That was also posted in mid-December and closed on the 27th of January, and the Public Comment summary and analysis report is posted.

What you may not be aware of is that we have a page that is dedicated to the 2026 Base RA, which I've just included into the chat, a link to that page. It's on the Next Round website. From there, you can see all of the information about the Public Comment proceedings as well as the Public Comment summary and analysis reports. We'll be posting other updates to the base registry agreement as we have them.

One of those in the next few days will be an FAQ on the proposed 2026 Base RA that I hope will be answering questions that the community may have on the progress and the elements of the proposed agreement.

Next slide, please. This slide should look familiar. I've had a similar timeline posted in previous discussions, and as Marika mentioned, we are preparing to have the draft 2026 Base RA submitted to the ICANN Board for their review and their consideration in advance of ICANN85. We are on track to do this now that we have the Public Comment proceedings closed and the information available and incorporated into the proposed agreement. We do anticipate that the draft 2026 or the 2026 Base RA, once the Board takes action, will be available soon after ICANN85. And again, in the deck, you will see a link to the web page so you can stay up to date on any information relevant to the 2026 RA.

With that, I will open the floor to see if there are any questions. I don't see any. All right. And who am I handing it over to you. Thank you very much. Marika?

MARIKA KONINGS

Thanks, Karla. Appreciate it. And just to note, like of course, if we can take some quick questions, we'll do, but we'll try to hold questions until the end to make sure we get through all the content. I know for today's session, we only have 60 minutes and quite a lot of information. But as noted previously, feel free to already drop questions in the chat. The team is taking note of those so we can make sure to get through those by the end of this call.

So as I said previously, we're now switching our attention to the program processing status and more specifically, our readiness for that phase. You can go to the next slide as well, Renate. Yes. Thank you.

So first of all, we'll have a look at our launch readiness governance processes. These are really to ensure operational, organizational, and technical readiness for launch as well as beyond. In the case of Operational Readiness, we're looking at ensuring that processes and procedures are well established to support the delivery of the 2026 round services. This is, for example, something we're testing through end-to-end testing.

Then we look at Organizational Readiness. Do we have the resources in place and are these ready to do the work that is expected of them? Our readiness team is supporting the development of training materials for staff as well as vendors, for example, to assist us in that area.

And then we have Technical Readiness. Are our systems ready and operational to support delivery of service? You'll hear more about that work in this area in a couple of slides. Assessing our readiness in these different areas is done by measuring against objective criteria at multiple points up to the opening of the application window.

We're referring to this as our stage gate and go-no-go process. On the next slide, we'll have some further details about that process. You can go there, Renate. Thank you. This gives you an overview of the gates as well as the checkpoints where we are going to go through to ensure that we're ready and confident to open the New gTLD application window.

There are first two stage gate exercises, one that we already did in January and a second one that we're currently in the middle of. The objective of this assessment is to confirm our readiness as well as risk in a number of areas, namely project management and governance, operational readiness, organizational readiness, and then also a technical readiness.

For each of these areas, there are a number of questions that the team is asked, and these are based on our assessment of readiness in these different areas by the time that we need those, because obviously we don't have everything in place at this point in time. So, it's about the plans and how we are executing against those plans that allow us to confirm, yes, we are ready, maybe, but we do

have some risk we need to address or accept, or no, we don't think we will be ready.

So then the results of those stage gate exercises means that we're able to identify a number of areas where further work may be needed through assigning actions and putting specific plans in place so that we're able to address where we may have gaps or areas that require further work.

And then at the end of the second stage gate process, if there are no critical items that cannot be resolved before the end of April, we then expect to be able to confirm our commitment to open the window for application on the 30th of April. However, after that, we'll still go through what we're referring to as go, no-go checkpoints.

These really serve to monitor that plans are on track and address any new issues that may arise throughout that timeframe. These are expected to happen all the way through until the end of April. Again, to really make sure that we keep a close eye on progress and are able to address issues that emerge.

We'll use the same approach as well for future milestones or where we have transition points in the program. For example, to assess that we're ready to move from the prioritization draw to a string evaluation, which is basically the next stage after opening and the immediate steps that follow that.

So, I hope this has helped you to give you some insight into the due diligence that we as a team are undertaking to make sure that we're all ready and prepared on all fronts as we move forward to the next stage of the program. So, with that, I'll now hand it over to my colleague and deputy Lars Hoffmann.

LARS HOFFMANN

Thanks, Marika. Hi, everyone. My name is Lars Hoffmann. Like I said, I'm a deputy based in Brussels, and I'll walk you through a few of the maybe behind the scenes issues where the team is getting ready for the launch in just a couple of months.

First here, there's an overview for you of the New gTLD program, a processing phase program structure. As you can imagine, it takes a small village to get the program off the ground and keep it running as well. I won't go through all the boxes here, but you see obviously the ICANN Board of Directors sits at the top, followed by the program sponsors and the program leadership team.

We then have an operating committee as well internally where key decisions are being taken, as well as the steering committee. You see that here going out from the program sponsors. And then kind of flowing into the leadership into the program. If you want, it kind of makes up the program of the different projects. You see that in blue.

These are the different teams of the 2026 round program from the community input management. This is Jared's team working, for

example, the SPIRT. We have further on the right Name Collision, Francisco, the gTLD application processing. The GAP project is my colleague, Yuko and Justin, who are -- Yuko cannot be here today. I suspect Justin is on the call.

And then below we have the ICANN Supporting Functions. So, these are functions that are already and have been in place, remain in place. But we obviously rely on our colleagues there to operate the program. And all these different functions are involved to varying degrees intensely in the program as well.

The next slide, please. Some of you may wonder what is it all these people do. A small snapshot of that here. We have a lot of different tracks that are running concurrently. And you see at the top we have obviously a project management that runs through the whole of the team. And this is led by our colleague, Julie Hoffmeister.

And we have the business requirements that are being developed. And you see the two stars here is the key days probably most people are interested in. One is today. And that one is the anticipated opening at the end of April. So, these are the business requirements we're putting into place, SRDs, et cetera, you can imagine.

The second and maybe currently the biggest focus as well of the team is the systems development. The term is the name of the application system that both the applicants and I can internally use to submit/process applications. You can see here there's different builds. One of that actually will happen after the opening of the

round, build six. You can imagine what is contained in that build is unrelated to any capabilities that are required for opening the round and submitting applications.

And so, some of the different tools and integrations that the team has already been working on and completed, you see that in the dark blue here. And then at the bottom, what is still ongoing at the moment is the application publication system or publishing system, the APS, that's under build at the moment as well. You see that coming to an end in July.

For most of you or many of you, as you know, we'll get to the next slide as well, that the reveal day is anticipated to be happening at some point in Q3 this year. So, by that time, obviously, that system has to be ready as well. Then we have a large track as well of vendor sourcing.

The round is based on a lot of robust valuation processes, and many of these are conducted by third party vendors. You see here, some of these are already contracted, others we are in the process of contracting or in the process of developing RFPs. We do have a website that lists as well the process, the RFP processes, upcoming and ongoing. So, for those of you interested, click there.

And then finally, the readiness team, my colleague Kristy will speak to that in greater detail later on. But we're obviously looking at training exercises and execution that is already underway, and then launch readiness as well is something that is ongoing. Before I go to the next slide, I see a couple of questions here in the chat. I

wonder, Marika, do you want to answer Karen's question on the risk? I'm happy to do that. It's probably a straightforward question. Marika, go ahead.

MARIKA KONINGS

Yeah, thanks, Lars. So, I think we've discussed this previously on kind of the risk. It's where the timeframe that we have to complete all the testing and address whatever comes out of the testing is a relatively narrow window. So, in that regard, again, there's always a risk that you find something that you need to address and may not have the time to do so.

At this point, we don't have any indications, but obviously we're still going through that process. We're talking a little bit, I think after, no, maybe after this slide or maybe the next, a bit about the testing that is underway. So hopefully, that gives a little bit more insight into the work that's underway. And just to be clear, we're not doing community beta testing, but that doesn't mean there's not a whole lot of other testing that is happening. Because, of course, we do want to make sure that we have a reliable and secure system before we open that to applicants.

LARS HOFFMANN

Yeah, thanks, Marika. I would suggest we hold the question. There's a question, I see Mark as well on TAMS. There's a question from Michael and Mark on TAMS. We also have a question on ASP.

I'm a little bit concerned that we are jumping back and forth between the topics. Marika, I see you nodding.

Can I suggest we go through the slides and hold these to the end? They will not be forgotten, guys, but I think it made more sense if that's okay with you. If I can go to the next slide, please. Thank you, Renato. Very quickly, this is a high-level overview of the application journey, if you want.

The timeline here, you see the big draft on the top right. These are assumptions that are based on roughly 2,000 applications. The timelines match what is currently indicated as well for the different scenarios in the Applicant Guidebook. Nothing has changed here. The string evaluation community input period, this comes after string confirmation day. That's part of the pre-evaluation processes.

With that, these are not fixed times. These are also timelines we expect to mostly applicable to those applications. That will go through the review process without any, let's say, major detours. We saw in the last round, GAC advice, objections, CPE were all factors that we cannot influence from a processing perspective from the ICANN side, but that significantly impacted the processing times of applications.

Nonetheless, we expect at the moment, these are the working assumptions when these different processes will come into place. As I said, this is the information as was indicated already in the Application Guidebook. With that, I will continue to collect the

questions in the chat. As I said, we'll get back to those, but first, I'll pass it on to my colleague, Rob. Rob, over to you.

ROB GOMEZ

Thanks, Lars. Hello, I'm Rob Gomez with ICANN Vendor Management to discuss the vendor selection process. As Lars mentioned, there are key 2026 round services where third-party vendor support is needed, and the sourcing and contracting process to find qualified service providers involves formal requests for proposals or RFPs.

What you're seeing here on this slide is a snapshot of the remaining RFPs in varying stages of the process. Some have already closed, meaning there are no more responses being received and the proposals are being evaluated. I wanted to highlight a couple of RFPs that are open right now. We have one for the Name Collision Temporary Delegation Service, and then the other is for the Geographic Names and Reserve Names panels, which is an application evaluation service.

A few others that we're gearing up to launch this year will be for auctions, financial capability, the independent objectives, and then two other Name Collision services which revolve around high-risk strengths. We welcome and appreciate your help to spread the word far and wide through your networks.

We really hope to engage with as many qualified vendors as possible, and so we encourage all who are interested in a particular

service or services to participate in the RFPs. If you know or are a potential provider for any of the listed services, please direct indications of interest or inquiries to gdsvendorservices@ICANN.org, and I'll share that in the chat as well.

Next slide, please. A couple of resources here. As Lars also mentioned, we do have details for RFPs published on ICANN.org, starting with the bottom link there, which is a sourcing timeline. That covers RFP planning details and statuses. We have links directly to the RFPs that are published. We also have links to announcements of service providers that have been already selected, so you can find all of those details there and brief descriptions of the upcoming RFPs and the specific services.

Vendor management also held a bidder conference. Apologies for the spelling error there on the slide, but this covered 2026 round details and also an overview of the business needs and where panels are required for different services, the types of service areas, and where that vendor support is needed. We did go over sort of estimated timelines, and we did open it up to Q&A at the end, so that webinar was recorded. You can find it at that link, which we'll also share in the chat for anyone who's interested. And with that, I'm handing it off to the next presenter. Thank you.

EDUARDO ALVAREZ

Thank you, Rob. This is Eduardo Alvarez. I'm going to be speaking about the technical readiness aspect. Next slide, please. Thank

you. So, we have completed a lot of work in terms of system development that is going to be needed to support processing of TLD applications for the next round.

We can see on the left column the system that we completed development for, starting with the LGR API tool, which is going to be a service that we will use to perform validations on the apply for strings received in our TLD Application Management System to ensure that these strings conform with DNS standards, the routes on label generation rules, as well as policy requirements for those strings.

The SMD validation service, another component that will be used to help verify that SMD files, which is documentation required from .brand TLD applicants, to help verify that those documents are consistent with their application and their apply for strings.

Oracle integration, this is to facilitate automation of the invoicing process from ICANN to applicants to make sure that they can pay for the necessary gTLD application fees, as well as evaluation fees where applicable. Our string similarity tool, this is a system that will be used with the purpose of assisting our string similarity panelists during the evaluation process to identify similarity between apply for strings once we get to that evaluation phase in the program.

And the Name Collision observatory, which is a system that will be used to give applicants an idea of the potential risk of name collisions on apply for strings. On the right side, we can see

development of systems that is still in progress with our TAMS system or TLD Application Management System. We're going to speak a little bit more about it in this next slide, but basically, it's where we're going to be doing the intake of TLD applications and the processing of those all the way through the contracting phase of the program.

We also have our application publication system or APS for short, which is the system that we will be using to make the publication of the application information to the public, as well as changes that this application go through, et cetera, similar to how it was done in the previous round.

Our Application Comment Forum or ACF for short, which is as the name says, the system that we will be relying on to receive comments from the public to make sure that these are processed as per the Applicant Guidebook rules.

The naming services portal, which is our existing system that ICANN use is to engage with our contracted parties. In this case, the updates are being done to the system to make sure we're able to support applicants from the next round after executing the contract as TLD registry operators.

And lastly, the TLD delegate, sorry, temporary delegation management system. This is an outsourced system, but it's still in progress. It's worth mentioning that the RFP for this outsourcing has been launched as of yesterday, and we're expecting bidder proposals by the 6th of April to move on with this process. This is a

system that will be used to, as the name says, support the temporary delegations of applied for strings once we get to that stage of the program.

Next slide, please. So, the TLD Application Management System, or TAMS, is one of our largest systems that's being implemented. As I mentioned before, this is expected to be used not only as a system for intake of applications, but also to help process these applications throughout the program. It offers functionality for three big groups of users, as we can see here in core functionality for our applicants.

It will support the processes for them to submit their applications. And then it's also the system that we will be using to engage with them via inquiries, respond to clarifying questions that may be issued by evaluators. They're going to receive and respond to application comments that may be received to their applications as well. They can submit change requests if needed for their applications, and then they can monitor their application status and progress, as well as payment and refund statuses, among other information.

From the ICANN side, our staff will be relying on this system for general processing of the applications. They involve several activities that we see on the slide, contention set management, processing change requests, updating application statuses, working date, processing evaluations, and publishing the results, all the way through our contracting stages.

We're also going to be using this system to provide the invoicing information from TAMS to our team on the finance department to make sure that invoicing and payments are done and processed as expected. This is going to be our main communication channel with applicants and panelists, and just tracking different programs or activities that is going to be impacting the applications.

On the side of evaluation panelists, as you know, there are several evaluations involved to process applications, and TAMS is going to be the system where these evaluation panels are going to be receiving application information. They will be able to submit conflict of interest. If there is any to ICANN via the system, they will be using the system to receive the information about the applications that they will be evaluating, and they will be providing their determinations for the corresponding evaluation through the system as well to make sure that it gets communicated properly to the applicants and the public that's needed.

On the next slide, I'm going to turn it to my colleague, Steve, who's going to help us cover a little bit more about the testing methodology.

STEVE ALLISON

Thank you, Eduardo. Hello, everyone. My name is Steve Allison. I want to briefly share how we're readying the next round systems for launch, and specifically the TAMS as the core system, how our

teams are working together to make sure they're thoroughly tested and secure before our release.

There are really two key dimensions to our readiness approach. The first is breadth of coverage, meaning what we test. We're not just testing isolated features within the systems. We're really testing end-to-end business workflows, user roles and access scenarios, data documentation, integrations, rules, configurations, and exception handling, and operational and non-functional needs such as our performance, InfoSec audibility, and resiliency of the system.

This is important because launch issues often happen at the seams where users and processes and systems interact, and not just within a single screen or one web form, but across many systems and many interfaces and workflows. The team is going through quite a thorough regression test of all the system features that have been developed.

Secondly is the depth of coverage, meaning how thoroughly we go through our testing process. This testing is grounded in our acceptance criteria of the requirements that we've written with our subject matter experts across the features we've developed, ensuring that we have clear testable definitions of what a feature's completion means, quality assurance and regression testing, end-to-end testing and user acceptance testing with our internal business subject matter experts, and really going through and validating against real-world business scenarios.

And finally, a complete security and penetration testing with an internal team plus an independent reviewer. So, when you add these up, we get quite a lot of feedback, and this is really the period of readiness that the team's actively engaged in at this time. All those pieces of feedback we go through and triage and prioritize and decide what needs to be included for changes or defect resolution prior to our go-live.

And so, it's not just one layer of testing, it's really a multi-layered readiness process designed to identify and reduce risk before launch. And the goal is for the team to have a shared confidence across product, engineering, quality assurance, security, and our business stakeholder teams. This is how we're approaching our readiness from a systems perspective, and happy to take any questions at the end of the call. Thank you. Next slide.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Thanks, Steve. My name is Kristy Buckley, and I serve as the lead for ICANN's Applicant Support Program. For those that may not be familiar, the Applicant Support Program, or ASP, provides financial and non-financial support for gTLD applicants that apply for and qualify for support.

The ASP was open to receive applications for 13 months from the 19th of November of 2024 till the 19th of December 2025. So, this section of the presentation provides an update on ASP application processing and other work underway in the program. So, here you will see the application status, the total submitted, those that were

not considered active at the bottom, and those that are in review now.

So, you can see here we have 12 in total that have qualified, either conditionally or fully. We have another 62 still in process. We did receive the vast majority of applications to this program in the final weeks of the application submission period, so we have put together additional resources to help with the processing of that volume at the last moment.

The next slide shows the geographic distribution of the applications received. So, you can see here we got 75 total across all of the five ICANN regions, 27 countries and territories, and the bars, which many of you in the community will be familiar with, show the total number of applications from that region and then the distribution across the number of countries. So, for example, in Africa we received 10 total applications, and this was across six different countries or territories in that region.

The next slide provides some additional updates on the program besides processing. So, we have the ASP capacity development work that we're doing. What we wanted to share here is the work that we did, especially in the lead-up to the close of ASP application submission period. So, in that lead-up, ASP applicants received daily email messages that included helpful information, resources, reminders of deadlines, frequently asked questions, and links to available resources, including our pro bono service providers and

mentors who have very kindly volunteered their time to help applicants in their journey.

We also have encouraged applicants to attend ICANN meetings and have provided a curated list of ICANN85 sessions as well as the previous Dublin meeting sessions. We also held weekly office hours in the lead-up to the close of the application submission period. Those were recorded and they're available on the ASP website, and we also published the supported applicant toolkit. So, this is kind of a one-stop shop of resources that they might need once they qualify for support and they start preparing their gTLD applications.

As I mentioned on the application processing side, we've ramped up internal resources, and we're also implementing process efficiencies to streamline application processing following the close of that extended submission period on the 19th of December. We're also preparing a request to the Board for additional funding should the number of qualified applicants exceed what we budgeted for, which was 45. So, as you saw, we have more than that in the pipeline. There's still a possibility that more than 45 could qualify, and so we would like to seek some budget reassurance on that should we exceed that amount, which would be wonderful if we did.

On the pro bono service providers and mentors, we updated the list. This is a publicly available list. All of them know that they're asked to prioritize ASP or supported applicants, but we

reorganized it by service type so that it's easier to see who provides financial services versus business services versus technical services. So, that's available on the site, and that's something that we frequently send to ASP applicants so that they're aware of those resources. We also held an update webinar just yesterday for pro bono service providers and mentors now that the application submission period for ASP has closed.

Lastly, and I think there was a question in the chat about this, we have work ongoing on continuous monitoring evaluation. So, along those lines, we have issued two surveys. The first one is an awareness outreach and communication engagement survey, which is a mouthful. That is complete, but we did have a low response rate. So, this was a survey that went out to people that attended an event about the applicant support program or the New gTLD program.

We wanted to get feedback from them on, was that event useful for them? Did it provide helpful information? Did they understand the information received, and did it help them make an informed decision about whether or not to apply?

The second survey is to applicants that have gone through the pipeline, so to speak, the application process. What was that like for them? What was their experience? Are there any challenges that they encountered there? The response rate on that one is also low. We are sending out regular reminders to all ASP applicants to complete that, but any help that folks can offer in the community,

if you know an ASP applicant, please encourage them to complete those surveys, because it is very helpful as we think about Continuous Improvement for future rounds of the applicant support program.

And with that, I will hand it over to my colleagues in the RSP program. Thank you.

FRANCISCO ARIAS

Thank you, Kristy. This is Francisco Arias, so I'm presenting in Gustavo's behalf. So, the RSP program is another part of the New gTLD program, and this is focused on evaluating the registered service providers. These are the companies that provide the services behind the registry operators. So, for example, DNS, GNSX, RDAP, EPP.

So, in this program, we have two application windows. The first one, the pre-evaluation window that are run until May last year, and we are in the tail end of the evaluation of those applicants. The initial list of evaluators piece from that window was published last 30 January, and it has been updated daily as applicants finalize or clear their evaluations.

You can find the link to the list of RSPs over there. And like I said, we update daily according to who clears the evaluation. Important to note that this list of RSPs includes applicants that have cleared. In the RSP evaluation, there are two evaluations. One that is documentation, and we call it the technical screening, and another

one that is a practical testing using the registry system testing or RST 2.0 system.

So, in that list, you will see those that have clear both technical screening and technical testing. Those are basically the ones that have clear RSP evaluation, but we also publish those that have cleared the documentation evaluation, the technical screening, but that is still in the process of doing technical testing so that people can see that they are in progress.

We plan to publish the rest of the data related RSP applications, that is the actual application, so the answers to the questions. I should say the answers to the questions that are marked as public in the RSP handbook of those applications, plus the IDN services, additional services that the RSP apply for.

So, the list of evaluated RSPs will be updated to incorporate that information. The plan is to do it early March, so we are only a few days from that time. Can we go to the next slide? So, actually, the latest set of public statistics for the RSP program can be found in this link. One other thing that I should mention is that I mentioned that we have a second round of RSP applications, so that will run in parallel with the gTLD application window.

So, we will reopen for organizations that are interested in becoming RSPs, and the window will be exactly the same as the gTLD application window, so people that are interested in participating and becoming RSPs for gTLDs, they can do so in the

upcoming window. And with this, I'm going to turn the microphone to I don't know who.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Back to me.

FRANCISCO ARIAS

There you go, Kristy.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Thanks, everyone. This is Kristy Buckley again. I will talk to you about applicant and community readiness. I'm just realizing that you've probably heard the term readiness about 200 times already on this webinar. There's a lot of things to get ready, but this section is really focused on applicant readiness, community readiness, in contrast to the operational or technical readiness that Marika, Lars, Eduardo mentioned.

My team is responsible for preparing various stakeholder audiences, applicants, community staff, vendors, so that they have the knowledge and the ability to participate in the 2026 round. So, this slide shows some of the plans that we have in terms of readiness webinars provided. We've got a lot on tap for ICANN85, and we've done some planning in terms of additional webinars and sessions going all the way through the applicant journey, including community input, objections, appeals, and overview later on during ICANN87.

So, these are some of the key milestones to keep in mind, although this is subject to change depending on schedules, et cetera. Where possible, we'll try to deliver these at ICANN meetings, but there may also be virtual webinars, including some that we've already had, which I'll talk about on the next slide.

So, we had two webinars to build foundational knowledge about the New gTLD Program 2026 Round in January. The first was the introduction to the 2026 round, and the second was the applicant journey overview. These are both recorded and available on the website, so we strongly encourage folks, especially those that might be new to the program, to go back and review those so that you have that foundational knowledge in order to build upon that as the additional readiness materials are underway.

On the next slide, we talk a little bit about the sessions that we have planned for ICANN85. So, we have two plenary sessions here. These are offered both obviously in person and online for virtual participants. These will cover the application submission overview. This is to prepare applicants for the requirements of a gTLD application and what the application experience will be.

We'll also have a TLD Application Management System introduction and demo. This provides a review of the process within the system, demonstrations of navigation, and the application steps.

On the next slide, this is a deeper dive. So, again, this is why those more foundational knowledge webinars from January will be

helpful for anyone that's new to this, because we have six additional sessions proposed here that go deeper into the RSP evaluation program, the IDN and variant applicant journey, a .brand applicant journey, geographic names, reserve names, community applicant journey, as well as a final wrap-up and open Q&A session.

Not reflected on this slide is the GAC Capacity Development session that will be offered. We've been working with GAC leadership on how to structure that, but that's another piece of the community readiness part that will be happening during ICANN85.

Lastly, on the next slide, we've provided a little bit more guidance on where to direct questions. So, this is to ensure fairness, transparency, equal access to information for all participants. We're kindly asking people to direct their questions through these following channels. So, either in an open public forum, such as the prep week session or an ICANN85 session, so that that's on record and everyone can hear the question as well as the answer, or emails to ICANN Global Support.

Those are then triaged and appropriate subject matter experts are brought in as needed to help respond to those. But what that does, if questions come into Global Support, is it also helps to build their knowledge base so that they can answer similar questions they receive in the future. It also helps to inform updates to our frequently asked questions on the website.

You also have an opportunity, once the application is submitted, to send application specific questions about your application through the application system, but that won't be available until after submission. And with that, I think we're opening for Q&A alternate -- I don't know if I'm turning it to you.

SAMANTHA MANCIA

It's me.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Thank you, Sam.

SAMANTHA MANCIA

Yeah. Hi, yes, I'm Samantha Mancia. I'm going to go over Q&A today. So, I see we've gotten a lot of great questions in the chat, and our team has been responding to those. So, if you haven't gone through and scrolled back a little bit, you may want to do so to see some of those answers. But now, we'll open it up for some additional new questions.

Feel free to raise your hand if you'd like to speak, or again, you can put your question in the chat, and we'll have somebody speak to that as well. So, we'll give it a moment for folks to raise their hand. Okay, I see we have a couple hands popping up. First, we have Anil. Did you want to start, Anil?

ANIL KUMAR JAIN

Yeah. Thank you, Anil, for the record. I have a simple question. Whether the online status of the application, means current status, will be available during the application process? It means that once an applicant submits the application, until the application is approved or delegated, is there any portal where they can find what is the status of whether it is getting approved, it is under consideration, or something like that? Thank you.

SAMANTHA MANCIA

Thank you, Anil. And I think maybe, Marika, would you like to speak to this one?

MARIKA KONINGS

Thanks. I was actually hoping that either Eduardo or Justin may be able to help with that question. I see Justin's hand is up.

SAMANTHA MANCIA

There we go. Justin, please.

JUSTIN HO

Hi, yep, happy to answer. Thank you for your question, Anil. I'm sorry, if I understood your question fully, after the applicants submit their application via the TLD Application Management System, what we're referring to as TAMS, applicants will be able to log back into the system to submit questions specific to the applications, look at their specific status of their applications as well.

So, that's the tool that ICANN is using to correspond with applicants. Additionally, after or on reveal day, we're going to be publishing the public portions of all applications on our public page. So, the statuses of all applications will be visible to everyone starting on reveal day. Thank you.

SAMANTHA MANCIA

And thank you, Anil, for the question. Next, we have Anne. Anne, over to you.

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE

Thanks, Sam. I guess I thought that the questions would be taken in order from the chat from questions that were not answered there, but I'm very happy to raise my hand and talk, and both questions are about Name Collision. Name Collision, temporary delegation in terms of vendors.

This was a question for Rob. I'm not quite understanding and didn't really understand what was put out for Public Comment either, how a third party is involved in temporary delegation, because it looks to me like temporary delegation has to be done at the PTI level, so I don't really understand what the third-party role is with respect to temporary delegation. And wouldn't that have to involve PTI providing that function? That's the first Name Collision question that I put in the chat. Thanks. I have a second one.

SAMANTHA MANCIA

Thank you, Anne. And I see Francisco is ready to speak to this.

FRANCISCO ARIAS

Yeah, and I provide the responses to both questions in the chat. Maybe you didn't see it because I responded not exactly at the time you posed the questions, but the answers are there. Very briefly, the temporary delegation system is for the DNS service at the TLD level, not at the root. So, that's the simple answer. Hope that makes sense.

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE

I just don't know what that means.

FRANCISCO ARIAS

It's for DNS service for TLDs, not for the root. So, this will be equivalent to the registry. Does that make sense?

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE

Is that going to feed into the Name Collision observatory then? Is that feeding in, is that information going to feed into the new Name Collision observatory?

FRANCISCO ARIAS

No, but the information will be used to assess the risk for to assess the risk for a stream being high risk. Does that make sense?

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE

So, who does the temporary delegation? It'll be PTI, right? And then data from the temporary delegation goes to the third-party provider?

FRANCISCO ARIAS

So, PTI manages the root. So, the strings are going to be delegated from the root, obviously. So, PTI has that role in the sense that the strings are going to request to temporarily delegate the strings. So, they're going to set proper records, DNS records in the root. But someone needs to manage the DNS service for those.

And so that's the temporary delegation system. We're going to have a vendor working for us, offer that service for those temporary TLDs and provide the data to us so that we can assess and confirm that the strings that are being temporarily delegated are indeed not high risk.

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE

Okay, thanks, Francisco.

FRANCISCO ARIAS

Sure.

SAMANTHA MANCIA

Thank you, both. And noting we did answer everything that was put in the chat except for the latest question from Jim, which I see

he has a hand raised. So, Jim, did you want to speak to that question?

JIM PRENDERGAST

Yeah, thanks a lot. I appreciate the, this is one of those webinars I'm going to have to go back and listen to again, because ton of information presented and appreciative of that. And looking forward to all the sessions coming up at ICANN.

I know there is a demo session scheduled for the meeting for the TAMS system, but when will potential applicants actually have the ability to go into the system itself to play around with it so that they can familiarize themselves with it? Is that going to be the opening of the window like April 30th or will there be a period prior to that for familiarization? Thanks.

SAMANTHA MANCIA

Thank you, Jim. And I see Marika is ready to respond to that one.

MARIKA KONINGS

Yeah, thanks, Jim. You answered the question. It will be on the 30th of April when we open the system. We recognize that that doesn't allow a lot of time to kind of get familiar. So, that's what we're really trying as well as part of the sessions in Mumbai to create that familiarity through demos, screenshots, videos.

And the team is also working on manuals to help kind of applicants familiarize themselves and be prepared for what they need to

provide and what the system will look like. So, again, we know in an ideal world and if we would have had more time, we might have been able to kind of do that differently. But in the timeline, we're working against currently, it will be when the system opens for applications.

SAMANTHA MANCIA

Thank you very much, Marika. And thank you, Jim, for the question. With that, I think that brings us to the end of the webinar. So, thank you, everybody, for attending and looking forward to more at ICANN85.

MARIKA KONINGS

Thanks, everyone.

JUSTIN HO

Thanks, everyone.

SAMANTHA MANCIA

Thanks, all.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]