
ICANN85 | Prep Week – ICANN Grant Program Update
Wednesday, February 25, 2026 – 01:00 to 02:00 AM IST

MADELEINE WERBELOW

Hello and welcome to the ICANN85 Prep Week Grant Program Session on Wednesday, 25 February 2026 at 19:30 UTC. My name is Madeleine Werbelow and I'm the Participation Manager for this session. Please note that this session is being recorded and is governed by the ICANN Expected Standards of Behavior and ICANN Community Anti-Harassment Policy. Interpretation for this session will include English, French, and Spanish. During this session, questions and comments will be addressed during the question-and-answer portions at the end of each section of the presentation.

If you'd like to speak during the session, please raise your hand in Zoom. When called upon, virtual participants will be given permission to unmute in Zoom. Please rename your sign and name in Zoom with your full name. Please state your name for the record. The language will speak if speaking a language other than English and speak at a reasonable pace. With that I will hand the floor over to Shayna Robinson, Grant Program Director.

SHAYNA ROBINSON

Hello. Thank you, Madeleine. I am Shayna Robinson, the Grant Program Director. And before we start, I want to give our SVP, Xavier Calvez, an opportunity to speak to us.

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.

XAVIER CALVEZ

Thank you, Shayna. Thank you, Madeleine. Welcome, everyone to this session. We're very happy to have the participants here paying attention to this program and providing feedback and input. And also, we'll be able to speak about the opportunities to do more of that during the upcoming ICANN meeting 85 in Mumbai.

I also want to thank the board members who are attending this, including the members of the board caucus that provides oversight over this program, and its chair, Alan. So, thank you, Alan, for being there. And with that, Shayna, please proceed.

SHAYNA ROBINSON

Wonderful. Thank you so much. So today, we really wanted to take the opportunity to share an update of where we are with the program and some status of our current round of grantees. We're very excited with the progress that we've achieved so far and so today we really wanted to focus on sharing some updates with you about the status of the program.

So, if we can move to the next slide, you'll see we'll start with a bit of background to the program. Many of you may already know this information, but for the purposes of those of us who are just joining the discussion, we want to make sure that they have good information about the program.

We'll talk a bit about, again, the status of where we are today. We'll also speak a bit about our internal review, the review of the first

cycle that we are in the process of conducting. And then we'll get into some next steps and activities that are upcoming that you should be aware of. And finally, we'll close with a question-and-answer session. I'll try my best to monitor the chat. Madeleine will also help me do that as well as in the Q&A pod. So, please feel free to share information there as you need to. Thank you. Thanks, Madeleine.

So again, just a bit introduction and background to the program, if you go to the next slide, you can see these are our four pillars that support the objectives of the program. This program comes to us from a very long cross-community working group process that was implemented many years ago before I joined ICANN. And through that work, we arrived at these sort of four main pillars to support the grant program and the funding that is to be dispersed through the program.

This means that all current grantees and future applicants really should be supporting projects or initiatives that are based around these four pillars related to development and evolution of the unique identifier systems, capacity development, and infrastructure support in communities that need it the most. Advancing future-oriented initiatives or developments and innovating around standards, as well as addressing and expanding participation and inclusion throughout our stakeholder communities.

If we look at the next slide, you'll see that we have organized ourselves and again, the design of the program really comes from our cross-community working group and the recommendations that were given to us by them or by that group. The way that we've done this and designed this is to disperse funds through tranches.

So, the first cycle was a \$10 million tranche of funding from the large group of auction proceeds that we received through that 2012 round for new gTLDs. And the intent is that each cycle would give out another portion or tranche of funding. So, we're not giving out all of the money at one time, but really to do it on a cycle basis.

For the first cycle, we've limited the amount of funding that would be available to applicants to a maximum of \$500,000 and we also capped the duration of those projects at 24 months. As we move through and think through future cycles, those elements of a specific cycle may change.

If we go to the next slide, we'll start to talk a bit about the status of our first cycle and where we are and where we have arrived today. So, in the next slide, it's just a bit of an overview of the first cycle of funding of the 23 grants that were received. You can visit our webpage if you want to find out more information about who those grantees are. There are nice descriptions of their projects and the items that these grants or activities that these grants support.

The total amount of funding was just under \$10 million. Again, this was the tranche amount for this first cycle. The average funding

amount is just under that \$500,000 cap and the average duration across the 23 projects is 21 months.

The next slide shows us just a quick screen grab of our website. So again, if you're interested to learn about those projects, please visit our website. I think the link has been dropped in the chat so that you can see all of the information about the projects that we're supporting.

On the next slide, I want to talk a little bit about where we are in terms of first interim reporting. So, the same way that we don't disperse all of the funding of all auction proceeds at once, we also do not expense or disperse all of the grant funding at once to each individual grantee. We have a payment and reporting schedule so that each grantee receives a portion of funding and then has to report on the use of those funds and the achievements and milestones that they've hit during that reporting period.

To date, we have received 22 reports of those 23 grantees. We have one that we are expecting by the end of February and 20 of those have been approved with two of them still in [inaudible - 00:08:05]. This means that 83% of second installments so again, this is the second payment of this first tranche of funding, 83% of that money has been dispersed, bringing us to a total of \$4.7 million disbursed against that \$10 million trench to date. And we're very happy, excited that we've been on the activity of the grant program to get the money out.

We go to the next slide you'll see a few indicators that we're tracking and measuring and that we want to share with you to ensure that you understand what we're doing with the program and to help illuminate as we move forward how these projects are going.

So again, the first interim progress reports, 22 of those have been submitted. We are working on a blog post that will sort of summarize some of the great things that we're learning and finding through those reports. With the final one, again, we're anticipating at the end of this month.

28% represents how much [inaudible - 00:09:18] towards the goals and outcomes and key indicators that they have described in their projects. This is a number that we expected, again with an average duration of 21 months for all projects. And us being six months into this first reporting period, 28% is just about right and to be expected [inaudible - 00:09:49] of how much money has been dispersed for the second payment and against that total overall \$10 million tranche.

If we go to the next slide, we'll talk a little bit about our internal review. And yes, again, on the next slide, thank you, Madeleine, our internal review comes from our cross-community working group on auction proceeds. This was a recommendation number 12 that they made to continue to learn and monitor the program itself. So, not just monitoring projects, but to really take a step back and assess and evaluate our projects or our program itself.

There were two parts to this recommendation. The first was that after each cycle, we would have an internal review to think through and reflect on the administration of the program, and how well and what we could also improve moving forward. The second part of this recommendation was to have a broader strategic review after several cycles have run. And so, at this time we're in the process of conducting our first internal review for the first cycle.

The objectives for this review are twofold. First, to assess and enhance our operational effectiveness. We want to be sure that as stewards of these auction proceeds that we are as efficient and as effective as we can be and that we are certainly implementing the program according to the CCWG recommendations and the expectations of the community.

The second portion of this internal review is really looking at how do we think about how we move forward? So, these are sort of strategic questions about learning, lessons learned from the first cycle, how can we improve so that we can better meet the outcomes of our program or the objectives of our program?

If we go to the next slide, I'll just share a bit about sort of what that looks like and how we're doing that. And to caveat and say that it really is focused on this first internal review, it is focused on the actual administration of the program. It does not include an assessment or evaluation of the grantees or their projects. So, we're not looking at that in our internal review as those projects are currently being implemented and are ongoing. So, the focus of this

internal review is really on ICANN org and our administration of the program.

We do include several internal and external inputs. We've surveyed some of our grantees and applicants to get information from them about their thoughts and feelings about the program, where they think we could improve, or some opportunities to strengthen the program or to make it more aligned to the objectives that we're trying to achieve. So, this is where we are and sort of formalizing this and moving through this internal review at this point.

Next, I'll talk a little bit about what's coming next and our next steps. And the big question that I know is on lots of people's minds about the next cycle and future funding rounds. I will not be announcing any timelines today, so I'm so sorry if you showed up and you were hoping that you would learn that today. We're not going to be able to do that today, but I will share a few items about where we're headed.

So if we go to the next slide, again, we're just coming to the end of our first interim reporting period. So, we'll continue to monitor current grantees, projects, and things that they're working on. Some really great work is coming out of those, and I encourage you when our blog is released to read that and to follow up and to look at some of the great things that our grantees are doing.

Secondly, we're finalizing our internal review report. There's been a lot of inputs, a lot of information and feedback that we've collected. Thank you to everyone who has participated in that,

whether it was through individual conversations that you had with me, if there were more formal discussions at the board level, thank you so much, so much input that we have that we're trying to synthesize and make sense of. So, we appreciate that.

And the reason why it's so important that we do this review is so that we can really better ourselves as we look to the future. And again, I know that everyone is very eager to hear from us about when the next window will open. I'm eager myself and I'm curious and I want to know too, but we're really working to formalize that input and to use that and the lessons learned to better our program so that we can implement them for future cycles and upcoming cycles. So I'm going to ask that you remain patient and as soon as that information is available, we'll be happy to share it.

Next, I'm just going to talk a little bit about some communication activities that are going on. Again, there's a blog forthcoming that talks a bit about sort of where we are with the projects during this first interim reporting, but also to highlight that there are some really wonderful links and things that we've shared on our webpage that you can follow for yourselves to see what some of these grantees are doing. And I think, again, a tremendous, tremendous kudos to our grantees who have really sort of hit the ground running this first six months to really deliver and meet the expectations set forth in our grant agreement.

So very happy to share these materials with you, to have you reach out if you're curious about what's going on with some of those

projects, but to certainly share as much as we can to highlight and celebrate the great work that this program is hoping to achieve.

With that, I will say that is the formal portion of the meeting and I just wanted to open it up to any questions, comments, thoughts, ideas that perhaps you wanted to share, but also Xavier, if you wanted to jump in.

XAVIER CALVEZ

Thank you, Shayna. Just to ask you if you can indicate that our presence at ICANN85 and what you will enable for those who will be present there, they will have other opportunities to interact directly. So, if you want to mention that, that would be helpful.

SHAYNA ROBINSON

Yes. Thank you, Xavier, for reminding me. I will be present at ICANN85 in Mumbai. We have some hours and time set up at our ICANN engagement booth and I believe, yes, thank you, Madeleine, has dropped that time into the chat. Please, come by. I'll be there and probably outside of those hours as well. If you want to stop by, ask questions, give any input, feedback, just say hello. Happy to do that so please join us.

Okay, I see some questions, other questions popping into our pod so let me do that. Yes. So, the first one, how many reporting periods are there for grantees and how many tranches do they receive across the grants? So, this is a great question. It really depends on how long the duration of the project.

Typically, reporting periods last about six months, though that may be a bit different if the project is shorter. So typically, we'll have three interim reporting periods and then a final fourth reporting period at the close of the grant. Each time the funds that they receive from the grant are broken up and they have different amounts depending on how many times that they are reporting. So, I hope that answers the question.

Another question, when will you publish the first set of reports from grantees? At this time, there's not a plan to publish full scale the reports. There's some information that is specific to our grant agreement that we have to keep private, that we're not able to share directly. But we do hope, and again, through our communication activities, to highlight, uplift, talk about the work that's happening, and to provide these status updates to see and measure progress along the way.

I see another question here in the chat or a comment would be great if we can see all the questions that are asked, but that means that the questions need to be visible to all and not just to the host. Oh, sorry. I think this is a technical question about the Zoom and I believe these questions I'm reading directly from the Q&A pod. So, if you are able to open that. Any other thoughts, questions, things we should know? I see, okay.

Here's another question in the Q&A pod, why can you not publish full reports with confidential elements masked? Great question. Again, I think there's an opportunity for us to share progress, but

there may be some items that need clarification that we're working with internally, our grantee partners, to ensure that we have a full understanding of the progress that they're making. And at that stage, it wouldn't necessarily be appropriate to publish those full sale.

Though, again, you know, we're really hoping that through these communications activities, all of the information that you would want to have about those projects to monitor those, we would make those available.

But if it's something that the community really feels that is important, I think that's something we could take back in our team and have an internal discussion about that and see what additional things we could make available. But at this time there is not a plan to do that. Any others? Thank you, Judith. I appreciate that.

XAVIER CALVEZ

Shayna, while maybe others are thinking about questions or topics, I just wanted to elaborate on one point that you made earlier about the next stage of the program. As you all know, granting funds is a new activity for ICANN, and the first cycle has been designed a little bit as a pilot to discover that activity in the ICANN context. And the learnings of that first cycle are important for us to then help define the path forward.

The input that we try to collect and that you provide, whether community members who have insight on other grant programs or

have participated to the discussions on the auction proceeds in the past, all that input is beneficial for us to contribute, to proposing a path forward for the program and make the best use of those funds in the ICANN context for ICANN's mission, but also beyond the activities that ICANN carries that itself. And that thinking is important.

There's a lot of ideas and it's an important endeavor for us to incorporate those ideas into a path forward that makes sense to everyone that can be well supporting the mission and do the most with these funds available. And that's why it also takes time and it's an exploration exercise.

SHAYNA ROBINSON

Indeed, thanks. Any other thoughts? I don't see any more questions in the chat. Oh, there's one. Okay. Does the grant program have its own concept if what areas of internet importance require a funding impetus? In other words, has the program outlined roughly how its funds could be channeled to crucial areas that require an impetus?

I think if I'm understanding correctly, this is a sort of strategic question about the objectives of the program. And yes, we do have objectives for our grant program. And if you'll recall those four pillars, it really is to strengthen and support the unique identifier systems. It's to increase participation and capacity of other communities, stakeholder communities, or perhaps those who are

not as included in some of the work that goes on here. So, we really are focused on those things.

There could be a possibility to strengthen that even further and I think, again, this is what our internal review is helping us to think through and talk about. How can we strengthen those objectives? How can we strategize and target our funding to really improve or move the needle around those things?

So, I think that's a question we have internally and certainly the input that we've collected so far. We'll inform any decisions around that. Any other thoughts? Okay, not a question. Thank you, but within the four areas, a non-restrictive list that can be drawn up by research. That's noted. Thank you. I appreciate that as a comment. Thank you so much.

Again, I will be in Mumbai so if there are people who are also attending the meeting, I'd be happy to chat one-to-one to continue to get information, answer questions, and share anything that I can. If there are no further questions or comments, Madeleine, do you see anything else?

MADELEINE WERBELOW

No, none at this time. Thanks, Shayna.

SHAYNA ROBINSON

So maybe I'll hand it back to Xavier to just sort of close us out.

XAVIER CALVEZ

No. Thank you, Shayna, thank you, Madeleine, and everyone helping support this session. And thank you for all the participants and the questions and looking forward to more interaction in Mumbai and in the future.

SHAYNA ROBINSON

Thank you so much.

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