
ICANN85 Mumbai | CF – GAC Discussion on New gTLD Program Next Round
Sunday, March 8, 2026 – 10:30 to 12:00 IST

JULIA CHARVOLEN

Welcome to the GAP discussion on New gTLD, Next Round on Sunday, 8 March at 10:30 a.m. local time. Please note that this session is being recorded and is governed by the ICANN Expected Standards of Behavior, ICANN Community Participant Conduct and the ICANN Community Anti-Harassment Policy.

Remember to state your name and language you will speak in case you will be speaking a language other than English. Please speak clearly and at a reasonable pace to allow for accurate interpretation and please make sure to mute all advices when you're speaking. With that, I will leave the floor to Ian Sheldon, GAC Vice-Chair. Thank you and over to you, Ian.

IAN SHELDON

Thank you, Julia. I hope everybody's had a good morning tea, some coffee and tea. As mentioned, this will be hopefully quite a good and productive GAC discussion on the Next Round of gTLDs. I might hand over to the Next Round team for a quick round of introductions.

They'll walk us through a few updates before we hand to Marco for a discussion on Early Warnings and then we'll have a bit of an open discussion. So, you've got the agenda here in front of you, hopefully it's reasonably straightforward. It's a good long 90-

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minute session, so hopefully plenty of time to work through details and I'm hoping yesterday was a good warm-up to the discussion this morning. With that, I might hand over to Lars.

LARS HOFFMANN

Hi everyone, my name is Lars Hoffman, I work for ICANN, I'm the deputy lead for the New gTLD Program. My team was responsible for the Applicant Guidebook, we're now working on the operating model for the Next Round and we're here to talk a little bit about what's coming up in the next few weeks and months, preparing everybody hopefully for the application/overall process. Pass on to Kristy first and then we go down the left.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Thanks Lars, this is Kristy Buckley for the record. Thank you all for having us here today. I serve as the lead for the Applicant Support Program or ASP, which many of you are familiar with, as well as the lead for the readiness team, which is helping all of the people that need to prepare for the New gTLD Program, whether they're applicants, community members such as the GAC, vendors or evaluators, or staff members.

We'll be presenting some of the resources here today and I'm joined by my other colleagues on stage, which I'm happy to have them introduce themselves as well before I get in. Maybe, who is next on the list? Jared?

JARED ERWIN

Sure. Hi, everyone, my name is Jared Erwin. I'm on Lars' team, the same team here, the New gTLD Program team. I was working on the Applicant Guidebook and getting that written and published and working with the IRT on that and now working to implement the Next Round. Thanks. Eduardo?

EDUARDO ALVAREZ

Thank you. Good morning, everyone, my name is Eduardo Alvarez. I'm also part of the ICANN staff, also part of the New gTLD Program team. I was helping with the systems track, developing all of the systems for the Next Round, working with the team. Next is my colleague, Justin.

JUSTIN HO

Hi, my name is Justin Ho. I'm the same team as up here for the New gTLD Program. I'm an application process manager. I report to Yuko Yokoyama, who's a senior director on the team. She wasn't able to make it to this meeting and my work is primarily focused on operationalizing the AGB and other inputs for the Program and getting everything ready for the round open.

LARS HOFFMANN

Anyone wants to go straight into the presentation? Yeah, all right. I'm not sure Gulten is running the slides. Thank you, Gilton. Would you move forward, please? And one more, please.

So, we start off, we discussed this in the Capacity Building session yesterday, so for some of you it may be a repeat, I apologize for

that, but the room was also slightly empty yesterday, so I hope at least for some of you this is going to be new, or at least a helpful reminder.

We're looking at the timeline here, starting in April this year, going through, kind of as a jump at the end there, really through February, and then looking ahead at June next year. These are the upcoming big milestones for the Program, so I hope most of you know that the opening of the round has been set for the 30th of April this year. That day the application system, TAMS, I'm sure you're all glad to hear there's another new acronym for ICANN, will open its virtual gates. It will stay open for 104 days, that's 15 weeks, I believe, and close on the 12th of August.

During that period, applicants can go into the system, edit the application, the team will talk about that in a bit more detail later, but they're told to say that they can submit the application either on day one or the last day, but once it is submitted, it's submitted and you cannot really go back and pull that back during that period.

Once the application period closes, ICANN will perform administrative work in the background, as you can imagine, payments have to be reconciled, other administrative checks have to be done as well, and we expect that period to last about nine weeks. It's a little bit of a question of how long a piece of string is.

If we get significant more applications than the 2,000 that this entire timeline, also including the timelines that I mentioned and

the AGB is based on, if we get significantly more than 2,000 applications, that period could very well be extended. If we receive significantly fewer, then obviously the timeline may be reduced.

We expect to make an announcement of when exactly the reveal day is at some reasonable time after the 12th of August. As you can imagine, for a variety of reasons, we're not tracking these applications really live. We also seen from the ASP and RSP program that just because we have X amount of applications in the system, that doesn't mean they will actually all submit at the end.

So, I know that many of you are already keen to know when the reveal day is, but unfortunately this is not something we can predict at this stage. On the reveal day, we then have two weeks, 14-day string replacement period. You see in the box there below, between October and November this year. During that period, applicants who have decided to submit a replacement string, in addition to their applied for a string, will be able to opt to make a change and apply to their replacement string instead of the primary string.

The decision can be made on the basis of all the information that becomes available on reveal day. On reveal day, all the publicly facing information, including string, applicant, the purpose of the string, the various application fields will be revealed, and so then applicants can review the applied for strings and the applicants, and based on the information as they see fit, make a decision whether or not they want to switch to the replacement string.

I will say there's some eligibility criteria around using the replacement string. I won't go into the details there in the Applicant Guidebook, but there are scenarios whereby people or applicants will not be able to use the replacement string because somebody else has, for example, applied for that as well.

Then we get to String Confirmation Day. You see this here, estimated to be in October 2026. That's the day when essentially ICANN will publish the list of the definitively applied for strings, so you'll see who has and has not opted to use the replacement string, and at that moment, applicants are also no longer able to switch either to the replacement string or back to their original string. No more string changes after that time, with a small caveat that under certain circumstances, brands may be able to change their string. There're certain caveats attached to that. Again, it's in the AGB, but in principle, no more string changes after that.

At that moment, what starts as well is the community input period and the objection period. You see that at the very bottom here, November '26 to February '27. That period is also 104 days, so while objections can be launched during that phase, the singular plural warnings can come in, and I think for this room of particular importance, the GAC Early Warning period starts at that point as well.

We can go into that in more detail later, and during that period, what will happen, you see that above the red line is the prioritization draw. Those applicants who decide to opt into that

will then be assigned a priority number, which will determine the order in which applications are reviewed in the application and applicant evaluation phase, which is the phase that actually starts after what you see here on the top right, the string evaluation phase, which includes string similarity, obviously.

The priority numbers only come in later in the program, but the draw will take place, we expect, in December this year. And you see here, we expect that in June '27, the string similarity evaluations report will be published, meaning that the string similarity review is completed, contention sets are being determined, and that also then kicks off a string confusion objection period, again, where the applicants can either object to either having been determined to be confusingly similar with a string and they think they shouldn't be, or the other way around, that you think that your string should be considered confusingly similar with another string, and you can launch an objection on that basis as well.

That brings me to the end of the timeline in this slide. Since we are switching presenters after this, just checking if there's any initial questions of that we are going to go into more details of much of this going forward as well, but on the overview, any questions? Otherwise, I'll pass it on. Great. I'm not entirely sure who's next. Justin is next. Over to you.

JUSTIN HO

Thanks, Lars. Next slide, please. So, yeah, at the request, we're going to share a few of the demos that we were intending to display

as part of a Tuesday 13-15 session, and I encourage GAC members to, if you're available, to attend or to check out the recording, because this is just a very small subset of that full presentation.

So, next slide, please. So, just as a brief introduction, this is a short demonstration video with voiceover of what the landing page for applicants would look like. If you could please go ahead and play the video.

VIDEO AUDIO

In this section, we'll review the TAMS applicant dashboard and the key areas available to you. Select settings to manage your account preferences, user information, and notification settings.

Next, the task queue displays items that require your attention, including actions, updates, and tasks related to your organization or application. Use the task queue to quickly identify what needs to be completed. The organizations area is where you access your organization record. The applications area is where you access and manage your gTLD applications, including completing sections, responding to inquiries, and tracking progress. Use the applicant dashboard to navigate between these areas and stay up to date on tasks and application activity.

JUSTIN HO

Thanks for playing the video. If you'd like to go to the next slide, please. So, this is another demo video that we picked out. It's just to set the scene. If an app, after the applicant submits all their

organizational information, so their full name or the organization, their stakeholders, a bunch of, if you were in yesterday's capacity building session, quite a number of the things that Jared mentioned, then they're able to start the application.

So, one of the first things when you start the application is putting your requested string. So, in this demo, it's going to just show at the beginning someone who wants to apply for an IDN and its allocatable variant. If you don't mind hitting play on the video.

VIDEO AUDIO

Let's take a look at the process to begin an application if you're using an internationalized domain name along with a variant.

First, select the organization that the application will be tied to. Next, select the option for New gTLD string and variants. Enter the primary string in three forms. ASCII label, which is ASCII, and we'll start with XN-. U-Label, which is the actual IDN characters, and code points, the unicode values. Select check my string to validate the primary string.

Enter the variant string in the same three forms, ASCII label, U-Label, and code points. Click check my string to validate the variant. Finally, select continue to move forward with your application.

JUSTIN HO

Thanks for playing the video. I forgot to mention something. I'm going to let Eduardo --

EDUARDO ALVAREZ

Sure. Thanks, Justin. I guess for today's session, this is the small snippet that we're planning to present today. We are going to have a couple more videos and demos of other features in the system in Tuesday's sessions that Justin already referenced.

And I guess one last note, as you know, we're still doing some final rounds of testing and some tweaks into the system, so just a small caveat to note that some things may be still subject to change, but this at least will help you get a good idea of this pretty much close to final of how the system will look like, so hopefully you'll find it helpful. Thank you.

JUSTIN HO

And I think we're okay to accept any questions about this section right now before moving on.

IAN SHELTON

We've got one hand from Marco in the zoom room.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Yes, thank you, and that's helpful to see what future applicants will face. I wanted just more or less a question for clarity. How much will the GAC for their own review processes rely on the TAMS interface, such as reviewing applications? Will that be a separate

system, or will this will just be a spin-off of the TAMS system for us to review those applications after a String Confirmation Day?

JUSTIN HO

Thanks for the question. So, this system is intended for applicants to submit their information and to interface with ICANN staff. It's not intended for GAC members to enter and to review the information.

On String Confirmation Day, the public portions of the applications will be published on the public page, if you're aware. It's going to look similar, but a more upgraded version of what we had for the 2012 round. So, there's functionality for GAC members to search and filter if you're interested in doing GAC Early Warnings or just the standard review procedures for GAC members.

Yeah, that's the general intent. There was a question yesterday that if there's a possibility to provide some sort of output for the GAC, if that's requested of us, we can definitely pull something together to make things a little easier or more efficient for this group.

IAN SHELDON

Any other questions? I've got the European Commission.

MARTINA BARBERO

Thank you very much, Ian. Sorry for my voice, it's early morning here, but I'm just wondering in terms of the, you mentioned the

search functionalities, so we can filter as a GAC in the public portion of the application page, I guess by region, type of application. I was also wondering if there is a way to download the data in machine-readable format or else to, you know, search more easily, like if it's in Excel format or whatever.

So yeah, we're just trying to get an idea of how, what are the functionalities that we can rely on to identify and screen a different application from a government perspective. Thank you very much.

EDUARDO ALVAREZ

Thank you for the question, Eduardo Alvarez here. We are still building the system that's going to be taking care of publishing the applications, but we do have in scope of our requirements to have an export function so that hopefully any tables that where we're showing information of the applications will be able to be downloaded by the public users, including GAC members, to have some form of export. So, hopefully that will be useful, that is still in development, but we do have that functionality considered.

IAN SHELDON

We've also got one question in the chat. Is there any system or website to help the IDN gTLD applicant to look up the corresponding U-label and code points?

EDUARDO ALVAREZ

So, well, we do have our LGR tool available today, which is available to the public as long as you have an ICANN account, which anyone

can create. That can help you review the validity of IDN strings and the code points. We're happy to share a link to the system that is available today, so hopefully that can help.

IAN SHELDON

Any other questions? I see none. Perhaps we move on.

JARED ERWIN

Hi, everyone. This is Jared again. So, going to talk briefly now about TLD types, which is also something that we went over in the Capacity Development session yesterday, and I think this also segues nicely from some of the questions we just received about what information will be out there regarding different types of applications that would be available to the GAC.

So, here we'll go over those different types of applications that will be available in the Next Round, and so, again, this information is likely key to the GAC as they develop their internal processes for the Next Round, for the 2026 round.

So, to start, we have a general application type, which is what likely most applications fall into this category, and so this is simply one of, an application that doesn't fall into any of the other specialized categories and would be subject to a standard set of defined requirements as defined in the Applicant Guidebook, and then from there, there's a few different specialized gTLD types or application types, depending on the type of applicant, the type of string, or the simply type of application that is to be submitted.

The first there you see on the screen are the IDNs and variants, which we just saw a brief demo of submitting that type of application, but of course, these applications, these types of applications or gTLDs are a big focus of the 2026 round, as they support linguistic and script diversity on the internet.

So these IDN gTLDs include one or more non-ASCII characters, and applications for variant strings of those IDNs may also be submitted, and variant strings are, of course, those that are considered the same as another gTLD string based on the script rules. The example we just saw was of traditional and simplified Chinese characters. Those are considered variants.

And so, an applicant may apply for a new gTLD in the sense of a new primary IDN, along with one or more of its allocatable variant strings, or an applicant can apply for a variant of an existing gTLD that has already been delegated, but the caveat there being that it must be from the same legal entity as the registry operator for that existing gTLD.

Go to the next slide. So, here you see a few more types of applications that might be submitted, that can be submitted in the 2026 round. The first there you see on the left are the geographic names, which may be of special interest to the GAC, but these are applications for gTLDs that represent specific geographic places, such as cities, regions, or countries, and these applications must meet specific criteria, and they require additional documentation,

such as government support or endorsement to proceed with that application.

There's also reserve names, and so as described in the AGB, these are applications for strings or names that have been set aside on ICANN's reserve name list, which these are generally inter-governmental organizations, such as Red Cross, Red Crescent, or the Olympic Committee's names, and the only eligible entities that may apply for those names are those organizations themselves, and there's a special evaluation to determine whether that particular entity applying for that name is indeed the right entity to be applying for that name.

Then we have .brand TLDs, which is generally what it sounds like, so these are applicants that are applying for a TLD that relates to their trademark, so intended for trademark holders that want to apply for domains that match their registered marks, and these are also typically designed for exclusive use by the brand owner, as well as their trademark licensees, and so again, there's a specialized evaluation to determine eligibility to apply for that particular brand to qualify as a brand TLD based on their registered trademark.

And then finally, we have community gTLDs, and so these are applicants that are applying for gTLDs that are intended to serve a clearly delineated community based on different shared identities or interests or other common factors, and any applicant can designate their application as a community gTLD.

The kind of major stipulation there is that these applicants are required to include a specification 12 in their registry agreement with IACAN, which lists out the kind of the eligibility criteria essentially for which types of domains can be submitted under that gTLD.

And following that, because of that stipulation regarding the registry agreement specification 12, these applicants must also go through Registry Commitment Evaluation, RCE, which would evaluate those registration policies and specification 12, and then also these applicants have the option to participate in community priority evaluation, which is a contention resolution mechanism, so only if a community applicant finds itself in contention with other applicants, whether community or non-community, then they would have the option at that time to participate in CPE to potentially resolve that contention and receive priority in the contention set.

And I think that's all we have on TLD types, but happy to take any questions on that.

IAN SHELTON

Any questions? Any questions in the room?

JULIA CHARVOLEN

Ian, we have a question. This is Julia, sorry for the record. We have a question from Giacomo Mazzoni in the chat. Just to be sure I

understood correctly, the full list of applied gTLDs will be known only on the reveal day in October 2026, not before, correct?

JARED ERWIN

Yes, that's correct.

IAN SHELDON

Any other questions? I think we're doing okay for time. Okay, perhaps we'll move on then.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

So, there's no more questions. I'll just go to the resources slide on the next section. So for those that were in the capacity development session yesterday, this resources slide may look familiar, but we wanted to make sure to share it with the full GAC to let you know all of the resources that are available. This is not everything, but we thought these are maybe the most useful to bring to the GAC's attention in light of the requests and conversations that we've had with GAC policy staff.

So, as our colleagues on stage here presented today, it was a sort of smattering of topics based upon the requests from GAC leadership, but there's a lot more resources. We're happy to entertain any other questions that you might have. I'll just point you to, while there are a number of resources intended to help the GAC with its own preparation, again, the authoritative source of

information is the Applicant Guidebook, and we do encourage everyone to take a look at that and familiarize themselves with it.

There is an HTML version of that on the website, which allows you to quickly search for keywords and navigate that very easily. We do have a number of key topic overviews, so those may be helpful as briefing documents for colleagues, ministers back home that want a very high-level summary of some of the topics in the Applicant Guidebook. They're not intended to replace the information in the Applicant Guidebook, but they may be useful as briefing documents.

We also post here the educational webinars and presentations. So, in January, we hosted two introductory webinars about the Next Round, one of which in February was aimed at the GAC, so those recordings are available on the website. I encourage folks to take a look at that. So, those are a couple of resources that I just wanted to highlight.

We do have some slides in the appendix here by way of status updates. These were presented during the prep week session on the 2026 round, but happy to cover those here if that would be of interest to GAC members or to take any questions that you might have.

The status updates are on the overall program, the Applicant Support Program, and the Registry Service Provider Program. So,

take your guidance on if you want us to cover those or if you have other questions or topics that you would like to discuss. Thanks.

IAN SHELTON

Is there any interest in hearing the status updates? I thought there might be some value in briefly touching on them given they should have been covered in the prep week, but I think attendance at that is patchy at times. If we have time, and I think we do, perhaps we can go to them briefly.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Marika, do you want to cover the status update on the overall program briefly?

IAN SHELTON

Oh, and apologies, I do have, oh, I had one hand.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

We can take it, yeah.

IAN SHELTON

Did you want to ask your question, Marco, and then we can go to the status updates.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Yeah, I can briefly. I mean, the status updates also sounds very useful, so, I'll be sure. No, I was wondering, you showed us a lot of

the IT and kind of wondering how much of an SLA or how are you going to provide IT support to applicants on the interface and the systems? Is that 24-7 or how does that work?

EDUARDO ALVAREZ

I would say we are still working on the support model. We are considering offering support at this point 24-7 for certain periods of time, but that is still being discussed internally in the Org, so more to come there. But yeah, we do want to make sure that we are available to provide support for the applicants in what relates to the system availability.

IAN SHELDON

Apologies. Any other questions? And perhaps we can go to Marika for a quick status update chat.

MARIKA KONINGS

Yeah, thanks very much. Hi, everyone. My name is Marika Konings. I'm the lead for the new program, sitting in the audience for those maybe looking at the stage.

If we can go to the next slide, and I think the next slide. It's a very brief update that we have on the status of the program, specifically implementation for the overall program, and I think then we have a couple of slides as well on the status of processing for the Applicant Support Program and the registry service provider evaluation program.

I'm just going to drop a link in the chat as well to our pre-ICANN briefing that gives you a much more detailed overview of the status of all the projects that contribute to the implementation of the program. What we have here is just a high-level overview, and as Kristy already mentioned, I think the prep week session may also be helpful and of interest if you want to know more about both the status of implementation as well as what we're doing to ensure readiness for the opening of the application window, as well as what lies beyond.

I think the team here has already shared some of that work, but obviously beyond the timeline that you saw on the screen, there is still further work that happens beyond that, and we anticipate currently that we will be processing applications probably throughout 2030 based on the assumption of 2000 applications.

So, what you see here on the slide is a graphic that we've shared on previous occasions that showcases the critical path, so basically the pieces that need to be in place before we are able to open the window for applications on the 30th of April. I think you'll probably be happy to see that there are already a lot of green boxes in there, that's all work that has already been completed.

There're still some blue boxes, that is work that is underway and on track, and you'll see for example the base registry agreement here. This is an item that will be on the Board agenda for Thursday's meeting for adoption, so assuming no hiccups there, we expect that to go to green as well.

As part of our prep week session, I think we also had a slide in there that shows kind of the progress that we're making with identifying and contracting with evaluation vendors that assist us in the processing phase for the different evaluations. We actually have as well a dedicated page on the 2026 round website that is dedicated to sourcing, so for those interested, I definitely would call on your help here as well to spread the word, and that may know parties that can assist or contribute to these evaluations to follow that and respond to the requests for proposals that are out there. But as I said, I think that work is also well underway and on track.

What you see here in the orange box, and that's what the team has been talking about as well, is what's happening with the systems. I think the text in the box may be a little bit misleading, because development for what is needed for the opening of the application window is complete.

What we're still working through is testing of the system, and as I said in the prep week session, we also had some further details on what testing is happening and what we're working through, because obviously we really want to make sure that once we open the window for applications, we'll have a secure and reliable experience for applicants. So, that should all get us to the opening of the round on the 30th of April.

I think I have one more slide. I think it's just again highlighting the key dates. We can go to the next slide, please. There's a bit of delay. I think it's just a slide that just re-emphasizes opening of the

window on the 30th of April. The window will be open for 15 weeks and therefore closing on the 12th of August. And I think that as we have shared as well, and this is subject to the total number of applications received.

Again, based on our current assumption of receiving 2,000 applications, we project that reveal day may occur prior to ICANN87, so in October of this year. But once we have confirmed the total number of applications, ICANN will confirm the dates for reveal day as well as String Confirmation Day and the events that happen after that.

I think that's all I had on kind of status of implementation. I don't know if there are any questions, and otherwise I think I'm handing it back to Kristy.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Thanks, Marika. Just noting for the sake of time that, yeah, I'll just point to the slides in the appendix in terms of the Applicant Support Program status update. The great news is that we had 75 applications submitted, which is wonderful, and we very much thank the GAC for all that they did to raise awareness and interest about the program.

One thing I will bring the full GAC's attention to is the board chair's blog, Tripti's blog, earlier this week, noting that ICANN. Org has requested that the board consider additional funding if all of 75 of those applicants end up qualifying, and the board has requested

the community's input on that additional funding since the proposal is for that to potentially come from the auction proceeds.

So, I'll put the link in the chat if I don't get kicked out of the zoom first, and happy to take any questions. Thanks.

IAN SHELDON

Thank you. We now have two hands. Giacomo, are you in the room?

GIACOMO MAZZONE

Yeah.

IAN SHELDON

Yes, please.

GIACOMO MAZZONE

The question is related to a point that we discussed before is about the community application.

Will the GAC be involved in the decision or at least informed in advance about who will be the advisor for the community process evaluation in case? Because last time this was a very turning issue.

JARED ERWIN

Hi, this is Jared. Jared Erwin for the record. I can take that. So, on the question of whether the GAC will be involved in the decision on who would be conducting the evaluation, the short answer is no.

However, we did discuss with the IRT the selection criteria for that vendor before we opened the request for proposal process, so the process to identify that vendor and contract with that vendor. And so that was discussed at the IRT that was in the August of last year time frame.

And then we've opened the IRP, and now we're in the tail end of that RFP process to select that vendor. And we hope to announce that very soon. And then after that, the plan is to work with that vendor to develop evaluation guidelines, which should complement the information in the AGB on the CPE, which also contains guidelines. And that evaluation guidance or guideline document would be published for Public Comment.

And so, of course, the ICANN community would have an opportunity to comment on that guidance for the vendor. So, that would be the opportunity for involvement there. I hope that answers your question. But understood on the comments of the concerns from the last round, and I know Giacomo and I were discussing this yesterday, that the AGB, in working with the IRT, we did take great care to ensure that we could be as clear as possible based on the policy as to how that evaluation should be conducted.

And again, there are guidelines already in the AGB that seek to provide clarity to the vendor. And again, we're developing or would develop with the identified vendor an additional guidance document on that evaluation. Thank you.

IAN SHELDON

Thank you. I might close the queue there, because we do need some time to talk about Early Warnings as a cohort as well. But while we do have the Early Warning team, the Next Round team here, I'm happy to field maybe two more questions. Jorge, you have the floor.

JORGE CANCIO

Thank you, Ian. I'm trying to put my camera on. So, good morning, still here in Europe. I had two points.

The first one is really to follow up on what Giacomo said. We really had a lot of issues during last round with the community priority evaluation, and amongst others with the provider we had at that time, or at least how it performed its work. So, we would very much welcome that this is looked at with utmost care. And there is on the record a lot of input made by the GAC during the last years on this topic, on the community priority evaluation. So, worthwhile looking into it, and looking forward also to the publication of the evaluation guidance.

That's the first one. The second one is to share this here during the plenary session, and I hope we take note of it, and we don't need to chase this ask later on. And this is that, as I said yesterday, apart from the Early Warnings and the GAC consensus advice, which the briefing for the GAC is focused on, the workbook, there are other

instruments which are quite complicated, or quite complex, so to say, which are the objections.

And that nevertheless can be used by the GAC, and especially by GAC members in certain situations, in which are stronger than just a GAC Early Warning, and don't require full consensus, like the GAC consensus advice.

So, I would really like to put this request on the record, that the GAC workbook includes digestible summary of the objections, especially those on legal rights, on limited public interest, and the community objection, and how GAC members could navigate those instruments. Thank you.

IAN SHELDON

Any comments, or happy to take that as a comment? Yes. Great, thank you. And Ingram.

INGRAM NIBLOCK

Hi, Ingram Niblock for Australia. In the Applicant Guidebook, it says there's funding for national governments for one objection and one appeal. I was wondering, are there any kind of criteria or processes to actually access that funding, or is it automatic if a national government lodges an objection?

LARS HOFFMANN

Yeah, thanks, Ingram, that's a great question. So, we are working, there's going to be procedures on that, as you can imagine. There's

a question of standing that has to be checked as well. The money also, obviously, those objections and appeals are handled by third parties, by distribution providers. So, the team is currently working on those procedures, including what governments will have to do in order to make a claim for that.

So, it's not out there yet, but there will be a procedure and there will be known, obviously, in time for when the period opens. We expect it to be happening over the northern hemisphere summer. I'm not sure it's going to be ready by the time the window opens, so that's the end of next month, we're in March, but it'll definitely be available by the time we'll have reveal day. So, it should be there. Thanks.

IAN SHELDON

Great, thank you. I think that draws us to the end of this portion. Before we move on and I give the floor to Marco, please join me in thanking our Next Round team once again for taking us through this process. You guys are welcome to stay for the next discussion or you're welcome to leave the stage as well. It's completely up to you folk, but please, Jack, thank you. Thank you.

Great. So, I think Marco will be taking us through this next discussion remotely. Over to you, Marco. Thank you.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Thank you, Ian, and hello again, colleagues. Once again, apologies for not being in the room. The GAC Early Warning process, we're

filling in here for Nico, who unfortunately had to be elsewhere. I mean, as a regular GAC participant, you probably recall that we've touched upon this at the previous meeting and there's also been plentiful exchanges on the mailing list regarding the development of this document.

So, for those who are new or have not followed it up close, the Applicant Guidebook provides a hook for the GAC to provide Early Warnings. We've touched upon that yesterday and it was again mentioned this morning. So, after the strings have been revealed and after the strings have been confirmed, there is a period for 104 days in which the GAC, any GAC member or observer, can send an Early Warning.

So, the crucial bit here is that this does not require the full consensus of the GAC. Anybody who is a member or an observer of the GAC can submit such an Early Warning and with the intent of giving any applicants a future indication or an early indication saying, hey, there is something here with this application that we think is potentially a problem and we'd like to talk to you about what can be done to mitigate that or resolve that issue.

So, it really is designed to be early. Now, the AGB allows for this to be submitted. Everything else is up to us. Everything else is up to us as a committee to figure out the process. So, as I said, the requirement for the AGB is clear. It should be or could be any GAC member or observer. There is a time period. Everything else is up to us.

So, what this document is set out to do is to establish the internal procedures. Of course, we do want to make sure that it aligns with the AGB. We also want to make sure that it aligns with all the requirements the AGB sets in terms of content. And of course, we need something to process this, to validate this.

Ultimately, Nico as the chair or the future chair of the GAC, depending on the exact timelines of this process, will need to agree and say, yes, this is a valid Early Warning, as in it really comes from a GAC member or observer. So, that is what this document is intending to fix.

If I can get the next slide. And we have been drafting for quite a while here. And as I mentioned, the draft was circulated ahead and during ICANN84. Meanwhile, based on the comments received and the discussions, Nico has invested some of his Christmas holiday to rework the document in a new version. As it says here, clarified the structure a bit.

We also made sure that the terminology was harmonized. And meanwhile, we also had the final version of the Applicant Guidebook being published. So, we made sure that the document actually aligns with the text in the Applicant Guidebook.

There's a couple of examples included. Also, make sure that that sort of it serves as a practical guide on how to use this, where to use this. So, this is where we are now. We'll go over it quickly. The document has been cycled through to the GAC in the last few weeks. I hope you had time to look at it, read it. I do not recall

seeing any substantial comments. I know that there were a few minor items left in the Google Doc, one of this by myself. But I think we're very close.

So, if I can move to the next slide. Thank you. The purpose then of today, and I already give you a heads up, we'll quickly look at it. I do not intend to have a full line-by-line text review at this stage. We also do not have a lot of time. Explain how the chair, as I said, unfortunately, Nico is not available. So, I guess I don't want to speak for the chair. And I want to explain to go to all the rationale of the change, when this was mostly based on your feedback and looking at it.

So, key outcome here, and I kind of hope that we can settle it in this session. But we might want to postpone this to later this week to sort of establish consensus and finalize this. We found that this is of course an essential piece of the GAC review. We, as GAC members, probably everybody for themselves need to prepare for it, inform colleagues, as we discussed yesterday, work with people. So, the sooner this document is finalized, the better it probably is for everybody to get ready and prepare.

So, with that, a brief overview. Well, here is the overview. You see, it's now got seven chapters, including very clear purpose and scope. Some lessons learned from the 2012 round. It explains who gets there. Thank you. So, here we go. As it says, important, this is non-binding. So, unlike GAC consensus advice, Early Warnings do not constitute a formal recommendation to the ICANN Board and

they're not a formal objection. This really is the early stages. Hey, we have a problem here. In other words, warning, if this remains, you might see such GAC consensus advice, or you might see other objections.

Speaking for myself, I would highly recommend using this first before seeking other ways. Of course, if there's a clear objection, there is a clear objection, but this process is really designed to make it also for the applicants, make it as predictable and easy as possible.

So, the sooner we as a GAC can indicate, or individual GAC members can indicate, like there is something here that we have an issue with and working with the applicants or org to resolve it is probably the best way forward.

So, lessons from the 2012 round. There are a couple from the previous round. Those are still available on the website. I would recommend having a look because some of it sort of goes like, oh yeah, that sort of made sense.

If we move to the next slide, a few more key highlights. Eligible entities. There was some discussion within the GAC looking at all the texts, including the GAC operating procedures. We figured it's both GAC members and observers who can submit it. So, that's an important thing. I think, as it explains, GAC leadership and GAC support team will verify the compliance, making sure that everything ticks the boxes, that everything is filled in and is there.

And then, again, to repeat, we as a group, as individual members, have 104-day period beginning on String Confirmation Day.

So, of course, there is a tiny lead up there in between reveal and confirmation day where we can already look at it and think about it. But the actual submission period is 104 days. There is a special circumstance in .brand. When they change something, you have another 30 days to respond to that. It's all very much explained in the very thoroughly documented but also lengthy application guide book.

There is a step-by-step workflow. I hope it speaks for itself if I can get the next slide. I think the important bit here is sort of that you have to provide some rationale. So, you really have to explain what you think is the problem and preferably also include something that you think would make that problem go away.

So, I think that's the key thing here. The rationale and then the proposed mitigation. And then, of course, contact details because the whole idea here is that this Early Warning is sort of set out to trigger a conversation with the future applicants or with the applicants to sort of resolve this amongst the people. There's a review. Well, this is mostly procedural and we will, just as in the 2012 round, publish them.

The mandatory elements, yeah, I'll skip over that. You can read this. This isn't something really important. I think we're heading towards the final slide, if I'm not mistaken. If I can get the next slide.

Slide 36. I mean, we are on the final slide. I thought there was something pending beyond. Okay. What's there to say?

As I mentioned, this process is open to any GAC member or GAC observer. Of course, that doesn't prevent you from submitting it as a group. There is no need to consult the GAC. There is no need to find full consensus within the committee. Of course, some people might see the same problem emerge on a string. So, I can highly recommend to use the GAC list or use other channels to build small coalitions, it's probably easier if you have a single Early Warning about the topic than having to deal with multiple. I'm not exactly sure.

I assume that if multiple Early Warnings are filed against the same string, those will be more or less brought together and into a small group for resolution, but they can also be tracked individually.

That is sort of the high-level overview. I'm happy to take any questions to the content of document. I see Ian, we have one from India. Suggestion, Santosh.

IAN SHELDON

Thanks, Marco. We had a comment from China, I think, we'll take before I give the floor to Santosh.

JULIA CHARVOLEN

Thank you, Ian. I'm going to read the comment. We are pleased to see that the newly revised GAC Early Warnings overview and GAC process document has adopted our relevant comments raised at

ICANN84, allowing GAC members and observers an additional 30 days to submit Early Warnings when a brand top-level domain applies to change its string due to a string contention issue, which helps relevant parties raise concerns and objections in a timely manner regarding potential sensitive or illegal issues related to the changed string. Thank you, Ian.

IAN SHELDON

Thank you, Julia. Santosh, please.

T. SANTHOSH

Thank you, Ian, and thank you, Marco, for the presentation. So, in the second or the third slide, it was mentioned as String Confirmation Day, whereas we have been discussing on string reveal day. So, which term is the correct one? Thank you.

MARCO HOGEWONING

The actual Early Warning process starts on String Confirmation Day, which is after reveal day. So, we have Reveal Day, and there is a two-week period, of course, when the applications are public. So, we can already look at the strings, we can look at the alternate strings, but the actual 104-day counter starts on String Confirmation Day. So, potentially, you have slightly more than the 104 days to make up your mind, but the process is set to start on confirmation day.

IAN SHELDON

Benedetta, please.

BENEDETTA ROSSI

Thank you, Ian. It's just to clarify that the slides on the screen, unfortunately, don't take into account the red lines that were provided by GAC members and leadership. It was intended to just show what the document looks like. We're putting on the screen right now the actual documents, so you'll be able to see the proposed edits and changes. I'm saying this in response to China's comments, because I believe that there are some input provided by GAC members. Thank you.

IAN SHELDON

Thank you. U.S., please.

SUSAN CHALMERS

Thank you, Susan Chalmers, United States. We really appreciate the work that has gone into the Early Warning process document, so thank you so much, and thank you, Marco, for your overview. The Next Round really is going to be fast upon us, and yesterday, a useful question was put to the GAC, which is whether and how delegations are preparing to assess applications.

The United States will assess all applied for strings with the security of the Internet at the forefront, but on our side, we are preparing an internal coordination process and developing guidance for

agencies as they work through applications in order to determine their concerns, if any.

Might I suggest to our chair or our vice chair that leadership or the topic leads consider organizing a possible intersessional discussion with GAC representatives. It might be useful to exchange information on how other delegations are preparing and coordinating their internal processes. It could be a chance for GAC reps to learn from others. This could help support readiness before reveal day. Thank you.

IAN SHELDON

Thank you, Susan. I think that is an excellent suggestion. We'll take that on board and see if we can find some time intersessionally, because I think, like I mentioned yesterday, this will be quite a long resource-intensive process, and the more we can help each other through this and share processes and learnings, the easier it will be collectively for us to work through this.

Any other questions? Was that an old hand, Benedetta, or were you still asking for the floor? Okay. So, I can see we have the document on the screen in front of us.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Yes, and I think it might be worth scrolling through some of the comments, and I see Ken-Ying said, like, would there be other concerns such as ethnical or historical concerns? Yes, this is by no means a limited list. The Applicant Guidebook, as I recall, does not

provide any bounds, so it really is anything that you as a GAC member feel might later on in the process lead to discussions or potentially blocking advice against the Board.

So, I think, indeed, any ethical, historical, cultural, whatever. It could be really looking back at the 2012 round. Some of them are really simple. Some of them are somewhat more complex in the rationale. As the US said, there might be security concerns. This really is open to anything. If you think you have a problem, mention it, and then you can work with the applicant.

Of course, as we mentioned, it is non-binding. The applicants say, like, yes, we've heard your concerns, but this is our answer, and we're going to move forward nonetheless, but let this somewhat short overview of possible reasons not hold you back in any way, shape, or form, but maybe looking at the solution on the text, we might make it more explicit that this is not a limited overview of reasons to do so. It's a future iteration.

IAN SHELTON

Ken-Ying, I can see your hand is up. Would you like to speak to that?

KEN-YING TSENG

Originally, I made a comment because I believe there should be some other concerns that GAC members, each GAC member can raise based on its own need and the national policy, but Marco has responded, yes, we can do, but I have another question because usually, I mean, people are busy, so we probably will wait until, like,

100 days, then we will submit our Early Warning requests to GAC support and the GAC chair, and I'm just wondering if our comment reached chair and the GAC support within 104 days, but somehow it didn't reach ICANN, whether that is still a valid Early Warning.

IAN SHELTON

Did you have any thoughts on that, Marco?

MARCO HOGEWONING

Yeah, any thoughts? Well, first of all, again, this is an Early Warning, so I would definitely urge everybody to file them as soon as it comes up, part of the design, and it says in the name. I think in terms of being sure, yeah, we staff and the leadership will process them as soon as possible. I'm afraid I can't give a hard answer.

We will find out whether the deadline is actually the 104-day deadline is sort of when they are known to ICANN in general, or whether they have to be at a specific point in the process, and we'll confirm. For now, please aim to allow 48 hours for us to process, so let's set your internal timer at 100 days, and we're safe that we will make the deadline no matter what. Let's not try and run this on seconds. Thank you.

IAN SHELTON

Thank you. Tomo, please.

TOMONORI MIYAMOTO

Thank you, Ian. This is Tomo from Japan. I understand that this document is only for the GAC Early Warning, and does a topically plan to create this kind of document for the GAC consensus advice for the New gTLD? Thank you.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Ian, do you have any thoughts on that? I mean, it might be useful to provide some guidance. At the same time, GAC advice is by the bylaws on anything at any time, so I'm not sure whether we want to limit that.

IAN SHELDON

Perhaps we can, perhaps leadership can work through this and work on how we want to, I mean, there's a lot of flexibility in what kind of consensus advice we provide, so I think we can be flexible on how we approach this, but I do think we need to provide some level of guidance, so perhaps we can take this on notice and come back with some initial thoughts on how to manage this as a cohort.

I can see we have a question in the chat as well. Should I read that out? Would you like to read out?

JULIA CHARVOLEN

Thank you. Thank you again. Yes, question from Indonesia. Will the data at UNGN be used as the data of geographical names, which in ICANN bylaws should need country agreement?

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- IAN SHELDON I'm struggling a little. Ashwin, would you be able to speak to your question? Are you online?
- GIACOMO MAZZONE This was the reference that we used at the previous gTLD round.
- IAN SHELDON Jorge seems like he has an answer to that question, perhaps. And Jorge suggests the answer is in the AGB.
- MARCO HOGEWONING Yes, Ian, if I may, if it's particular to country names, there is some very specific text in the geographic section of the AGB. Any country name in any language is automatically blocked, so I'm not sure whether that would sort of be relevant to your question, Ashwin, but I think in terms of if somebody requests a country name, it should be a relatively easy objection in terms of the AGB does not allow country names, to my recollection. But maybe there's somebody from ICANN staff in the room who has a clearer final answer.
- LARS HOFFMANN This is Lars. Yeah, just very quickly, I think you got that exactly right. Country names are not permitted per community developed policy, and it's reflected in the Applicant Guidebook, and it would not require, well, it could require an objection in case the geographic names were to miss it, I guess, which seems somewhat

unlikely, but I guess everything is possible. In principle, all strings will be evaluated for whether there are geographic markers in any way, and if there are one of those that are not permitted, then that string would be automatically excluded without the need for further action from anyone. Thank you.

IAN SHELDON

Thank you. Any other questions, comments?

MARCO HOGEWONING

Maybe Benedetta, you have the overview. Can you scroll down and see if there's any other comments or questions that would be worth addressing? I see a couple of my own comments back, but I think we can solve those offline. The template I see is still pending, but I think we have clear guidance from the AGB on what should be in it. You want to speak to this particular point, Benedetta, given the comments you put in?

BENEDETTA ROSSI

Thank you, Marco. Yes, there are a few comments still in the document about specific examples or about New gTLDs from the 2012 round or other organizations. Here it says cross-reference to relevant UN IETF or similar frameworks, so the question is whether it's appropriate to actually include this in the GAC process, since it's intended only for the GAC. It seems like it's more examples than process.

MARCO HOGEWONING

That's the way I read it as well. I'm hoping to hear comments from the floor or the room in guiding us. My personal view is that in providing a rationale, of course, it helps if you can point to external documents, external sources or local legislations to make it clear in the sense that this is just not something you found or made up, but it's really sort of based on particular legislation or particular standards that may exist elsewhere if you file an Early Warning.

I think it's useful also for the other side on the receiving end to process and understand the rationale if you can provide evidence, but that's my thinking. Happy to take guidance from the group on whether this is a useful point or not.

IAN SHELDON

Any other questions? Has anybody had a chance to look at the document? I mean, I would very much encourage everybody to read this. It'd be good to get agreement and land this sooner rather than later, so if you haven't had a chance, please, over the lunch break, have a look at it, go through, add any comments if you have them.

As we've mentioned, this has been circulated a couple of times to the list, so we are really looking to land this as soon as practically possible. Marco? Ingram, please.

INGRAM NIBLOCK

Ingram New Block for Australia. I was just wondering, like in the last round, there were some instances of multiple applicants applying for the same string, just in the interest of efficiency and noting GAC leadership planning to review all these things. Will this allow for, let's say, again, to use an example from the last round, hotel, where there were a number of applicants. Can we do one Early Warning for the string hotel, for whatever our reasons are, that's directed at multiple applicants?

MARCO HOGEWONING

That is a really good question, Ingram, thank you. I do not have the answer. I know from looking at the 2012 that there were specific Early Warnings filed against a string also based on the nature of the applicant, so those, of course, should be individual.

I'm not sure I recall any Early Warning that was just a coverall saying this applies to all strings, but I guess that if it's the same string and the same rationale, to err on the side of caution, unless we get clarity from the legal team on how this would work, probably best to address individual applications as individual applications, which might mean that you need to file Early Warnings multiple times against different applications.

To be honest, as we talked about the interface, we don't know what the interface will look like, so I don't know how this grouping will work and whether this should work. Stand by. If we have further refinement on this process, we no doubt will include it, but for now

I would assume that better safe than sorry, but that's my engineering brain.

IAN SHELDON

Thanks, Marco. Perhaps Lars might want to weigh in on this.

LARS HOFFMANN

Yeah, I think it's a very good question and I don't have a definitive answer, so just taking on from Marco, I think if you think this through, the Early Warning essentially is issued, I can think of two reasons really, or two goals.

Either the government says, okay, this string is okay, but we have some concerns around how it's being used or the intention of it or whatever else it may be that could be addressed through a voluntary commitment or through some other change to the application, say.

In that case, the Early Warning is there also to encourage a dialogue between the GAC member or members and the applicant. So, here you really want then, obviously, if you have a concern with the string that can be addressed, you want to make sure that all the applicants for that string are aware of that and therefore make those changes or at least can consider making those changes before they potentially go to an auction, which obviously will have to happen unless somebody pulls out.

So, there I think it would be helpful to really indicate all the different applications so that you can then also maybe have the

conversation almost as a group, I think maybe, I mean if that's what you choose to do, that's between the GAC and the applicants, ICANN is not involved. If this concern is so that you say, well, this string, I can't see our government ever supporting this string going forward, so we kind of warn you that you should withdraw and here's why kind of thing. It cannot be remedied.

I think that maybe it's more efficient to do it for all of them. You list them in one morning and say this string, including these applicants we have concerns about and nothing can change that and here's why, and then maybe it's just one document. I think looking at that from a more pragmatic case-by-case base, what is the thing that you're actually concerned about and what is your ultimate outcome may determine whether you want to group them or do individual ones. Thanks. And Marika wants to add something.

MARIKA KONINGS

Yeah, thanks. This is Marika. I just added in the chat because the Applicant Guidebook is specific that it's for an application, not a string. So, again, I think the way and of course it can be copy-paste, but that you focus indeed on the application and again, I think applicants will probably look at this in any way, even if they are not flagged, if they do have the same string.

IAN SHELDON

Thank you. That is a good, important distinction. I think we need to get the process right and perhaps we can find some synergies in

cutting and pasting as appropriate. We have two minutes left in this session. I'm not seeing many other hands.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Sorry to interrupt you. There's a short sort of comment from Jorge in the chat that indeed in certain cases you might spot a mismatch where you feel it's geographic name, but the AGB might think differently.

My personal readout is that those are very much indeed cases where you might want to file an Early Warning and say, we see this differently. We think this is not a .brand, but a geographic name or vice versa and start the conversation with that. But again, this is my personal reading the AGB and then trying to understand the Early Warning process. But maybe as we indeed near time and wrap up, my feeling is we've come a long way, but we still have a few loose items to tie up. And as I said, rather sooner than later.

So, would we be able to establish a sort of comment date and maybe figure out when to revisit this and actually finalize this, be it in this meeting or shortly after via the mailing list. But I kind of would like to wrap this up.

So, everybody has the document and everybody can just work. And then as the viewers I suggested, we can have further discussions on how to process things based on this document. So, what are your thoughts or anybody else in the room? I see Jorge still has his hand up.

IAN SHELDON

I might give the floor to Jorge, but I think I would agree. Perhaps we can clean up the document, finalize the comments, recirculate it by list and get agreement ideally during this meeting. I'm not hearing a lot of other views or concerns coming from the group. So, hopefully we aren't far off from this. Jorge?

JORGE CANCIO

Yeah. Thank you. Thank you, Ian. And thank you, Marco. Just to put on the record and as a, let's say a warning to all GAC colleagues that the definition of Geonames in the Applicant Guidebook is a very restrictive one. So, don't think that the names of your rivers, mountains or other geographic sites are protected or are under a specific regulation under the AGB because they are not.

It's only country names, some two-letter, three-letter codes that are protected, capital city names and city names whenever they are used in a geographic sense. This was a long battle in the PDP negotiations where I participated, but unfortunately, we couldn't get further than just maintaining the status quo of 2012.

So, to cut the long story short, the .Patagonia, the .Amazons of the last round are possible again. So, be aware of this. Don't think this has changed because the situation may repeat itself. Thank you.

IAN SHELDON

Thank you, Jorge. Marco, we are now a little bit over time. So, last comments from you and we'll look to wrap up.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Yeah. Well, last comment and then just to make it explicit because I know that geographic names have been and will probably likely be a very large focus point for the GAC, but this process applies to any string and any region. This is not particularly limited to geographic names. I just want to put that on the record as well.

This is to any application. The GAC has the opportunity to file Early Warnings regardless of what that application might be or how this application is filed, be it a brand, be it a geographic name, be it a random string, we do have the opportunity to file our Early Warnings.

IAN SHELDON

Great. Thank you. I think that draws us to the end of this session. As mentioned, we're going to recirculate this via list. We'll clean the document up. Oh, please, last and be quick.

MARINA FLEGO EIRAS

Thank you very much. This is Marina Flego Eiras from Argentina, for the record. Just to make sure the rules will prevail are those who are determined in the AGB, right? I mean, despite the changes that could be made to this document or guide, which is not binding. That's my question. Thank you.

IAN SHELDON

Yes, these are Early Warnings at its essence, raising flag, sharing early government concern with this process. If there are no other comments, we will, like I mentioned, recirculate the document and find time later in our agenda to seek consensus agreement on this.

With that, thank you. Have a good lunch break and please be back in the room at 1:15 for our bilat with the GNSO. Thanks, folks.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]