
ICANN86 Seville | PF – GAC Capacity Development Session (1 of 2)
Monday, June 08, 2026 – 11:45 to 13:15 CEST

GULTEN TEPE

Welcome to the ICANN86 GAC Capacity Development on GAC Readiness for Next Round session on Monday, 8th of June at 11:45 local time. Please note that this session is being recorded and is governed by the ICANN Expected Standards of Behavior, ICANN Community Participant Code of Conduct, and the ICANN Community Anti-Harassment Policy.

During this session, questions or comments will only be read aloud if submitted in the proper form in the Zoom chat pod. Interpretation for this session will include all six UN languages and Portuguese. If you would like to speak during this session, please raise your hand in the Zoom room.

And please remember to state your name for the record and the language you will be speaking in case speaking a language other than English. And please speak at a reasonable pace to allow for accurate interpretation. I'll now leave the floor to GAC Chair, Nicholas Caballero. Thank you.

NICOLAS CABALLERO

Thank you very much, Gulden. Welcome back, everyone. Please take your seats. So, we're going to begin the session with a status update on the 2026 Round of the New gTLD Program, followed by

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an overview of the application process, including evaluations and opportunities for community input, of course, such as early warnings, GAC advice, objections, appeals, and so on and so forth.

This session, as everybody knows, is highly intended to be interactive with opportunities for GAC members to ask questions, any kind of questions you want. There's no right or wrong question whatsoever. Please feel free to ask. We actually urge you and encourage you to ask all kinds of questions and participate in discussions throughout, including through a few poll questions we're going to show on the screen. We have Marika and Elisa. Chris is not joining us, right? So, welcome. Thank you for your time. Thank you for allocating time for this.

Next slide, please, Gulden. There's a very short, let's say, readiness content disclaimer, just to point out that the authoritative source for all information about New gTLDs, and we have Marika here with us in case anybody has any kind of question, of course, for round rules, evaluations, restrictions, processes, and system, is actually the English version of the New gTLD Program, 2026 Round Applicant Guidebook, and you have the link right there.

So, the readiness and training content is supplementary to the Applicant Guidebook and has been developed to provide a high-level summary of key topic areas of interest to prospective applicants and the broader ICANN community. So, in case of any kind of discrepancy, the Applicant Guidebook prevails. So, that's kind of like the content disclaimer. Next slide, please.

We're going to take a quick look at the agenda for today and then I will kindly handle the floor to my esteemed colleague, Marco, who's going to be running this part of the session. So, as you can see, we have the 2026 Round Status Update, and then we'll talk about Evaluations. Right after that, Community Input, Objections, and Appeals. In the fifth place, we have Systems, Readiness, and then hopefully very engaging Q&A session.

So, without further ado, Marco. I'm sorry, sorry. Marika, Marika, Marika. Please go ahead.

MARIKA KONINGS

Yeah, thank you very much, Nico. And hello, everyone. It's good to be with you again. I think we're here this week for a couple of sessions. So, this is part of the capacity development session. So, we'll take a little bit of a step back on some of the topics and provide a bit more of an introduction. And I think then tomorrow, we're also participating in a plenary session. Oh, closer?

All right, closer. During the plenary session, we'll talk a little bit more about where things currently stand and what you can expect next. So, I'll be kicking things off and then handing over to Elisa. I probably should, for those of you that don't know me, my name is Marika Konings. I serve as the lead for the New gTLD Program. And as I said, we're really happy. Oh, we have a bird visiting, I see.

Okay. We definitely want to keep this interactive, so do feel free to raise your hands whenever you have questions or comments, and

we'll do our best to address those. So, with that, I think we can go to the next slide, please. And the next one. So, as I said, we'll start with a little bit of an introduction, and this may be, for some of you, really basic, but we do want to make sure that everyone is at the same page, but where we're talking about here.

So, we're talking about a New gTLD Program. So, that's focusing on generic top-level domains. And this is what you see here on the screen on the right of the dot. So, in icann.org, .org is the top-level domain here. Maybe a fun fact, so when the DNS started out, there were only seven of those, among which .com, .net, and through the expansion of the DNS through the first New gTLD Program round that was held in 2012, there were over 1,200 top-level domains that were added, including those in different scripts, as you can see some examples here, as well as many, many others.

So, again, that's what we're focusing on now, because we now have arrived at the 2026 round of the New gTLD Program. If we go to the next slide, please. And I think that's just the happy news or to report that we opened the round on the 30th of April. I think hopefully all of you will have seen that. And that basically marks now the start of what we're referring to as the processing phase.

So, where applications are being submitted and they'll be taken through a number of evaluations. And if an applicant is successful, they'll be able to sign an agreement which then makes them officially a registry operator and gives them the ability to run that top-level domain.

But as I said, we'll take a little bit of a step back and look at kind of the background to this, how the round came out to be, as well as some of the elements that are of specific interest to the GAC and how you're able to participate and make sure your voice is heard as well as part of that process.

We'll go to the next slide, please. So, as I said, the 2026 round is the result of a multi-year process in which the community, including members of the GAC, developed policy recommendations to make this expansion of the domain name system possible by setting out the rules and expectations of the criteria applicants would need to meet and the checks we need to do to make sure that we are able to manage this in a predictable and organized manner.

So, that resulted in the SubPro final report, which you may have heard of as well, which then basically gave us the guidance on the rules and expectations to set that were then translated into the Applicant Guidebook. And we've presented to you as well, I think, on a number of occasions on that. And again, as Nico shared at the start, the Applicant Guidebook is really the rulebook for this round.

It sets out all the rules and requirements that applicants will need to meet in order to be a successful applicant. So, who is able to apply? So, this is for legal entities, which include businesses, organizations, institutions, as well as governmental, non-governmental, and intergovernmental entities. As I just shared, the round opened on the 30th of April, and consistent with policy

recommendations, the duration of this window for applications is 15 weeks.

So, that takes us to the 12th of August. So, on that date, the window for applications will close and everyone will have need to submit their application in order to move forward to the next phases of the program. There is a cost associated with this, and I think as we discussed with you previously as well, the program is set up on a cost recovery basis. So, this is not something where ICANN is charging to make money out of this.

Now, this is to pay the costs that are associated with carrying out the evaluations and the different steps of the process. So, again, we work closely with the community on setting that fee, and that translated into \$227,000 per application, and in certain cases, and we'll talk a little bit about that, and I'll slow down.

There may also be conditional fees that are applicable depending on the type of application and the type of evaluations that need to be carried out. If we go to the next slide, please. So, I know there's a lot of detail on this slide, and I think we've also spoken about this with you previously, but it's probably really important to emphasize that this is the projected application timeline.

So, basically, this sets out the milestones that are expected to happen relatively shortly after the close of the application window. But this is based on our assumption of receiving 2,000 applications. So, what the team will do once the window for application closes, we'll assess the number of applications received as well as types of

applications received because that may also impact the work that's involved for us then to be able to confirm these dates.

So, again, that's something that we'll come back with. But based on our projections at this point in time, these are some of the milestones and the timing of which we currently expect these may happen. So, the first big event after the close of the application window, is Reveal Day.

So, after the close of the application window, there is some work that ICANN will need to do to reconcile payments, confirming which applications have paid and are going through, therefore, to the next round, looking at contention sets, which strings are identical and therefore in a potential contention set. And then compiling all that information is what will get published on Reveal Day.

So, at that point, we publish the list of all applications that will have passed the administrative check. So, that's then the moment that kicks off what we're referring to as the string replacement period. So, applicants that have submitted as part of their application, a replacement string, they have the ability at that point in time during a two-week period to change from their original string to their replacement string.

They may have had a look at the list of applications during Reveal Day and, for example, have seen that they're in direct contention with others, and in order to avoid that contention, they may choose to change to that replacement string. So, following that two weeks, we'll then get to string confirmation day. So, that's basically the

moment where the final list of applications and initial contention sets is published. And that then kicks off a string of events.

So, it will mark the start of a string evaluation. And again, we'll talk a little bit more about what is involved in each of these stages of evaluation. But I think more importantly for you, it also kicks off the community input period. And I think that's what Elisa will talk a little bit more about as well. But again, there are several ways in which the community, including the GAC, is able to comment and provide input on applications received through different mechanisms.

There's also an ability at that point to notify us of any singular and plural strings, and that will kind of lead us through in December where we expect a prioritization draw to happen. Again, this comes into play at the moment that applications are in the next stage of evaluations when they get to application and applicant evaluation which happens after a string evaluation.

So, it didn't fit on this slide, but it's basically what happens beyond that June 2027 date when we expect to publish string evaluation reports. So, again, I think this is in a nutshell kind of some of the milestones that you can still expect to happen later this year on our projection of receiving 2,000 applications.

But as I said, we will need to do an assessment once we know the number of applications and types of applications received to confirm these dates. Can we go to the next slide, please? This is kind of, again, to kind of briefly mention there are different type of

applications that can be submitted. And depending on the type of application, it then also depends on the information you need to provide, the questions you need to address, as well as the requirements you will need to meet as an applicant.

So, first of all, there are, of course, general applications. They don't fall into any specialized category, and they're subject to a standard set of defined requirements. Again, the example we've given here is dot link. But then there are a number of what we're calling specialized application types. Again, these are meeting a certain or serving a certain community or organization, and therefore have to go through very specific requirements and additional questions as well to kind of assess whether or not they qualify for that type of TLD.

And in certain cases, there are also very specific evaluations that are associated with that. So those examples are brands. I think many of you are familiar with what those represent. Community TLDs is another category, geographic names, reserve names, variants, and I think it's kind of exciting it's the first time that variants can be applied for in this round. This was dependent on work that the community needed to do to make sure that we had the rules in place on how to deal with and manage variants.

And then internationalized domain names, so basically those in different scripts which were already available for registration in the 2012 round. But again, there are a number of additional scripts that have been added since, and there's an opportunity to apply for

those here as well. So, I think with that, I think we have one more slide in this section, if I'm not mistaken, or maybe this is the -- Oh, we're actually going to a poll. So, I think I'm handing it over to the team. in the back to take us through that.

JULIA CHARVOLEN

Thank you so much, Marika. Just to explain really quick, we're going to be using Mentimeter. So, if you can go to menti.com, I'll show you, menti.com, and here, enter the code that I will be sharing in a moment. There you go. And you'll get -- oh, okay, the code is wrong. Apologies for that. And you'll get the page where you can complete the poll questions. So, we'll be starting with the first question. And I'll put information in the chat as well. Thank you.

NICOLAS CABALLERO

So, before I give you the floor, Elisa, we have a question from Egypt.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

This is Abdalmonem Galila for The Record. Actually, my question is related to the string replacement. What I mean is, is this advice from ICANN for the applicant to change the string, or it is an option, or it is intent from the applicant to change the string? And why he is going for that, for this change, at the time he is applying for this string from the early beginning for the applicant submission? Thank you.

MARIKA KONINGS

Yeah, thank you for that question. So, an applicant would need to have submitted a replacement string as part of their application. That doesn't mean that they're required to use it, but it's the only way they have the option then when the string replacement period happens to change that if they choose to. Again, it's their decision to make based on the information that they may see on Reveal Day.

They may make a determination to say, well, actually seeing the broader field of applications and potential contention I may run into. If I go to my replacement string, I may you avoid that. So, again, it's completely up to the applicant, but in order to be able to switch to a replacement string, they will need to have submitted one as part of the application. They cannot do that after the fact.

ELISA BUSETTO

Hi, everybody, this is Elisa for the record. And you have already started responding to the questions. But the first question is, when will all applications be published and the final applied for strings confirmed? And the options are A, on Reveal Day, projected to be in April 2027. On string confirmation day, projected to be in November this year. Never, because applications are secret. And once ICANN has finalized all evaluations.

And I think we'll give it another minute or so for participants to answer. And I see answers are still trickling in. And the correct answer is B, on string confirmation day, which we expect to be at the end of this year, though we will have more information on the

exact timeline once we know how many applications we have received. And I think I will hand it back to Marika.

MARIKA KONINGS

Thanks, Elisa. And maybe this is also a moment to take a little pause to see if there are any other questions anyone has. Yep. Please go ahead, Marco.

MARCO HOGEWONING

I might be ahead of you. Thank you. For the record, it's Marco speaking for the Netherlands. Now, when you mentioned the different application types, I understood that that's managed by the applicant. They can pick and choose themselves. In case somebody in the GAC feels that a string has been applied for under the wrong application type, is there a way for redress?

MARIKA KONINGS

Yes, I think this is definitely something to call out in either GAC early warning or comments, but there are also certain elements that are checked through the evaluation process. For example, geographic names.

If you say, I'm not a geographic name, but you are going to be using that TLD for geographic name purpose, that will be called out, and again, there's a specific evaluation that will look at that, so at that point, an applicant will be notified, so either you need to change

the way you're using the string or you're going to fall into this category.

So, again, I think it's both options, but we're also, of course, looking at whether someone is falling in a certain category and if they've wrongly identified themselves, that that may need to be corrected. Yes, Nigel.

NIGEL CASSIMIRE

Thank you, Nigel Cassimire from the CTU. I looked at this question and it says the first choice is on Reveal Day, which is likely to be in April 2027. But I think there's a Reveal Day in October. Am I right?

MARIKA KONINGS

Yeah, that was meant to be completely wrong.

NIGEL CASSIMIRE

Right, okay. So, my question really is, so what will be revealed on Reveal Day if the applications will be published and finalized on string confirmation day?

MARIKA KONINGS

So, on Reveal Day is when we, for the first time, will publish all the strings that have been applied for and all the information that will be public for all applications. So, that's also kind of marked, I think, in the Applicant Guidebook, so all the related information. But

that's not necessarily the final list because we have the string replacement period.

So, again, if no one opts for a replacement string, the list could be identical. But again, it's that window where it's the initial list and it's only final until we know whether or not anyone opts for the replacement string. And that is what's published then. on string confirmation day, but as I said, the information that's published is the same.

Again, in the case of replacement string, an applicant will be asked to also provide all answers to the questions in relation to those strings, which may or may not be the same as for their original string. So, that might also be information that changed. But again, if an applicant sticks with their string, it's the identical information that will be available on Reveal Day versus String Confirmation Day.

NICOLAS CABALLERO

Thank you, Marika. We have a hand from the Netherlands.

MAAIKE VEENSTRA

Thank you, Nico. Sorry, when you were talking about the different types of applications, I was wondering what the exact difference between the variants and the IDNs is. I couldn't quite catch it, so thank you.

MARIKA KONINGS

Yeah, and I'm definitely not the expert on this topic. So, I think that's where, and it may be an interesting topic for you at some point to look at kind of the difference there. But my understanding is a variant basically means the same thing in a certain script, but is represented in a different way. So, again, an IDN is just a string in a different script.

While for a variant, you apply to have that associated with your either existing TLD or the principal TLD that you've applied for. So, you will kind of use that as a package, sort of say. And there's also then, in the case of a variant string, there are certain questions that are associated with how are you planning to use that variant?

Because as part of the application and as part of the policy recommendations, we need to make sure that variants are used in a consistent way and do not create confusion for end users. So, I think that's in a nutshell. But as I said, I'm definitely not the variant expert, but I hope that that helps.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Yeah, maybe it looks like the same question, but in a different methodology. What I am thinking about is that if we are talking here about the string as a string, or the string with its variances for the application submission. Maybe one of these variants, maybe the string that the applicant applied for, maybe have some consequences or some variants that may be not accepted by other

communities. How could it be handled within the program of utility? Thank you.

MARIKA KONINGS

Yeah, thanks for the question. I think we're going into probably a bit more detail than I can answer on this one. But this is also where, indeed, there is opportunity for comments. There's also a specific review that takes place by a variant panel that looks, indeed, at those issues.

And it's, indeed, either associated with a string that has been applied for, but it could also be for existing TLDs. So, there's also an ability for those that applied in the 2012 round to now apply for the variants for already existing strings. Again, it's kind of the policy that set that up.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

What I have to say is that maybe one of these variances or the string itself, maybe in some countries, it is in a profanity list or restricted list. So, this is the issue for myself?

MARIKA KONINGS

Yeah, and I said, I think that falls in the same category, like around the meaning. And I think we're talking about comments and objections. But of course, like from a security and stability perspective, only variants can be applied for that allocatable. So, there's a panel that has already kind of done that assessment.

So, I think applicants can already see ahead of time, at least from a technical perspective, which variants they're able to apply for and that are in principle allocatable. But obviously, if there are concerns about the meaning of the string or what it represents, there are processes in place that also apply for any other string, basically, not only variants. So, I guess one hand in the back.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Yes, I believe we have somebody queued up in the Zoom room, Marika, and just for people in the room, if you can. And I've got Azerbaijan in the room and I've got somebody in Zoom. So, I've got two people in the queue. But before we move back, if people in the room, please speak closer to the microphone because our interpreters have a hard time getting the audio and so do the people remote. But I'll give the floor to Azerbaijan first then.

JEYHUN HUSEYNZADE

Thank you, sir. Again, my name is Jeyhun. Before preceding my concern and question, it's my first time at ICANN at the GAC meeting. I first want to understand the background of cost that is fixed for application review process, maybe it was open at the beginning, and you may say that why we didn't touch that for this question before. For example, my concern is that this is too much for countries like Azerbaijan, and I believe that no application will be seen during the application process.

So, I believe that there were many discussions around this, and I also believe that I don't think there will be any applicant from Azerbaijan particularly for high cost for application. And also, my belief is that it's also too much for countries similar to Azerbaijan at development level.

MARIKA KONINGS

Yeah, thank you for that question, and indeed appreciate that for some this may be cost prohibitive, but again, we're kind of implementing policy recommendations here whereby the program is expected to be set up in a cost recovery manner. So, we've kind of looked at, and I think we see it in one of the upcoming slides, kind of the number of evaluations an application needs to go through.

It's a very robust process and there are obviously costs associated with that. Having said that, and we're not really talking about that today, but again, I think it's something where maybe, I don't know if in the later sessions, but what we did set up was the Applicant Support Program.

So, that is a program that has been set up for those for which this is cost prohibitive and that meets certain criteria that they can request support, in which case they would get 75% reduction of the gTLD application fee as well as non-financial support to kind of help them in the application process.

Having said that, that program has already closed. So, we're actually in the process of evaluating applications and already quite a few that have qualified. And maybe also important to know that we're talking about around. So, the community has also set the expectation that as we progress, there will be multiple rounds and future opportunities.

We also anticipate in that regard that, of course, having set up everything now, we don't need to recuperate the cost of redoing what we've already developed and implemented, that there is a possibility that costs may go down. Again, I cannot make any promises because, obviously, there may be further requirements that are developed either through policy development or as well lessons learned because of course, the price has been set as well based on assumptions we've made about costs and work that is involved.

So, again, we will obviously review that and keep the community informed, but that's basically indeed where, on the one hand, the cost is derived from, but on the other hand as well that we do have a program that is intended to assist those for which the fee may not be within their means.

And again, we're happy to share more information about the Applicant Support Program, and that may be indeed for the next time that kind of runs an opportunity, and we're definitely hoping as well that GAC members, of course, share that information in

their countries for those that may be interested to participate in that.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Thank you, Marika. Just to double check for my queue, I've got the World Broadcasting Corporation Indonesia, and then I've got another queue in the Zoom room from, I believe, Georgia. So, Giacomo, World Broadcasting Corporation, and please be mindful in your time and your length of interventions. We've still got quite a bit of material to go through. But Giacomo, your turn.

GIACOMO MAZZONE

Thank you very much. My question is very simple. The first is, what is the trend, even if the application period is still open, of course? But I remember that in 2012, there was a flood of application in the first hours, in the first minutes of the opening. So, we are seeing the same rush this year or not? That's my main question. The second is, why you have so many troubles in getting independent objector and there has been a certain lack of transparency about this process. Thank you.

MARIKA KONINGS

Yeah, I can take the first one, and then probably hand it to Elisa for the second one. So, we're actually not sharing any information on applications. I don't even know. We're keeping that information very tightly held because again we want to keep that kind of confidential and it's not information that we're planning to share

until we get to Reveal Day and we're able to publish the applications that have been received.

ELISA BUSETTO

And concerning independent objectors, maybe for context I can share that we currently have a so-called expression of interest open to hire three independent objectors who are going to look at applications and file objections in the light of the public interest.

So, we did have a couple of technical glitches, which is also why we had to push the timeline. Both the glitches were fixed. And as also mentioned initially when we first extended the deadline, we also had some challenges with the uptake. However, I would not say that there has been lack of transparency.

I would just like to stress that we cannot share information on applicants and we cannot share information on the ongoing process until we have made a selection. So, of course, the moment we have made a selection, we will make sure that the community is informed. Thank you.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Thank you. The next on my list is Indonesia.

ASHWIN

SASONGKO

SASTROSUBROTO

Thank you. I have two questions, actually. Number one is, as you might be aware, as I'm aware, the name of geographic names is protected. And now, in a country like Indonesia, for example, we

have 17,000 islands or so. The names of the islands are registered by the Indonesian related ministry to the UN GEGN that looks after geographic names.

Now, with those names, it may happen that we miss one or two of the names. Somebody may apply the name. For example, .bali. Well, bali is important, so everybody knows it. But there are thousands of small island names. Small island also have names. Now, my first question is what we should do if ICANN already give the name to a particular operator, operator registry, and then we say, okay, this is the geographic name. What can we do after ICANN gave the contract to a particular registry? This is number one.

Number two question is that many Indonesian islands, especially the main island, have Indonesian name, but also the translated English name. For example, Jawa is Java, J-A-W-A, is the official name of our main island, one of the main islands, but the English translation is Java. Now, when a company applies for Java, if you remember several years ago, finally, after discussion and so on, it is given, not a public TLD, but as a, what do you call it, private or close TLD, whatever is the name.

Now, many islands have similarities like that. Kalimantan Island is called Borneo and so on and so on, you see. I have the English name. Now, how can we check it? Because it may happen that the applicant doesn't know that it is a geographic name because it is an English translation of that particular thing. Thank you.

MARIKA KONINGS

Yeah, thank you. On your first question, and I think that's slightly outside of my remit, because then I think you're already dealing with contracted parties, and again, if they're not meeting the requirements that are set out in their contract, there are specific processes that can be initiated.

So, I think that's probably a question for my colleagues, what would potentially happen in a scenario where someone has been granted a TLD, and then later on there's a realization that may not have been on the grounds or the appropriate grounds.

But as I said, that's kind of outside of the remit of the program because at that point, our checks happened before that. And to your second question, again, it's either through the geographic names review that happened. So, there is a panel that will first of all look at is this a geographic name and is it being used as a geographic name?

Does it appear on any lists that require specific approval? And then, of course, it will also look at any public comment that come in. And again, my understanding is also that at least for those that appear on lists, there's also an expectation that indeed your translation is factored into that or at least in the UN languages, I think some of that is provided as well as part of those lists.

But again, we will definitely rely as well on input from the community, and I appreciate that that may indeed take efforts, but

I think we discussed as well with the GAC that obviously we're working on, providing you as well with a format that will make it easy to search. And I appreciate that, of course, depending on the volume, that may still take time, but hopefully as well with modern tools, there may also be help in that way to kind of review the list and identify if there are any names with which there are concerns.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Thank you, Marika. I have Brazil still in the queue, and then I suggest we'll move on to our next set of slides. So, Brazil, you have the floor.

RENATA MIELLI

Hello, here. Thank you very much. My question is about the phonetic similarities, how ICANN will deal with an application with phonetic similarity, but it's different from the words, what's the rule about this kind of application? It's like Indonesia, but I don't know. I know in the previous gTLD round, it had call with K and call, and this application couldn't be -- I'm going to speak in Portuguese, please.

It's a thing about phonetic similarities. In the past rounds, there was an application with call with K and call with C. Call with K was not accepted, was not approved, because it was call with C. So, let's suppose there's another application with phonetic similarity and with some gTLDs already delegated. How are we going to

tackle this? Will this be evaluated or denied? I don't know if my question was clear enough.

ELISA BUSETTO

Thank you for your question. So, there is a check first, a submission where the proposed applied-for string is going to be compared to a list of strings which cannot be delegated. And this includes strings that are already in the root. So, if you are trying to apply for a string that already exists, you will not be able to proceed with your application.

Concerning confusing similarity, we have different safeguards in place. First of all is the string similarity evaluation, which was one of the string evaluations that are performed after String Confirmation Day. So, ICANN, in collaboration with the community, has developed string similarity evaluation guidelines, and these were developed based on policy.

So, a number of checks will be performed by a panel, by an appointed panel, that will check for similarity based on these rules. And strings will also be checked against already delegated strings, but also other strings, including other applied for strings, block names, reserved names, and others. There is another safeguard in place, which is the string confusion objections.

So, applicants or parties will also be able to claim that a string is confusingly similar to other strings, including already delegated strings, and the panel will look at their claim. And this check, this

string confusion objections is not limited to visual similarity but it also expands to oral similarity, so pronunciation basically, but also similarity meaning.

So, this string confusion objections kind of expands and complements the string similarity evaluation. So, I don't know if this answers your question.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Thank you. Can you please be brief, because we have to start moving on.

PÄR BRUMARK

Thank you. Very brief. I just wonder, from page six, IDN was listed as an object that you could apply for. IDNs, do you have to apply separately for that?

MARIKA KONINGS

So, basically as part of your application, you have to indicate that you are looking for an IDN. Because again, there are specific questions associated with that type of application.

PÄR BRUMARK

Thank you.

MARIKA KONINGS

All right, I think very briefly then, maybe just the next slide, and I'll hand it on over to Elisa. Again, as we've said, as a result of the

community recommendations, there's a very robust evaluation process in place that an application will have to go through so we can confirm that indeed they meet the criteria they have you know financial capability to run a gTLD, they meet the requirements in you know these different areas that we address kind of any concerns or issues that are raised and that kind of is spread over these different phases of the evaluation process.

So, again there are a number of validations that happen and kind of during the submission, and Elisa already referred to the checking against the blocked names list, certain names you cannot apply for, so you're not even able to submit your application. There are also other checks that happen at that stage as well. Then the first set of evaluations focus on the string itself.

So, we look at the string. Indeed, is it a geographic name? Are there singular or plural concerns? String similarity, we just discussed safeguard assessment, and then as well name collision initial assessment happens. And again, that's all carried out on the string itself. And once string evaluation is complete, we start with application and applicant evaluation. So, again, applicant evaluations look at who's the applicant. Do we have any concerns about this entity?

Are there any reasons why ICANN may not want to enter into a contract with this applicant? Do they have the financial and operational means to run a TLD? Because, again, we do want to make sure that these applicants are successful. And then we look

as well at the number of application-related evaluations. Most of these are conditional evaluations that, again, depend on the type of application that you are, that you may need to go through these.

But some of these are required. So, for example, we need to check, do you have a registry service provider that has been evaluated through the registry service program? Again, that's one that we check for all applications. So, again, this gives you hopefully a bit of a picture of all the evaluations a string and an application and an applicant will need to go through before they get to the point of having passed all these evaluations and being able to go into conversations around contracting. So, I think with that --

NICOLAS CABALLERO

I have a quick question, Marika, and it has to do more or less, it is somehow related to the historical remarks that I made at the beginning of the session. Like, what would happen with historical names? Kind of like in Spain, for example, in southern Spain, Gades, which is nowadays Cadiz, right? What would happen if somebody wants to register Gades, G-A-D-E-S, because it's obviously not the modern city of Cadiz, right? So, what happens there?

MARIKA KONINGS

If it's on a list, it may be protected. Again, I don't know the specific situation here. If it's not, then there are opportunities, if there's concern, especially about the use, because obviously there may be

a purpose or a meaning to this word that's very different and it's not focused on related to Cadiz, but obviously if it's marketed as we're going to represent the city of Cadiz, then we would definitely expect probably Spanish GAC representatives to first of all start with early warning and an identification that may not be acceptable. But again, that's a hypothetical case that hopefully we don't need to get into.

ELISA BUSETTO

And I think we can go to the next slide.

MARCO HOGEWONING

I think we can move on.

ELISA BUSETTO

This is Elisa for the record, and I will briefly talk about the different ways the community, including GAC members and observers as well as the GAC as a whole, can provide their feedback on specific applications or groups of applications. So, all these actions start on String Confirmation Day, which is the day when the final strings are published and are made available to the public.

So, the first avenue the general public has to provide their input is by finding application comments on the so-called application comment forum, which is a platform that will open on String Confirmation Day and will be managed by ICANN. Anybody can submit application comments, meaning that also GAC members

and observers will have the chance to use this platform to provide their feedback.

Application comments do not necessarily have a direct impact on the application, but if they are submitted during the 104 days following string confirmation day, as well as during other specified time frames, which will be communicated to the public, they might be taken into account by evaluators that are performing the relevant evaluation that the comment refers to.

Another way the community can provide their feedback is by filing singular or plural notifications. And again, GAC members and observers may also submit a singular or plural notification. There are only 30 days following String Confirmation Day, during which singular or plural notifications can be filed.

And they have the objective of identifying if an applied-for string is a singular or plural form of another applied-for string, a delegated TLD, a string being processed from a previous new gTLD around, or a block name.

There will be an evaluation performed, which is called singular-plural evaluation, and its result might be that an application cannot proceed if, for instance, the string is found to be the singular or plural form of an already delegated TLD, but there's also other checks that will be performed, or it might be placed in a contention set if the string is found to be the singular or plural form of another applied-for string.

Both these ways to provide comment do not have any costs associated and will be handled by ICANN via ICANN managed platforms. Next slide, please. GAC members and observers may file GAC member early warnings, and these early warnings should be filed in the 104 days following string confirmation day. Early warnings do not have a direct impact on applications, but they may signal that the application could be later subject to GAC consensus advice.

Early warnings must include a written explanation describing why the early warning was submitted and also how the applicant may address the GAC members or observers' concerns. GAC members and observers, they should also provide contact details for communication with the applicant so that they could potentially work together on trying to find a solution on how to make the application proceed.

We also included a link here, and as Julia mentioned, the presentation will be posted shortly to the website where you can see what early warnings were submitted during the 2012 round. And as you know, I believe there will be further discussions around this in the next session. And next slide, please. The GAC, as you know, can also issue GAC consensus advice at any time throughout the application process.

But of course, we would encourage, ideally, the sooner it is submitted, the easier it will be for applicants to potentially address any concerns. The ICANN Board will consider the GAC advice

concerning applications and they will accept it or not. And if the GAC does accept the GAC consensus advice, the application may be prevented from proceeding or may only proceed with specific modifications.

So, there was quite a lot of GAC advice was issued in the 2012 round, and if you would like to take a look, you can refer to the communique between ICANN46, which took place in Beijing and ICANN54, which took place in Dublin. So, you may also take a look at the advice from the last round there. And next slide, please. Finally, objections is another way the community has to provide their input on applications. Objections do come with a cost, unlike the other processes, and they're filed by parties withstanding.

And you may refer to the guidebook. We'll also include some information in the next slide, but this is quite a complex process, so if you need more information, we would really invite you to check the information in Module 4 of the guidebook. So, GAC members and observers may have standing to file objections, but this very much depends on the ground and the specific situation. Objections can be filed on four different grounds, and I will elaborate on that in the next slide.

And they can be submitted in the 104 days following String Confirmation Day for all objection grounds. There will be an additional window for string confusion only, which is what I referred to earlier, for 30 days after the publication of the updated contention sets, after string evaluation is concluded. But also, in

case of brand string changes, there will be an additional window of 30 days.

But I think that for the time being, also considering what's coming over the next few months, we can focus on the 104 days following string confirmation day. So, a panel will look at objections and they will issue a so-called panel determination, which will determine whether the application can proceed. The application can only proceed with modifications or the application cannot proceed at all.

And the results of the panel determination itself can be appealed, which is something new compared to the last round where there wasn't an appeal process in place. And can you move to the next slide, please? So, this is a very high-level overview of the four objection grounds, which, once again, are quite complex. So, the first one is string confusion, and this is what I briefly referred to earlier.

So, the objection on a string confusion ground are based on a claim that the applied for primary string or its allocatable variant label or its block variant label is confusingly similar visually, orally, so in pronunciation, or in meaning, to an existing TLD, and or another applied for primary gTLD string, or any other allocatable or blocked variant strings.

So, this really refers to a string being confusingly similar to another. And as mentioned, string confusion objections complement the string similarity evaluation, which is one of the string evaluations

that are performed after string confirmation day. Only an existing gTLD or ccTLD operators or applicants from the application round have standing to file a string confusion objection.

Of course, we're referring to the similarity to their own string, let's say. And please note that we are oversimplifying here and the matter is quite complex. Rights holders as well as IGOs meeting the criteria for registration of a .int domain name may file legal rights objections based on a claim that the string infringes on its existing legal rights.

Then anybody, which of course also includes GAC members and observers, may file limited public interest objections on a claim that the string is contrary to generally accepted legal norms of morality and public order. Finally, established institutions that are associated with clearly delineated communities may file community objections on a claim that there is well-substantiated opposition to a string from a significant portion of the community which the string may explicitly or implicitly targeting.

And once again, in the guidebook, we elaborate on each aspect of community objections. And I think I see a hand up. Can we stop here to take some questions, maybe?

MARCO HOGEWONING

Yeah, it might be good at this stage to take a few questions before we start testing the participants' knowledge about this. Now, you mentioned filing objections. There is a cost associated. I have

understood there is some support mechanism for particular community groups and governments?

ELISA BUSETTO

Yeah, thank you, Marco. That's correct. So, ICANN will be able to fund one objection and one appeal if requested by national governments. So, one objection appeal per national government subject to certain requirements. And we have recently published the instructions on how this is going to work on the New gTLD Program website. And I can maybe post a link later so you can take a look. Also, the ALAC can apply for funding.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Thank you. I see no hands in my Zoom queue. Is there anybody else who has a question here? Otherwise. I guess nothing. Oh, I see Switzerland, Jorge.

JORGE CANCIO

Thank you, Marco. So, Jorge Cancio for the record. Maybe this is a bit of a difficult, tricky question. There's conversation going on to what extent denominations of origin can be protected through an objection. So, whether there is some possibility to use the legal rights or the limited public interest one, or maybe even the community one. Don't know if you have thought about that, if you have some documentation on that. Thank you.

MARIKA KONINGS

Yeah, thanks for that question. I think that is really up to the panel to evaluate the kind of standing, and I know that in that area there are not necessarily international agreements that may apply. So, again, it's not something where ICANN has policy or requirements. So, it's basically up to the panel to evaluate the standing and the rules that apply. But I think, as you're aware, in that area, there's maybe not a clear answer to that.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Thank you. I see no further hands. Yes, I have another hand. Sorry, you're the -- Okay.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER

Yes, thank you very much. I'm in the room. Yes, thank you very much. I just have a quick question. It's about how does ICANN ensure that the legitimacy of this public policy concern can be adequately considered when they do not clearly fit within the existing objective category present here. I don't know if you already talked about it, but I miss it perhaps.

MARIKA KONINGS

Could you elaborate on your question, please?

UNKNOWN SPEAKER

Yes, it's just to know that in case of this concern is not something existing in the different category you just elaborated, how ICANN can fit it? This is the question.

MARIKA KONINGS

Yeah, so I think I understand your question. If there's a concern that doesn't relate to string confusion or legal rights or limit public interest or community, but there's still a concern, what mechanisms does either ICANN or community have? So, I think at least I shared that there are various paths, so starting with comment.

So, I think that's an ability to kind of express any concerns you may have regarding a string, and depending on what that comment relates to, that is information that's passed on to a relevant evaluator that may be looking at that area. GAC early warning is clearly a path whereby GAC members and observers can flag to applicants that they have concern in certain areas.

And if that elevates, and again, if the applicant in response to that is not able to address those concerns, then obviously the GAC has the ability as well through GAC advice to make clear that there is a concern that is shared by GAC members in the context of the public interest for which either an applicant would need to provide certain safeguards or should not be permitted to move forward.

So, there are several paths in which applicants or the community are able to kind of flag and raise issues that then are considered as part of the evaluation process. So, I hope that addresses your question.

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- UNKNOWN SPEAKER Yes, yes, it's clear. Thank you.
- MARCO HOGEWONING Thank you. Then I have a queue formed by the UK and Egypt. Just to check, Marika and Elisa, how much time do you still need?
- ELISA BUSETTO I think we only have the polls left, so even if we don't manage to go through all the poll questions, I think that's okay.
- MARCO HOGEWONING Okay, thank you. Then I hand the floor to the UK. Craig.
- CRAIG STANLEY-ADAMSON Thank you, Craig Stanley-Adamsen, UK GAC, for the record. This is just a very quick question. I think it's been touched upon a number of times under legal rights. Obviously, this goes through UDRP WIPO. I just want to clarify that a rights holder is not just a trademark owner but can also be for geographic indicators and things like that. Thank you.
- MARIKA KONINGS We expand on the definition of rights holder in the Applicant Guidebook, so yes, there's some additional eminence to that.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Thank you. I see Egypt has removed themselves from the queue. Do you still want it? You're good?

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Yes, this is Abdalmonem Galila for the record. Actually, you did handle the string and its variants very well, which is already appreciated. But actually, maybe the problem is not only for variances. Maybe with IDNs and its translation to other scripts, for example, from Arabic to Latin script.

Maybe we have words in Arabic that couldn't be reserved by English one, its translation. It could make a lot of corruption, a lot of confusion. Especially, for example, for the religion institutions, countries from Arabic to English one, this could be a kind of confusion that I am thinking about. Thank you.

MARIKA KONINGS

Yeah, thanks. And as I said, I think indeed those are issues that we expect our hope community can bring to the attention of the relevant evaluations to kind of make that case. Because again, it's very important to look at what is confusing for the end users and to try to avoid that as much as possible.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Thank you. In which case, I think it's time to actually test what you've picked up from this room. Am I right? Not sure whether

there are any prizes, but sure there's lunch waiting at the other end of this poll.

ELISA BUSETTO

So, here's the second poll question for today, which is, which one is not a mechanism that the community has to provide their input on New gTLD applications? And it's GAC member early warnings, singular-plural notifications, GAC advice, application comments, challenges and objections. I will give it a couple of minutes. Everybody is getting it. So, indeed, paying attention.

So, while E. Challenges is unsurprisingly correct, and the rest are indeed ways the community have to provide their input. And next question, please. So, can application comments prevent an application from proceeding? And I hope this is a bit trickier than the previous one, so I hope there will be some mistakes here. So, A is no, but they may be taken into account by evaluators. B, only if they're submitted by a GAC member. And C, application comments are not a concept in the context of the 2026 round.

We'll give it another few seconds. And here there are a few mistakes. So, the correct answer is A, no. They may be taken into account by evaluators when they perform the relevant evaluations. It is GAC member early warnings that can only be submitted by GAC members and observers. But anybody can submit a comment via the application comment forum. And next question, please.

Can GAC observers file GAC member early warnings? And I kind of already answered that like a second ago. And I'm happy to hear that GAC member early warnings can only be submitted only on Tuesdays. So, tomorrow, you will be able to submit a GAC member early warning, apparently. So, the answer is yes, observers can submit GAC member early warnings, and all days of the week, starting on String Confirmation Day. Sadly, not tomorrow. Next slide, please. Or question, rather.

I hope this is a bit trickier. So, when can singular plural notifications be submitted? And A is at the same time as objections, which is during the 104 days following String Confirmation Day. B is during the first day of the next ICANN meeting, between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. local time. So, it's a stringent two hours you will have to submit singular or plural notifications or during the 30 days following string confirmation day. And the correct answer, somebody got it right, it's B. No, it's C, which is during the 30 days following string confirmation day.

So, 104 days is for objections, for comments to be taken into account by evaluators, and ideally also for GAC member early warnings. But singular plural notification is only in the 30 days following string confirmation day. Next slide. And it's again about GAC member early warnings. Do they require consensus? Yes, no, or only in specific circumstances? And the correct answer is no, no consensus is required for GAC member early warnings to be submitted. And next slide, next question.

So, when can the GAC issue advice on New gTLD Applications? So, it's only for 104 days, starting on string confirmation day. This time it's only on Mondays, because better after a good weekend of rest. C is only during the ICANN meeting, following string confirmation day, and finally, anytime. And only 16 people answered this question. Okay, it's getting better. So, I would still love to know who answered B.

Not only on Mondays. One doesn't require a good weekend of rest to file consensus advice, but consensus advice can be issued at any time. And next question, please. Who can file objections? So, only the GAC. Anybody? Only parties withstanding, depending on the ground. Only ICANN community members, also depending on the ground. I see it is a bit trickier. Glad to see that.

So, only parties with standing can file objections. And in the case of limited public interest objections, anybody has standing. But for other objections, specific requirements need to be met in order for a party to have their objection move to the next stage.

So, correct answer is C. And we can move to the next question. How can application comments be submitted? So, the first is via email to the GAC chair with GAC support staff in copy, and I'm sure Benedetta and Giulia are pumped about this one. The second one is via the application comment forum. Then it's on a dedicated page on the New gTLD Program website. And finally on TAMS, which is our TLD Application Management system, which is where all the applications are submitted.

So, you're not expected to send any emails to file application comments, but comments are filed via the application comment forum, which, as I mentioned earlier, is a platform that is managed by ICANN and that will be made available to the public on String Confirmation Day. And on TAMS is where applicants are filing their applications. And next question.

So, can GAC member early warnings be submitted via the application comment forum? Yes, but only for GAC members observers. Sorry, but GAC members and observers have to follow a different process, or no there's there are specific procedures for GAC members and observers, or they can only be submitted via TAMS. So, I see answers are still coming in. So, only application comments can be submitted via the application comment forum.

GAC member early warnings have to be submitted following specific procedures that I think you guys will be discussing in the next session. And next question. Can GAC members and observers see the application comments that have been submitted by other parties? So, no, only evaluators have access to application comments. Yes, unless the comments pertain to confidential portions of an application and were submitted confidentially.

And C, yes, but only if the comments were submitted during the 104 days following String Confirmation Day. And most of you got it wrong. The correct answer is B. Yes, unless the comments pertain to confidential portions of the application and were submitted confidentially. So, when submitting a comment, the commenter

will have to select the application their comment pertains to if it relates to a specific evaluation, and such comments will be forwarded to the relevant evaluators.

However, all comments that pertain to public portions of the application and were submitted publicly will be available to everybody. So, anybody can read the comments that were submitted regarding applications, even if they were submitted outside an application comment window. So, even after the 104 days following string confirmation date. So, yes, correct answer is B.

And I think that now we're -- are there any more poll questions or not? We're ready to move to the final -- Like we still have a few slides, unless there are any comments or questions regarding the poll. So, if not, we just wanted to share with you a few screenshots from some of the systems that our teams have been working really hard to develop. And the first one is the Application Comment Forum.

I believe this is the home page. It is not yet available, so this is a screenshot from our testing environment. But here you can see how there's a few words about the application comment forum itself and application comments. And commenters will be able to submit comments quite easily by clicking on add comment. They will have to answer a few questions before being able to do so, but also have an ICANN account. But then the comments will be visible

to anybody. Next slide, please. And here is an example of what a comment will look like to the public.

So, you see that there is some information about the commenter themselves, so name, affiliation, if they have a statement of interest. But then, as mentioned, they will also have to select the evaluation their comment relates to, subject, the comment itself, and they will also be able to provide attachments to their comment.

Also, something that I didn't mention earlier, applicants will also be able to respond to comments. And there's a few poll questions related to this. I don't know if we have the time or if we can move to the -- Yeah, we still have 10 minutes, so maybe we can also go through the poll questions there.

JULIA CHARVOLEN

We went through the poll questions.

ELISA BUSETTO

Okay, already. Okay, sorry about that. Sorry, Julia. Then TAMS. So, TAMS is the TLD Application Management System, and it is the system that's used by applicants, among other things. TAMS does many things, as we know. It's also used by applicants to submit their applications. Unfortunately, we're not ready yet to share a dashboard including all the applications, which is what will be visible to the general public.

We're still working on that. But we still wanted to share a few screenshots on what the application looks like to applicants. So, here you can see each applicant has a dashboard, and they have the opportunity to create an organization, meaning that it's the applying entity, and also file the specific application.

So, applicants will not have to fill out the entity information several times if they are applying for several strings, but they will only have to do it once. So, this is really making it much easier for applicants that are filing several applications. And here you can see what kind of information is available to them. Next slide. And here is just a screenshot from the organization information question.

All the questions that applicants have to respond to are available in Appendix 1 of the Applicant Guidebook. So, here is just an example from our system. And next slide. And this is in the questionnaire, so the section on TAMS that relates to the application itself. So, applicants will also have to fill this out. And this is currently happening because the application window is open as you know.

So, we just wanted for you to take a look at some of the systems that our team has been working on. I think this is the end of the -- Oh, no, we still have a slide on readiness. So, next slide, please. We included here some of the resources that our team has developed, specifically some of which are for the general public, some of which are specific for GAC members.

So, first of all, as you know, the source of all truth is the New gTLD Program 2026 round Applicant Guidebook on which we have worked for several years and is now published on the New gTLD Program website, both in PDF and in HTML. And I shared the link earlier to the homepage. For application information and application types, we would like to invite you to refer to Appendix 1 as mentioned, which is where all the application questions that are on TAMs are listed.

But also, we have developed a key topic overview on TLD application types as well as Q&As. Related to community input, objections, and appeals, the team has developed a GAC workbook, which is specifically meant for the GAC, of course, as well as GAC members and early warnings, focusing on the different ways that GAC can provide their input.

And we also have topic overviews, which are also linked in this slide, on different community input processes. During ICANN84, we also discussed quite in-depth the various processes, so you may also watch a recording of that or re-watch the session from today. Then, if you want to have some general information on the program, you can refer, of course, to the website.

We've also published webinars, presentations, resources, as well as the TAMS applicant user guide, and we have a wonderful readiness team who's been working very hard on all this. We also have use cases to tell the story of the TLDs, considerations, and business impact you can refer to.

And final, the New gTLD SubPro final report, which lists all the outputs that we have, which include recommendation, implementation guidance, as well as affirmations that we have implemented while working on the program, notably when developing the Applicant Guidebook.

And I think this is it from our end, and I'll hand it to Marco to manage the Q&A portion. I'm afraid we only have six minutes left. Thank you.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Thank you indeed. We still have a few minutes left if there's any questions remaining. I've one for myself and then we can just do little thumbs up, thumbs down. Do you feel ready? I mean, we talk a lot about GEC readiness. So, for you thumbs up, I feel ready. I don't know yet. Thumbs down, not yet prepared at all. Can we see some hands? Yeah, we see some. We see a couple of thumbs up.

Unless I have anybody in my Zoom queue. And I see thumbs on the screen. So, well done, well done. I do not see anybody in the queue. So, Elisa, Marika, thank you for this wonderful overview. Be reminded this is only part one. After the lunch, we'll continue with a very more interactive session that focuses on GAC readiness.

So, be back then and there. And we hope also to solicit some more input from the GAC members on how to prepare and what they're doing. Another thing I'd like to mention is there was a mention of

GAC early warning. The final process has been mentioned on the mailing list several times now.

So, for the GAC members, please have a last look. But I think we have that process now good to go. So, Marika, Elisa, and every other ICANN staff who are behind the scenes, thank you for helping us out here, and I'm happy to hand back to Nico.

NICOLAS CABALLERO

Thank you so much again, Marika, Elisa, and of course Lars. Is Lars in the room? Because before being the successor -- can you stand up Lars? Because you work so hard and apart from the fact that you're Rob Hogarth's successor, this is in part your job and we just wanted to recognize that.

So, thank you so very much. Hard work indeed. Fantastic job. So, I'm very happy to let you go five minutes before the allocated time. As you know, we're going to be applying this in a very interactive way during the next capacity building session at 4, sorry, sorry, at 2:45.

So, 14:45, you need to be back in the room. And we're going to have the, you remember the ccNSO style session we had back in, I think it was Dublin. So, that's the idea for the next session. Enjoy your lunch. Please be back in the room at 2:45. Thank you.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]