

# Principle 2 Measuring What Matters: Emerging Criteria and Indicators for ccNSO Effectiveness

*Based on ICANN84 Workshop Discussions*

Looking at the flip charts and notes from the recent ccNSO effectiveness discussions, something refreshing is happening: the community is moving beyond abstract organizational theory toward practical, measurable indicators that reflect reality. Rather than imposing top-down metrics, participants are asking, *"What tells us we're working well?"* The answers reveal a sophisticated understanding of what effectiveness really means for a global volunteer organization.

## The Criteria: What Conditions Must Exist?

Criteria define the conditions that must be met for the ccNSO to be truly effective. Think of them as the foundation—the *how* of effectiveness. Here's what's emerging from the conversations:

### The Right Structures Match the Purpose

The ccNSO has three core purposes: developing policy, facilitating member interaction and learning, and conducting outreach. The first criterion is straightforward but profound: the working groups and committees need to align with these purposes. Not just exist, but actively serve them. As participants noted, structures must support both the policy development process (study groups, working groups) and community engagement (standing committees like TLD-OPS, the Meetings Programme Committee, and the Technical Working Group).

### Results Happen in Reasonable Timeframes

Here's where reality meets aspiration. Yes, consensus is valuable—but as one participant captured it: *"Effective: policy developed, consensus achieved but not necessarily rapid."* The tension is productive: how do you maintain quality deliberation while avoiding endless process? The emerging criterion acknowledges both needs: structures must enable timely progress without sacrificing meaningful consensus.

### Agility and Flexibility Are Built In

This criterion draws inspiration from CENTR's approach: small teams, narrow remits, lightweight solutions. The reasoning is elegant—not every challenge requires a permanent committee. Sometimes an ad-hoc group with focused expertise can deliver faster, better results. One participant articulated it perfectly: *"To be agile and flexible, use small teams, light-weight solutions."*

### Consensus Gets Achieved

Particularly within the Policy Development Process, the ability to reach consensus serves as a fundamental test of structural effectiveness. If groups consistently deadlock or produce weak compromises, something in the structure needs adjustment.

## The Indicators: How Do We Know?

While criteria describe what needs to exist, indicators provide the measurable proof. These are the signals that tell you whether the criteria are being met. The workshop discussions surfaced several compelling indicators, with one dominating the conversation.

### Volunteer Engagement: The North Star

This indicator appeared repeatedly on different flip charts, suggesting genuine consensus around its importance. The reasoning is beautifully simple: if you have enough volunteers—or even more than enough—actively participating, your structures are working. The flip side is equally informative. As one participant noted:

- *"No volunteers → issue is not important/not needed"*
- *"Issue isn't important → no volunteers"*
- *"Issue not deliverable, deadline, no volunteers"*

This creates a natural feedback mechanism. Volunteer numbers help distinguish between issues that genuinely matter to the community and those that perhaps don't warrant significant structural investment. Of course, context matters—some necessary work isn't glamorous, and the broader community may face capacity constraints. But as a general indicator, volunteer engagement provides remarkably clear signal.

### The Fun Factor

Don't underestimate this one. As captured on a flip chart: *"To be a member of WG/Committee looks like fun."* When participation feels rewarding rather than burdensome, you're creating sustainable engagement. This isn't about entertainment—it's about designing structures that respect people's time, leverage their expertise, and deliver visible impact.

### Additional Measurable Indicators

Several other indicators emerged from the discussions:

- **Delivery against deadlines:** Can working groups fulfill their tasks within agreed timeframes?
- **Cross-community participation:** Are ccNSO members successfully engaging in ICANN's broader working groups? Are they getting what they need?
- **Council and Secretariat performance:** Is the Council operating efficiently? Is the Secretariat providing adequate support?

Participants noted that *"Council does what is supposed to do, Work is done"* and that *"ICANN staff is part of the structure of the ccNSO. The support is satisfying."*

## Making It Real: The DNS Abuse Working Group

Let's ground this in a concrete example. During the discussions, someone asked: *"Why is the ccNSO working so hard on DNS Abuse?"* This question perfectly illustrates how criteria and indicators work together.

### Testing the Criteria:

- **Right structure for purpose?** Does DNS abuse represent a genuine threat to ccTLDs? Participants noted the importance of focusing on *"core business, threats and pains of ccTLD."*
- **Can it deliver results?** Is this a problem that a working group can actually address within reasonable timeframes?

### Watching the Indicators:

- **Volunteer engagement:** Did people sign up? Are they staying actively involved? High engagement signals that DNS abuse is indeed a shared pain point worth addressing.

- **Meeting deadlines:** Is the group producing outputs on schedule, or getting bogged down?
- **Consensus achievement:** Can the diverse ccTLD community agree on recommendations?

If volunteers flock to this working group and remain engaged, that tells you DNS abuse truly matters to the community. If the group struggles with participation, it might indicate the issue isn't as pressing—or that the structural approach needs adjustment. Either way, the indicators provide actionable intelligence.

## Why This Approach Works

What makes these emerging criteria and indicators compelling is their grounding in reality rather than theory. The community is essentially saying: let volunteer behavior and work outcomes guide us. There's wisdom in this bottom-up approach. Different types of work naturally require different approaches—permanent standing committees for core ongoing functions, nimble ad-hoc groups for specific challenges. Volunteer numbers reflect genuine community priorities rather than leadership assumptions about what matters.

The framework also acknowledges nuance. As participants noted, sometimes finding volunteers is simply *"getting hard"* due to broader capacity issues rather than structural problems. Context always matters. But over time, patterns in these indicators reveal structural strengths and gaps.

## What to Explore Next

To turn these emerging ideas into a robust assessment framework, consider these productive next steps:

- **Test the volunteer indicator with real data:** Analyze the last 3-5 working groups—map volunteer numbers against perceived success. Does the correlation hold? What about outliers?
- **Define "reasonable timeframe" more precisely:** What's reasonable for a full Policy Development Process versus an ad-hoc study group? Get specific about expected timelines.
- **Conduct a "fun audit":** Survey current working group members about what makes participation enjoyable or burdensome. What small structural changes would help?
- **Map structures to purposes:** Create a visual showing which committees/working groups serve which of the three core purposes (policy, facilitation, outreach). Identify gaps and overlaps.
- **Pilot lightweight solutions:** Pick an upcoming issue and intentionally design a nimble response structure. Document what works differently.
- **Develop relevance check mechanisms:** How might the ccNSO regularly assess whether working groups still address core community needs? Consider an annual review process.

The beauty of what's emerging is its practicality. These aren't abstract metrics—they're observable patterns that real people can recognize and act on. That's the foundation of genuine continuous improvement.