

SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY FEEDBACK ON “HOW WE MEET”

I. Introduction and Background

Following an informal discussion at ICANN80 in Kigali with ICANN interim President and CEO Sally Costerton, the SOAC leadership teams agreed that it would be helpful to have a fuller dialogue about how to optimize the effectiveness and efficiency of in-person and hybrid meetings, in view of the current global environment, evolving community needs and budgetary constraints.

Exercising financial prudence in planning and conducting in-person and hybrid meetings requires close collaboration between the community and the ICANN organization. The SOAC leadership and Sally agreed that the aim of the current discussion should be to realize meaningful cost savings while ensuring that resources expended on supporting meetings align with the community's actual needs.

Facilitated by the Policy Development Support function, Sally Costerton and the SOAC leaders held a further meeting to consider how best to find community consensus on cost saving measures and possible changes to how ICANN Public Meetings are organized and supported. Based on a discussion paper prepared by the Policy Development Support staff, several community groups also provided written as well as informal feedback on a number of ideas for further discussion.

This document is a thematic summary of the community's input to date and outlines several topical areas which may be helpful in framing further community dialogue.

II. Summary of Community Input Received

A. General Observations

Overall View on the Current ICANN Meetings Strategy: There was general acknowledgement that it may be timely to assess how we are implementing this strategy and if it needs to be updated, considering that it was developed in 2014. While some groups emphasized the need for an inclusive cross-community mechanism to change the underlying Meetings Strategy, several groups thought there would be value in pursuing incremental or practical improvements in how the current strategy is being implemented.

There was general agreement that experiences from the COVID-19 pandemic, the current global environment, changes in community needs and financial constraints are key factors that should inform any modifications and improvements. These factors could also impact more broadly how inter-sessional community meetings are organized, since the ICANN Meetings Strategy is limited to the three ICANN Public Meetings that are held each year.

B. Key Themes

1. Meeting Format and Frequency:

- a) **Mixed Views on Virtual vs. In-Person Meetings:** There was no clear consensus on whether to shift some meetings to a wholly virtual format. While some groups noted the potential cost savings and environmental benefits, there were concerns that reducing in-person meetings could also reduce accessibility for some groups, adversely impact outreach, and weaken relationship-building and collaboration opportunities. Some groups highlighted the need to balance in-person work with virtual meetings, including the use of inter-sessional meeting opportunities.
- b) **Meeting Structure and Number of Sessions:** A common theme was the need to maximize the opportunities presented by hybrid meetings to conduct more focused work. Suggestions from several groups include reducing non-decisional sessions, making greater use of Prep Week to share informational content, and prioritizing sessions for topical discussions and decision making.
- c) **Focus on Regional and Community Needs:** A few groups noted that there is still a need to ensure that ICANN Public Meetings address the needs of underrepresented regions and provide outreach opportunities.

2. Cost Reduction Measures:

- a) **Evaluate Cost Allocation and Priorities:** There was general agreement that it would be useful to categorize meeting components into "need to have" vs. "nice to have", to help identify areas for cost savings.
- b) **Travel and Accommodation Policies:** Several groups suggested looking at more specific ways to realize cost savings through improvements to travel arrangements, such as limiting premium travel to long-haul flights, and making travel bookings much earlier in the process.
- c) **Rethink Sponsorships and Funding:** There was support for encouraging local hosts and sponsors to cover some costs, such as coffee breaks or social events.

3. Environmental Considerations:

- a) **Climate and Sustainability Focus:** Several groups suggest that any changes to the ICANN Meetings Strategy should consider the environmental impact of in-person meetings, with the aim to reduce ICANN's carbon footprint.

C. Group-Specific Feedback

Group	Type of Input	Summary
At-Large	At-Large survey results and member comments	Supports exploring alternative funding through sponsorships and local collaborations while recommending cost-effective venues and rotating meeting regions. They call for strategic alignment to ensure meeting cycles match community priorities and prefer in-person engagement over virtual alternatives, emphasizing the value of face-to-face interaction. At-Large also advocates for transparent travel policies determined by SO/ACs and focuses on using metrics to evaluate meeting effectiveness.
ASO		Did not provide formal feedback.
ccNSO	Letter to Sally Costerton	The ccNSO Council reviewed the proposal on optimizing ICANN community meeting time, following a discussion paper and cover note from Mary Wong. The Council believes that deciding changes to meeting approaches should not be confined to SO/AC Leaders but should involve a broader, open, and transparent cross-community process. They suggest that the review of the Meeting Strategy, last updated in 2014, should similarly be conducted through a Cross-Community Working Group. While they acknowledge that this process will take longer and require more resources, they argue it is the appropriate way to address the issue. The ccNSO Council is open to collaborating with other SOs and ACs to establish such a group and invites further discussion on this matter.
GAC	Informal email to Sally Costerton and Mary Wong	The GAC Leadership team and other ICANN community members discussed ways to improve the effectiveness of their meetings, focusing on adjustments to travel arrangements, meeting formats, and work methods. GAC members generally support shifting some focus to intersessional work, with a review of ICANN's public meeting strategy being encouraged. While there are mixed opinions on in-person versus virtual meetings, some members favor reducing the number of physical meetings to two per year, with one virtual meeting to cut costs and lower ICANN's carbon footprint. Others emphasize the importance of maintaining in-person meetings for community outreach, especially in underserved regions. Additionally, some members suggest streamlining meetings by reducing scripted sessions and focusing on decision-making, while also finding more cost-efficient approaches to hosting meetings.
GNSO Council		Did not provide formal feedback.
RSSAC		Did not provide formal feedback.
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RySG	Email to GNSO Council	The RySG provided feedback on the "How We Meet" paper, expressing concerns about making changes through consultations with ICANN Org and SO/AC leadership. They believe that any alterations to ICANN's processes should go through a cross-community working group, as done in 2014. The RySG is willing to participate in such a group and wants to discuss issues like budget, remote participation, climate impacts, and meeting structures. They also request data on

		current meeting structures and costs to support informed discussions with the community.
RrSG	Email to GNSO Council	The RrSG shares the RySG's concerns about how input on potential changes to ICANN's meeting format is being gathered. They support a review of how the community meets but emphasize that the current format was developed through a cross-community Working Group (MSWG). While they acknowledge concerns about meeting costs and efficiency, they are wary of ICANN staff or executives making changes based on consultations with only SO/AC leaders. They believe that any reconsideration of the MSWG recommendations should involve a new cross-community Working Group. The RrSG hopes the discussion paper is just a starting point for a broader, formalized cross-community discussion and is ready to participate in such a group.
NCSG	Email to GNSO Council	The NCSG supports reviewing the ICANN Meeting Strategy after ten years, considering the significant changes in that period. While they agree with reviewing meeting costs, they caution against blanket reductions in sessions or travel, as not all community groups have equal funding. The NCSG believes the timing of these potential changes is poor, given the upcoming new gTLD round and related issues. They emphasize the importance of face-to-face sessions for newcomer education and outreach, especially with the expected interest in new gTLDs. Additionally, they express a desire for clarity on ICANN's financial situation. The NCSG is open to further discussions with ICANN Org and the community.
BC	Email to GNSO Council	<p>The BC provided feedback on ICANN's discussion paper regarding meeting arrangements, emphasizing the need for fiscal prudence due to budget constraints. They propose categorizing meetings into "need to have" and "nice to have" to identify potential cost savings. The BC suggests reviewing various types of meetings and possibly consolidating group-specific meetings with larger ICANN meetings to reduce costs. They emphasize the importance of maintaining in-person meetings for their benefits, such as relationship building and regional engagement.</p> <p>The BC also discusses the need for a strategic review of ICANN's meeting cycle, advocating for flexibility in planning to adapt to changing circumstances. They support maintaining the funded travelers' program and suggest booking flights early to save costs. The BC advises against reducing the number of sessions or eliminating training sessions solely for cost reasons, as this could undermine ICANN's multi-stakeholder model. They recommend evaluating the relevance and attendance of sessions to ensure their value.</p> <p>Additionally, the BC suggests rationalizing social and outreach events, proposing that program sponsors and local hosts could contribute to costs. They oppose moving ICANN Public Meetings to a virtual format, emphasizing the value of in-person interactions. Finally, they recommend focusing on the quality and structure of meetings rather than reducing their number, with a particular emphasis on ensuring broad community engagement and interaction with the ICANN Board.</p>
ISPCP	Email to GNSO Council	The ISPCP acknowledges the need to review ICANN's meeting arrangements, considering current financial challenges and increased costs. They highlight a 20% rise in travel expenses and a projected lower budget for FY25, along with recent staff reductions for financial stability. The ISPCP suggests that a minimum 15% budget cut is necessary, noting that small adjustments won't suffice and that any cost-cutting should be fair and evenly distributed across the community. They

	emphasize that relying on increasing revenues, such as through domain name sales, is not a preferred solution. Instead, they propose prioritizing in-person cross-community work over outreach and capacity building, limiting funding for regional and intersessional meetings, and potentially revising travel policies. As a last resort, they suggest converting one ICANN meeting to a virtual format or slightly increasing registry/registrar fees, but only under inflation rates.
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Please find the submissions from SOs, ACs, GNSO SG/Cs in [this folder](#).

III. Themes and Possible Questions for Discussion

Building on the themes from the community feedback and initial discussions with the SOAC leaders, the following topical areas may be useful for framing additional community discussions around whether and how we can further optimize the value of hybrid ICANN Public Meetings, including how they are organized and what should be prioritized.

1. Meetings as a Focus of Cost-Saving Measures

- Is it timely to undertake a review of how ICANN community meetings (including ICANN Public Meetings) are planned and resourced?
- What community mechanism would be most suitable to assess whether, and what aspects of, the current implementation of the ICANN Meetings Strategy need to be updated?
- How can we ensure that any cost-saving measures are applied equitably across different community groups?

2. Format and Frequency of Meetings

- What are the benefits and risks of conducting more virtual meetings and fewer in-person or hybrid meetings, including at least one of the three ICANN Public Meetings?
- What specific aspects of ICANN meeting expenses should be prioritized for cost reductions (e.g., number of in-person vs. virtual meetings, frequency, location, sponsorships for social or outreach events, etc.)?
- How can each ICANN Public Meeting be better structured to meet the needs of different community groups and to focus on decision making?
- How can we better distinguish between "need to have" and "nice to have" aspects of in-person and hybrid meetings to identify potential cost-saving opportunities??

3. Regional vs. Global Meetings

- What are the benefits and risks of focusing on smaller regional meetings to reduce travel and location-based costs?
- In deciding when and which regional meetings are appropriate for policy work, what are the main factors and regional variations that should be considered, to ensure equity of opportunities for community participation and cost-effective meeting arrangements?
- In light of the costs of organizing multiple large hybrid meetings globally, how can ICANN maintain its commitment to global representation while also optimizing regional meetings to support the community's policy work?

4. Targeted ICANN Public Meetings

- Should ICANN Public Meetings be organized with more targeted participation, such that cost savings may be realized by providing funding only for those actively involved in specific workstreams relevant to that specific meeting (e.g. active contribution to current policy development processes for a Policy Forum)?
- How would a shift to more targeted ICANN Public Meetings impact opportunities for equitable participation, diversity in representation of viewpoints, and timeliness of community decision making?
- Will there be a need for a more flexible approach to travel funding (e.g. traveler numbers per community group, how each group selects its funded travelers, etc.) if ICANN Public Meetings are organized on a more targeted basis?

5. Metrics and Data for Assessing Value and Utility of ICANN Public Meetings

- What metrics should be prioritized to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of ICANN meetings (e.g., attendance rates, cost per attendee, policy decisions reached)?
- What data can we realistically gather that will be useful in determining which sessions or meeting components provide the most value to participants, and which others might be reconsidered or eliminated (e.g., session attendance numbers, session outcomes)?