

SOAC CHAIRS' ROUNDTABLE – ICANN81 - 8 November 2024
SUMMARY NOTES

Attendance:

Community Leaders – Jonathan Zuck, Claire Craig, Justine Chew (ALAC); Hervé Clément (ASO); Alejandra Reynoso (ccNSO); Christina Arida, Zeina Bou Harb, Thiago Dal Toe, Nigel Hickson (GAC); Greg DiBiase (GNSO); Jeff Osborn, Ken Renard (RSSAC); Ram Mohan (SSAC).

ICANN Org – Sally Costerton, Xavier Calvez, Ergys Ramaj, Mary Wong, and staff from the Policy Development Support & Meetings teams.

ICANN Board - Chris Chapman, Danko Jevtović

ACTION ITEMS
1. SOAC Leaders to agree on a mechanism for community discussion of ideas for updating the implementation of the ICANN Meetings Strategy (ICANN org to provide a suggestion of how this could work).
2. SOAC Leaders to suggest participants for the group that will be formed for this purpose.
3. ICANN org to develop a project charter for discussion (including suggested timeline and dates, deliverables, and scope) and assign staff members to the effort.
4. ICANN org to draft a “strawman” proposal suggesting options for the policy update for the group to discuss.
5. Group to collaborate with ICANN org to develop recommendations from the org’s “strawman” proposal, to be published for Public Comment.

Introductions & Welcome

Danko Jevtović welcomed everyone to Istanbul on behalf of Tripti Sinha, Board Chair. He introduced Chris Chapman, who will take office as Board Vice-Chair at ICANN81. Danko emphasized the importance of the meeting based on recent discussions in the community on the benefits and costs associated with ICANN Public Meetings. Sally Costerton added that these discussions started in Kigali at ICANN80 with the community leaders. The conversations continued over the next few months with two focused themes: How We Work and How We Meet, and many community groups contributed feedback.

Alejandra Reynoso, as chair of the session, reminded the attendees that Roundtable discussions are meant to be high-level, and the Roundtable is not a forum for decision-making. The SOAC

leaders need to consult with their respective community groups. On behalf of the leaders present, she thanked Sally and the staff for compiling and circulating the meetings-related data and information package ahead of the Roundtable.

Topic 1: Current Challenges with Implementing the ICANN Meetings Strategy

Xavier Calvez provided a brief presentation on ICANN org's FY24 finances, including the risks and opportunities that impact the forecasts used. The FY24 deficit is targeted to decrease in FY25 due to cost savings measures that ICANN org is implementing. FY26 projections anticipate a small decrease in funding, which will require an ongoing focus on cost-management. Due to the timing of the various measures, not all savings will be fully realized in FY25.

There were several questions from the attendees about how the financial projections were developed and the org's plan to decrease overall spending. One attendee observed that while it may be an obvious area to focus on, reducing meeting costs is not necessarily the most appropriate priority topic when considering overall cost cutting.

The attendees asked if ICANN org had an estimate in mind for the amount of savings to aim for, in realizing cost reductions for ICANN meetings. They noted that not knowing this target and the areas that might be affected makes it extremely difficult for the community to gauge what type and level of efforts will need to be made. Sally Costerton replied that ICANN meetings cost approximately US\$14 million a year, and a possible number to work towards could be exploring annualized savings of around US\$2m.

The attendees sought clarity on whether ICANN org intends to seek community feedback about other categories of costs. Sally Costerton replied that ICANN org is looking at several categories of costs; however, since meetings are a large portion of the operational budget and are an important element in enabling the community to meet to do its work, the intention is for the current discussion to focus on meetings.

Topic 2: Summary of the Community Feedback & Outline of Meeting Costs

Sally Costerton noted that improved hybrid capabilities have enabled ICANN org to support multiple types of community meetings without impacting the number of attendees. There are, however, short to medium-term financial and other important constraints. For example, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find meeting locations that meet the critical requirements of safety, productivity, and affordability. Our carbon footprint is also becoming an important criterion.

The community feedback received to date showed that there was no consensus on hybrid meetings vs in person meetings, though some groups favored making one of the three ICANN Public Meetings virtual. There seemed to be general agreement on the need to prioritize: i.e., what are “must-haves” vs “nice-to-haves”, including types of sessions and topics. She noted that ICANN org has already reduced its costs by decreasing the number of staff that travel to ICANN Public Meetings and has implemented a practice of booking flights earlier. This is significant because international travel is one area where major savings can be found.

Topic 4: Open Discussion

Several topics were raised and noted. As part of the open discussion, ICANN org staff provided recent examples of community-based groups that are more informal, time-limited and representative of the various community structures. There was general agreement to move forward to explore how a suitable group can be assembled to look at how the meeting policy can be updated. Accordingly, the group explored the following topics:

Purpose & Scope of Planned Community Work:

- Improving the effectiveness and efficiency of meetings, especially given their cost, should not just be about lowering costs, or motivated only by financial considerations.
- Meetings are important to the community, and necessary to advance work. We should be looking at how to run better meetings. As implied in the problem statement proposed for this meeting, the focus should be on effectiveness whilst taking affordability into account.
- In addition to considering a virtual meeting as one of the three ICANN Public Meetings, we should look at other cost saving solutions; for example, leveraging other meeting opportunities such as Day Zero sessions and the Contracted Parties Summit.
- Practical measures relating to other major expenses, such as interpretation and translation services, also need to be discussed further.
- One attendee suggested that a practical and efficient way to proceed is for ICANN org to prepare a “strawman” proposal for community discussion. The document can include ideas for cost saving measures that the org believes can reasonably be achieved. This suggestion was supported by other attendees.

Mechanism & Timeline:

- A community-based group can be formed to discuss the “strawman” proposal. The group’s recommendations can then be put out for Public Comment for broader community feedback and dialogue.
- The group should have a clear charter, defined timeline and, if needed, a clear budget.

- To keep the discussion focused, the group should consider relevant developments in the decade that has passed since the Meetings Strategy was adopted. This consideration is separate from the need to look at efficiencies and cost savings.
- ICANN org should be included as a participant in the work of the group, in addition to its facilitation role that Sally Costerton - who also led the staff support for the current Meetings Strategy - will lead the org work, with assistance from relevant staff and supported by the Policy Development Support team.
- The group should be kept small and comprise participants familiar with how ICANN meetings and other similar events (such as Internet governance stakeholder meetings) are organized. To ensure nimbleness and timely work, it should not be necessary for the group to be representative of all the community groups, as there should be an extended Public Comment period for the group's recommendations.
- The group can aim to produce recommendations by ICANN82, with the Public Comment period ending before ICANN83, and final proposals ready to be presented to the Board and community at ICANN83.

Topic 5: Next Steps

See Action Items summarized above.