

ICANN Org Input to Reviews CCG May 2026

The ICANN organization (hereafter, org) thanks the Review of Reviews Cross Community Group (CCG) for the opportunity to provide comments on the refined outline. The org, as a participating group in the CCG, has developed the following general points as well as inputs on specific elements of the Refined Outline. Specific suggestions for the CCG are noted in bold text below.

General Input

- 1. Distinguish recommendation requirements from implementation guidance.** ICANN org appreciates that discussions on Review aims and scope are often intertwined with consideration of details around how a process might work in practice. ICANN org has suggested in the CCG discussions an approach similar to what is sometimes used in policymaking efforts, which distinguishes recommendations (requirements) from implementation guidance (guidelines or suggestions that enable some degree of flexibility). In our experience, this is a helpful construct for implementing recommendations, that avoids ambiguity of requirements and allows space for implementation details to be iterated and adjusted based on feedback or new analysis. In the instance where ICANN org proposes an implementation that diverges from the implementation guidance, the practice is to note this transparently along with a rationale.

This may be a useful tool to focus the CCG's time on areas of "shared understanding of the areas and issues for which reviews will enhance ICANN's accountability, transparency and effectiveness," as emphasized in the ICANN Board's inputs. The Bylaws Transition Article that is currently in the Empowered Community process allows for at least one, and up to two years of deferral of ICANN's current obligations to run Specific Reviews while the outputs of the Reviews CCG are being implemented, including the updating of the Bylaws to reflect a new Reviews structure. Org suggests that setting aside deeper operational aspects for now will enable the community's attention to be primarily focused on what topics of assessment are fit for purpose in the new Reviews system. We would welcome the opportunity to collaboratively work on the operational aspects subsequent to the Reviews CCG delivering on a proposed reviews system.

- 2. Ensure participatory roles are clear.** The org envisions it may fill a number of distinct roles in the recommended Reviews system. For example, ICANN staff members might be

serving on a scoping group, participating in a review effort itself as members of a CCG, serving as a subject matter expert to a CCG, providing administrative and logistical support to a CCG, and other roles, including roles in implementing review recommendations. ICANN org anticipates some action on its part to be clear about the scope of its participation where different staff members are appointed to different roles in the system. ICANN also suggests that there may be instances where it might recuse itself from participation in a particular effort, discussion, or consensus call/vote, and suggests that recusal be available to ICANN or any other member of an effort where appropriate.

3. **Overall accountability.** ICANN org supports a system that provides accountability across the community, Board, and org. ICANN org has observed that while the Board and org are sometimes positioned as the primary recipient or subject of review, accountability is a shared responsibility that the community, Board, and org should collectively strive to uphold. The org notes that acceptance or rejection of recommendations each raise accountability issues - for acceptance, is the accepting entity ready to be held accountable to implementation; for rejection, how can the rejecting party demonstrate that its decision is based in principles of broader accountability? The ICANN Bylaws include processes for the Board which define steps for the Board's acceptance or rejection of recommendations. The CCG's work on Structural Reviews and the nature of recommendations issued to SOs or ACs, and the accountability questions that go along with the acceptance or rejection of recommendations is a newer area of discussion. In this regard, **the org recommends that the CCG further discuss the scenario where an SO or AC rejects recommendations directed to it and what steps should be in place leading up to or following such rejection.** There should be clarity around who is accountable for recommendations, including the acceptance and rejection process.
4. **Prioritize: recognize constraints, focus resources and bandwidth on agreed high-impact areas.** ICANN org believes it is important that reviews remain aligned with what matters most to ultimately focus resources and bandwidth on high-impact areas in support of ICANN's Mission. The challenges of supporting multiple review activities in various stages were in part what prompted the Board to ask for a community dialogue "to develop a shared understanding of the areas and issues for which reviews will enhance ICANN's accountability, transparency and effectiveness." We operate in a highly creative environment, with new issues that emerge and challenges that become increasingly complex. The org recognizes that the Refined Outline incorporates several elements to support an effective Reviews system, including an inclusive scoping process and collective assessments of feasibility before a Review is undertaken. Because this is an

area of shared accountability, the org believes it is important to keep in mind the demand on community bandwidth from the Reviews system overall. We have observed that in the policy space, practices have trended in recent years to more representative groups to support effective participation. The system of reviews should, as a result, be able to be commensurate with varying constraints of time and capacity across the community, Board, and org.

Inputs on Refined Outline

- 5. Potential addition of “Issue Report” step to gather data to inform review.** In discussing the scoping processes and goals to enable maximum efficiency of the various review efforts, ICANN org discussed whether a step for staff to prepare something like an Issue Report might be useful for the Reviews system. In the policy context, when the GNSO wishes to review how a policy is working and whether it might wish to undertake additional policy work, staff prepares a Policy Status Report compiling available background and data including, for example, analysis of complaints, where an issue is causing problems for stakeholders, and whether an issue is within scope. Enabling a factual background milestone might also be helpful to a review; **ICANN org proposes this be discussed at a future CCG meeting.**
- 6. Cadence of one on-demand review per planning cycle to bring in some predictability.** Org is sensitive to the desire to not impose limits on reviews; however, realistically believes only two can occur with any degree of focus during a given period. The existing 5-year strategic planning cycle provides a framework for planning review activities and allowing sufficient time between them. With the current recommendation of an Accountability and Transparency Review every 5 years, some of the org and community bandwidth will necessarily be taken up with this important work, whether in review or implementation. The on-demand capability allows the community to come together on what, out of a number of possible areas, it considers most important and relevant to review. In light of this, the org is unclear on the need for categories within possible on-demand reviews. Elevating some as special topics with a required solicitation seems counter to the desired goal of the on-demand category, as if one of these is initiated, there is likely little availability left for an on-demand effort. **ICANN org suggests the CCG spend additional time to clarify.**
- 7. On Structural Review.** In listening to a variety of goals and understandings on a potential Structural Review, ICANN org observes that what appears to be the underlying goal of looking at the existing SO and AC structures is to make sure there is capability for the ICANN model to evolve as the needs and environment change. Scenarios discussed

include: a) Ability to add a new SO or AC, b) Ability to retire an existing SO or AC, and c) Ability to update the internal structure of an existing SO and AC. ICANN org supports the underlying goal, however, **suggests the CCG further consider which mechanisms to effect structural changes need to be nested in a Review process.**

The example of the first ALAC review is instructive here. That review recommended two Board seats appointed by the At-Large Community, while the outcomes of Board's own review suggested the Board was too large. In that instance, those competing outcomes together were taken to the community through public comment, with the resulting proposal of moving one Board liaison role from non-voting to voting, so the At-Large Community was able to select a voting seat on the Board, while the of the Board did not functionally change. If a transparent and repeatable process for these specific activities can be established, the consequential effects review element being discussed may be an appropriate venue for the community as a whole to undertake as proposed. CCG recommendations should avoid overlap and potential confusion with regard to existing mechanisms for making these structural changes.

8. **On Implementation of Review Recommendations.** Recognizing that this topic has not yet been discussed for the recommended Reviews system, ICANN org notes that this is where it would play a role in estimating level of effort and resource requirements associated with recommendations being considered. The org believes the key assumptions and understandings relating to implementation should be surfaced transparently within the Review effort, and the work plan for implementation endorsed before the Review effort concludes. ICANN org would like to discuss or for the CCG's Final Report to allow for testing a variety of possible approaches to implementation.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input as the Reviews system is being developed. We agree that incorporating verification and check-in steps throughout the process is both constructive and necessary to ensure the work remains on the right track. It is important that all stakeholders have the opportunity to share their perspectives and confirm alignment along the way, ultimately helping to refine the outcome and ensure it is focused, effective, and fit for purpose.