

Continuous Improvement Program Framework

Continuous Improvement Program Community Coordination
Group (CIP-CCG)

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Background

Organizational Reviews are mandated by the ICANN Bylaws ([Article 4.4](#)). They assess ICANN's Supporting Organizations (SOs), Advisory Committees (ACs), and the Nominating Committee (NomCom) to determine how effectively they operate, how well they achieve their purpose and how accountable they are to the ICANN multistakeholder model of governance. After two cycles of Organizational Reviews, the community identified challenges and opportunities to improve Organizational Reviews.

Challenge

There are community-perceived shortcomings in Organizational Reviews, which led to the development of the Third Accountability and Transparency Review ([ATRT3 Recommendation 3.6](#)). The perceived shortcomings include the understanding and competence of the Independent Examiners who have conducted Organizational Reviews and produced recommendations. The community has debated the quality of the Independent Examiner recommendations, and the volume of recommendations led to a backlog in implementing several recommendations.

In most cases, Independent Examiners avoided determining whether the organization has a continuing purpose and whether the organizational structure should be changed. Thus, most Independent Examiners' recommendations were intended to improve operational effectiveness and accountability.

The ICANN organization (ICANN org) previously [received](#) broad support from the community to defer the next scheduled Organizational Reviews, considering the need to plan for changes to the Organizational Review processes including implementation of the Continuous Improvement Program (CIP). Accordingly, the ICANN Board took action in [June 2022](#) to defer the next cycle of Organizational Reviews. The Board will consider the progress made toward evolving Organizational Reviews by June 2025 to determine whether or not the Organizational Reviews should be resumed.

Solution

ATRT3 Recommendation 3.6 calls for Organizational Reviews to evolve into a Continuous Improvement Program. The Board directed ICANN org to work with the community to develop a pilot Continuous Improvement Program before a Bylaws amendment is completed to ensure it yields the outcomes intended by ATRT3.

The language of ATRT3 Recommendation 3.6 states: "ICANN org shall work with each SO, AC, and the NC (Nominating Committee) to establish a Continuous Improvement Program. Such a Continuous Improvement Program shall have a common base between all SOs, ACs, and the NC but will also allow for customization so as to best meet the needs of each individual SO, AC, and NC."¹

¹ See p. 72 of the [ATRT3 Final Report](#).

The Continuous Improvement Program (CIP) will be flexible enough to enable each ICANN Organizational structure to utilize the CIP Framework to fit its unique needs. It will also have the uniformity needed to assess the health of each ICANN organizational structure in a predictable and consistent manner so that results can be understood holistically across the community.

ICANN org facilitated the formation of the CIP-CCG, convened in January 2024, with the goal of developing the CIP Framework for implementation of ATRT3 Recommendation 3.6. The CIP-CCG was tasked with:

1. Developing a shared understanding of the meaning of Continuous Improvement in the context of ATRT3 Recommendation 3.6,
2. Considering a range of methodologies for effective continuous improvement programs,
3. Agreeing on the methodology that is fit for ICANN's purpose, and
4. Formulating a CIP Framework, which each SO, AC, and NomCom will use.

The development of the Continuous Improvement Program results from implementing ATRT3 recommendations pertaining to Specific and Organizational Reviews. The Continuous Improvement Program outputs will serve as inputs for the Holistic Review in the evaluation of its [objectives](#) (below), provided the work on the implementation of ATRT3 Recommendation 3.5 advances as planned², eventually culminating in the incorporation of the Holistic Review in the ICANN Bylaws. The eventual Holistic Review would serve as checks and balances on the self-assessment and continuous improvement efforts by the SOs, ACs, NomCom and their constituent parts.

The Holistic Review objectives are to:

1. Review the effectiveness of the various inter-Supporting Organizations/Advisory Committees/Nominating Committee (SOs/ACs/NomCom) collaboration mechanisms.
2. Review the accountability of Supporting Organizations/Advisory Committees or constituent parts to their members and constituencies (this will include an in-depth analysis of the survey results).
3. Review SOs/ACs/NomCom as a whole to determine if they continue to have a purpose in the ICANN structure as they are currently constituted or if any changes in structures and operations are desirable to improve the overall effectiveness of ICANN as well as ensure optimal representation of community views (but taking into consideration any impacts on the Board or the Empowered Community).
4. Review continuous improvement efforts of SOs/ACs/NomCom based on good practices.

² See [Pilot Holistic Review Revised Terms of Reference \(ToR\) Public Comment proceeding](#). In January 2024, the ICANN Board agreed to proceed with Pilot Holistic Review with guidance to the Pilot Holistic Review Team, and to initiate consultation with SO/AC Chairs on the timing and potential deferral of the Fourth Review of Accountability and Transparency (ATRT4). Based on the Board's guidance, the Organizational Effectiveness Committee formalized the plans toward Board action to initiate the Pilot Holistic Review. ICANN also initiated a community consultation on the timing of ATRT4 to ensure efficient use of community resources. See [April 2024 Board resolution to initiate the Pilot Holistic Review and timing of ATRT4](#).

Research and Development

Several activities were completed to prepare for the successful development and launch of a Continuous Improvement Program (CIP). Reference the [Continuous Improvement Project \(CIP\)](#) home for ongoing updates.

ICANN org conducted preliminary research into [tools](#) for community consideration in developing a Continuous Improvement Program draft framework for assessment, as detailed in this document.

Proposed Definition of Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement is an ongoing process of identifying, analyzing, and making incremental improvements to systems, processes, products, or services. Its purpose is to drive efficiency, improve quality, and value delivery while minimizing waste, variation, and defects. The continuous improvement process is driven by ongoing feedback, collaboration, and data.³

Research Considerations

ATRT3 Recommendation 3.6 calls for the ICANN community to “evolve the content of Organizational Reviews into [a] Continuous Improvement Program in each SO/AC/NomCom.” It also states: “ICANN org shall work with each SO/AC/NomCom to establish a Continuous Improvement Program [that shares] a common base between all SOs, ACs, and the NomCom but will also allow for customization so as to best meet the needs of each individual SO/AC/NomCom.” ICANN org research looked for a solution that could provide:

- **Flexibility:** CIP Framework must offer flexibility for individualized fit to different structures.
- **Uniformity:** Ensure uniformity for assessing the health of various structures as articulated in the scope for Organizational Reviews in the ICANN Bylaws, Article 4.4.
- **Efficiency:** Seek an effective and efficient approach to avoid overburdening community resources.
- **Build on Existing Work:** Identify and build upon existing work to avoid duplicating efforts.
- **Areas for Improvement:** Understand what is working well and identify opportunities for improvement.

The Continuous Improvement Program Community Coordination Group (CIP-CCG) reviewed ICANN org's research and [agreed](#) the principles, criteria, and indicator framework were fit for purpose.

Objectives of ATRT3 Rec 3.6 and Bylaws Article 4.4

While the process may change — from Organizational Reviews led by Independent

³ Source: [BusinessMap.io](#).

Examiners into a Continuous Improvement Program led by the ICANN community — the mandate is the same:

Organizational Reviews are anchored in Article 4.4. of the [ICANN Bylaws](#) to assess the effectiveness of ICANN's Supporting Organizations, Advisory Committees⁴, and the Nominating Committee. Organizational Reviews specifically assess: (i) whether that organization, council or committee has a continuing purpose in the ICANN structure; (ii) if so, whether any change in structure or operations is desirable to improve its effectiveness; (iii) whether that organization, council or committee is accountable to its constituencies, stakeholder groups, organizations and other stakeholders.

The Board approved ATRT3 Recommendation 3.6 and the community assigned it high-priority status.

Understanding Principles, Criteria and Indicators

A Continuous Improvement Program following a principles-based approach is broken down into Principles, Criteria, and Indicators.

- **Principles** describe the objectives of the Continuous Improvement Program (CIP) and define its fundamental goals.
- **Criteria** are the conditions that must be met to comply with a principle. A criterion is an element or set of conditions or processes by which a system characteristic is judged. Criteria define how a principle will be achieved without themselves being a measure of performance.
- **Indicators** define what the CIP will measure. Indicators are measurable states that allow assessing whether or not associated criteria are being met. Indicators are flexible, and they can include metrics, assessments, and or new processes put in place to meet criteria.

Uniformity is provided by having shared principles. Flexibility is provided because each stakeholder group prioritized criteria and developed custom indicators to test the framework.

Please note that these customized frameworks were developed by the respective groups led by the CIP-CCG representatives. Several representatives of the CIP-CCG volunteered their group's work on the framework to serve as illustrative examples (see p. 9), but input is not requested on each group's customized framework.

Developing Principles

Principles were designed to describe the objectives of the Continuous Improvement Program. The objectives of Organizational Reviews are already defined in the current ICANN Bylaws. Historically, ICANN [Organizational Reviews](#) have asked whether the Supporting Organizations (SOs), Advisory Committees (ACs), and the Nominating

⁴ Currently, the Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC) is not included in Organizational Reviews.

Committee (NomCom) have a continuing purpose within the ICANN community. Using the Bylaws regarding Organizational Reviews as guidance, the CIP-CCG developed principles for the CIP. At the ICANN79 Community Forum in Puerto Rico, CIP-CCG volunteers held their first hybrid working meeting. During [this meeting](#), the group made substantial progress toward developing five common principles for the CIP. The CIP-CCG furthered their development of the principles in subsequent Phases of their work (see Appendix, “CIP-CCG Roadmap” and “Phases of CIP-CCG Timeline”), including the description of the “bottom-up” ICANN multistakeholder model. In consideration of SO, AC, and NomCom accountability (as described in Principle 4), the CIP-CCG recognized that the work of ICANN also benefits the global Internet population.

The CIP-CCG considered how to balance the focus of Organizational Reviews on the structures as a whole (Supporting Organizations, Advisory Committees and the NomCom) with the ATRT3 recommendation that the continuous improvement efforts by each structure also delve into the component parts of certain structures (i.e. their substructures), where applicable. The CIP-CCG acknowledged that the culture of continuous improvement is built from the “bottom-up” within the substructures where community members gather regularly to do their work. At the same time, the CIP-CCG concluded that the CIP Framework should apply at the organizational level (SO, AC, NomCom) to begin with. As they continue working on how the overarching principles apply to each SO, AC, NomCom and their respective substructures, any necessary adjustments and fine-tuning to these overarching principles can evolve over time. For avoidance of doubt, substructures may apply the CIP framework to their individual substructure as a part of their ongoing continuous improvement activity. Such continuous improvement activity is encouraged.

The CIP-CCG adopted the following five overarching principles to be used by each SO, AC and NomCom to develop the criteria and indicators relevant to their groups. The CIP-CCG envisions that the CIP Framework will be consistently applied across all structures while also providing the flexibility needed in recognizing the unique circumstances of each ICANN structure⁵. These overarching principles are as follows:

- 1. The SO, AC, or NomCom is fulfilling its purpose.**
- 2. The structures of SO, AC, or NomCom are effective.**
- 3. The operations of SO, AC, or NomCom are efficient.**
- 4. The SO, AC, or NomCom is accountable internally to its stakeholders and substructures (where applicable), and externally to the wider ICANN community.**
- 5. The SO, AC, or NomCom collaborates to further the mission of ICANN and the effectiveness of the ICANN bottom-up multistakeholder model.**

⁵ Organizational structures with substructures include, for example: At-Large community and its At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC) and five Regional At-Large Organizations (RALOs), as well as the Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO) and its stakeholder groups and constituencies. These Organizational structures have, and continue to evolve, unique processes to align on continuous improvements. ICANN org will also support the community by putting uniform processes and tools in place to help them prioritize and implement improvements. See p. 9 for more detail.

Developing Criteria and Indicators

Leveraging Existing Continuous Improvement Work

The CIP-CCG volunteers mapped the existing continuous improvement activities of their community structure/group to inform the CIP Framework, including the established principles, criteria and indicators relevant to their groups. The information was used to compile a database (see Appendix, “CIP-CCG Existing Continuous Improvement Activities”), including information on identifying those activities, whether there are existing working groups involved in those activities, whether they are publicly available, and examples of challenges and improvements related to continuous improvement in their structure.

This existing continuous improvement activity included content from a collaborative brainstorming from the hybrid meeting during the ICANN79 Community Forum. The group determined to use the “SMART” approach for indicators - i.e. an indicator or metric to measure or form a process for criteria, that should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound, (SMART). The CIP-CCG was also determined to utilize a minimum of [3-5 criteria](#) for each group.

Principles, Criteria, Indicators Framework Example

Below is an example of the principles, criteria, and indicators framework applied to a single CIP principle.

Principle

- **The operations of SO, AC, or NomCom are efficient.**

Criteria

- **Each structure has a process for planning and setting priorities.**
- Each structure efficiently assesses inputs related to their scope of responsibility.
- Each structure efficiently develops and recommends outputs relevant to its purpose (policy development, support policies, leadership placement).
- Each structure’s outputs are implemented efficiently, and implementation of outputs is monitored.

Indicators for criterion, “Each structure has a process for planning and setting priorities”:

- Yes (example of the process or working group).
- If No, the indicator could be to develop a process, that is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound (SMART).

Illustrative Examples of Draft Continuous Improvement Program (CIP) Framework

Several representatives of the CIP-CCG volunteered their group’s work on the framework to serve as illustrative examples. Please note that input is not requested on each group's customized framework.

- [At-Large Advisory Committee \(ALAC\)](#)
- [African Regional At-Large Organization \(AFRALO\)](#)
- [Asian, Australasian and Pacific Islands Regional At-Large Organization \(APRALO\)](#)
- [Nominating Committee \(NomCom\)](#)
- [Root Server System Advisory Committee \(RSSAC\)](#)

ICANN Community Engagement

All CIP-CCG volunteers consistently attended CIP-CCG meetings on a biweekly basis, with the majority of those attending 80% or more of meetings. CIP-CCG volunteers engaged consistently throughout the 2024 calendar year both within the CIP-CCG and with their respective groups to develop the draft framework, with one representative noting “two and half months of continuous engagement and hard work with our group, including around 10 working sessions.” Other representatives to the Community Coordination Group formed their own subgroup to discuss and align on the Continuous Improvement Program and how it would be implemented within their own organizational structure.

CIP-CCG Representatives: Participation & Engagement

Participation Rate (% out of 16 Meetings, as of 2 October 2024)

	Constituency Groups
100%	ALAC, EURALO, NARALO, RSSAC
80%-99%	AFRALO, APRALO, LACRALO, ccNSO, GNSO NCUC, NomCom
60%-79%	GNSO Council, GNSO IPC, GNSO NPOC, GNSO RrSG, GAC, SSAC
40%-59%	GNSO BC, GNSO ISPCP, GNSO RySG
0%-39%	N/A

CIP-CCG Representatives regularly reported updates from their Constituencies on ongoing CIP internal efforts and feedback on CIP Framework throughout 2024, as reported in meeting reports and transcripts.



Executing the Continuous Improvement Program

The CIP Framework developed by the CIP-CCG is published for ICANN Public Comment before adoption by each SO, AC, and the NomCom, before the first CIP assessment period. The assessment period described by ATRT3 may be separated into 3 phases, each estimated to be 1 year in duration (total of 3 years).

The first CIP assessment period is estimated to begin at the beginning of 2025 and conclude at the end of 2027 (a period of 3 years), and the second assessment period is estimated to begin in early 2028 and conclude at the end of 2030 (another 3 years). The three phases of each assessment period are broken down below. At a high level, the CIP-CCG proposes that the community-adopted CIP Framework be put into action through two 3-year assessment cycles:

- **Year 1:** Conduct a satisfaction survey to identify areas that need improvement. Analyze the input and identify priority improvement work to be carried out by each SO/AC/NomCom.
- **Year 2:** Carry out prioritized improvement work.
- **Year 3:** Analyze the results achieved through improvement work, report progress and results. Prepare to carry out the second 3-year assessment cycle.

Assessment and Prioritization Phase (1st year)

As the work on the CIP Framework progresses with community support, the next phase of implementation of ATRT3 Recommendation 3.6 will include the CIP survey, gathering information, and establishing the cadence of work for the CIP Assessment periods.

The CIP Framework developed by the CIP-CCG will be used by each SO, AC, and the NomCom, to establish an assessment of their continuous improvement activities. The [ATRT3 Final Report](#) also described a “satisfaction survey of members/participants” for the CIP Assessment period, which would be administered during this phase.

This survey input and application of the CIP Framework will allow the SOs, ACs, and the NomCom to easily analyze input from their members/participants and prioritize improvements. Prioritization processes are in place for the SOs, ACs, and the NomCom to assess improvements from surveys and assessments utilizing the framework, to determine their feasibility given existing resources and evolving context.

Improvements Phase (2nd year)

The SOs, ACs, and the NomCom will implement identified improvements. Each Organizational structure will work with its leadership and/or relevant working group for their planning and implementation.

ICANN org will support this phase by putting uniform processes and tools in place to help the community prioritize and implement improvements.

Reporting Phase (3rd year)

The reporting phase would entail the SOs, ACs, and NomCom publishing reports of what they uncovered, what improvements they implemented and what results they achieved over the preceding two years of the assessment period. The reports will be published for Public Comment.

ICANN org will support this phase where appropriate, including the preparation of materials related to the Public Comment proceedings and summary reports.



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