

Rationale for Implementation Guidance 14.4

Implementation Guidance 14.4: In support of improved usability, the Working Group advises that ICANN org should leverage prospective end-users to beta test systems, perhaps by setting up an Operational Test and Evaluation environment. The Working Group notes that if beta testing is conducted, it must be done in an open and transparent manner that does not provide the testers with an unfair advantage in the application process. The Working Group notes however that the mere access to beta testing does not in and of itself constitute such an unfair advantage. It further notes that ICANN org did not have an end user beta testing program in 2012 because it believed that allowing some users to have access to the system for beta testing provided those users with an unfair advantage over others. The Working Group does not agree with ICANN org's assertion from that time period.

1. Regarding Beta Testing

- 1.1. On 14 October 2025, ICANN provided an implementation status update on the New gTLD Program: Next Round during the ICANN84 prep week [session](#), where a question was raised about the status of the Community Beta testing as outlined in the Implementation Guidance 14.4.
- 1.2. ICANN org recognizes the intent of Implementation Guidance 14.4 to enhance usability through community participation in system testing. However, given the current development and deployment timelines, a public beta program is not feasible at this stage without significant impact to the overall program schedule.
- 1.3. There are several practical considerations informing our decision not to facilitate a public beta program:
 - 1.3.1. The system remains in active development, with ongoing iterations based on internal stakeholder feedback. Introducing a community beta during this time would divert limited resources from completing core functionality, quality assurance, and readiness activities.
 - 1.3.2. Maintaining the current program timeline requires focus on completing development, conducting internal process testing, training staff and preparing for launch. There is no slack in the current timeline in our development and readiness activities. Adding a community beta phase would require reprioritization and extend these activities beyond the current scheduled launch date.
 - 1.3.3. Standing up and maintaining the additional test environment for community beta testing while internal development and testing is in progress will add complexity that could jeopardize the integrity of the

development and readiness efforts, in addition to requiring more resources.

1.3.4. Opening the system to external testers before it is fully production-ready could introduce potential data exposure risks.

1.3.5. ICANN cannot control what information might be entered during testing, there is a risk of inadvertently disclosing sensitive or proprietary data to ICANN staff or among testers during beta testing sessions.

1.4. For these reasons, ICANN org does not plan to conduct a community beta testing prior to launch.

2. Regarding System Testing

2.1. During the above mentioned session, several questions were raised in terms of ICANN's testing strategy for the systems being developed.

2.2. To ensure confidence and user readiness of the system, ICANN org is conducting a comprehensive suite of internal testing designed to deliver a stable and user-friendly platform at launch. The testing includes:

2.2.1. Quality Assurance Testing after each 2-week sprint cycle as a best practice

2.2.2. Internal business team's user acceptance testing

2.2.3. End-to-end integration testing

2.2.4. Penetration and security testing

2.2.5. Role-based permission testing

2.3. In addition to system testing, ICANN org is ensuring operational readiness through various activities, that loops back to enhancing the system development:

2.3.1. Development of comprehensive process and procedure documents

2.3.2. Development of training materials

2.3.3. Various operational readiness activities

3. Community Facing materials in place of beta testing

- 3.1. ICANN org will release the system once internal testing and readiness is complete, at the time of the Round opening.
- 3.2. In support of transparency and community preparedness, ICANN org plans targeted readiness events and reference resources to provide visibility into the system and its features including community webinars, system demo recordings, and detailed system user guides to aid in adoption and use of application management system
- 3.3. Through training events and resources, the community and applicants will be prepared for the look and feel of the system, including basic navigation and functionality. Demo videos will focus on the organization and application submission screens; system guides will have click-by-click instructions for all applicant functionality.
- 3.4. While these resources will not replicate hands-on beta testing, they will provide meaningful insight into system functionality and user experience. This approach ensures that, despite limited time and resources, ICANN org can deliver on time while remaining responsive to community needs once the system is operational.
- 3.5. ICANN org plans to share how the systems work via some of the above mentioned methods in advance of the opening of the round, so the community and the prospective applicants can familiarize themselves with the ICANN developed systems. Through these readiness activities, there will be an opportunity to ask system related questions to ICANN.
- 3.6. ICANN org plans to collect community feedback on usability of the systems throughout the operational phase of the Program, addressing issues and enhancements through iterative updates.