

NEW gTLD PROGRAM: NEXT ROUND

gTLD

# Public Comments on the Draft CPE Evaluation Guide and ICANN Responses

29 May 2026



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# Overview

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ICANN opened a [Public Comment on the draft Evaluation Guide for Community Priority Evaluation \(CPE\)](#) on 24 March 2026. The Public Comment closed on 4 May 2026, and ICANN received 12 submissions (from various constituencies, groups, and individuals) in total. The summary of the Public Comment can be found [here](#).

This document is the compilation of all comments received on the draft Evaluation Guide for CPE and ICANN's responses. For each comment, ICANN has provided a response indicating whether a change is required, not required, or not applicable, and why.

It should be noted that, as specified in the [proceeding](#), ICANN requested that commenters focus on reviewing the Evaluation Guide itself and not on the criteria and guidelines from the Applicant Guidebook (Guidebook). As such, in cases where commenters re-open issues previously deliberated on and discussed with the IRT or provide recommendations for changes not grounded in SubPro Final Report or other related policies, ICANN's response notes this as such without further substantive consideration.

Following conclusion of discussions with the IRT, ICANN org, together with the CPE vendor, will consider whether any changes need to be made to the Evaluation Guide. The Evaluation Guide will be posted on the [New gTLD Program website](#) on icann.org.

# ICANN Responses to Comments on Draft CPE Evaluation Guide

#	Public Comment <sup>1</sup>	ICANN Response
1	<p><a href="#">Joshua Seyi Ibitoye</a>: This submission supports the overall direction of the draft CPE Evaluation Guide, particularly its focus on transparency, structured scoring, and accountability. However, it highlights concerns around subjectivity in key evaluation criteria, potential inconsistencies arising from independent research, and the lack of standardized methods for defining community boundaries and majority support. Strengthening these areas would improve consistency, reduce ambiguity, and enhance confidence in the evaluation outcomes.</p>	<p>Thank you for the comment. ICANN has divided its response below by the different areas covered in this comment.</p> <p><u>Limited Independent Research</u></p> <p>ICANN notes that, although the inclusion of the ability for the panel to conduct “limited independent research” is based on SubPro policy recommendations, that policy did not provide specific guidelines for such research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Recommendation 34.21:</b> “If the Community Priority Evaluation Panel conducts independent research while evaluating an application, limitations on this research and additional requirements must apply. The Working Group recommends including the following text in the Applicant Guidebook: “The Community Priority Evaluation Panel may perform independent research deemed necessary to evaluate the application (the “Limited Research”), provided, however, that the evaluator shall disclose the results of such Limited Research to the applicant and the applicant shall have an opportunity to respond. The applicant shall be provided 30 days to respond before the evaluation decision is rendered. When conducting any such Limited Research, panelists are cautioned not to assume an advocacy role either for or against the applicant or application.”</li> <li>• <b>Implementation Guideline 34.22:</b> “To support transparency, if the Community Priority Evaluation Panel relied on research for the decision it should be cited and a link to the information provided.”</li> </ul> <p>However, ICANN notes that the SubPro policy also highlights that “[w]hen conducting any such Limited Research, panelists are cautioned not to assume an advocacy role either for or against the applicant or application.” This statement also appears in the Guidebook (see Section 5.4.6) and has been added to the</p>

<sup>1</sup> Only a summary or excerpt is provided in cases where the submitted comment is too long to copy fully into this document.

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		<p>Evaluation Guide (see updates to the section “Evaluation Panel Activites”).</p> <p>Additionally, ICANN will include in the updated Evaluation Guide the CPE Panel Process and Procedure Document, developed by the CPE vendor and published by ICANN. This document provides an overview of the CPE vendor/panels processes as it relates to conducting the evaluation. This document also provides more information regarding the panel make-up.</p> <p><u>“Community Boundaries”</u> Regarding “defining community boundaries”, ICANN notes that this comment provides no additional information as to what this refers to or how this might be improved upon. However, ICANN notes that the guidelines included in the Guidebook, which accompany each of the CPE criteria, include multiple considerations and guidelines for the type of documentation that should be provided by the applicant and how the panel may objectively determine whether a criterion has been met.</p> <p>ICANN also notes SubPro <b>Implementation Guidance 34.2</b>, in which the SubPro WG sought to allow for different types of communities to be eligible to pass CPE in the 2026 round, compared to the 2012 round:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Implementation Guidance 34.2:</b> “In the 2012 Applicant Guidebook, the following text is included under definitions for Criterion 1-A Delineation, “Delineation” relates to the membership of a community, where a clear and straight-forward membership definition scores high, while an unclear, dispersed or unbound definition scores low.” The corresponding Evaluation Guidelines from the 2012 round include a non-exhaustive list of “elements of straight-forward member definitions.” This list should continue to include elements applicable to economic communities with a formal membership structure, but it should also include elements applicable to communities that are not economic in nature, including linguistic and cultural communities, that have clear and straight-forward membership definition. The term “member” in this context should be interpreted broadly enough to include communities that do not have “card carrying” members. Further, the Evaluation Guidelines should include provisions that allow communities which are not economic in nature (and which therefore may not have clear and straight-forward membership</li> </ul>

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		<p>structure) with an equal opportunity to score a full 2 points on the Delineation Criterion, as well as an opportunity to score a single point if some but not all elements of this criterion are met.”</p> <p><u>Determining Majority Support</u>  ICANN also notes concerns in this comment as well as several others regarding defining “majority support.” The Evaluation Guide, as well as the Guidebook (in Section 5.4.8), provides several considerations for determining majority support. For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “Majority and minority are based on the size of the community as specified by the applicant. The panel should consider the applicant’s evidence on the identified community’s size to determine whether there is majority support or notable opposition.</li> <li>● The applicant should clearly define its community, providing estimates of the total size and any sub-groups.</li> <li>● The majority of the identified community may be determined by, but not restricted to, factors like headcount or the geographic reach...”</li> </ul> <p>These guidelines/considerations relate directly to application questions 139 and 140:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 139: “What is the estimated size of the community? This should take into account any regions listed in Question 138. Instructions: 1. Provide the estimated size of the community. The size should be in number format (for example, “1,000,000 members”). 2. If the community is divided by group, region, sector, etc., this should include estimated size for each group.”</li> <li>● 140: “What portion of the community do any organizing bodies represent or administer to? Instructions: Provide the estimated size of the community that is administered or represented by each relevant organizing body in the identified community.”</li> </ul> <p>Based on this, ICANN does not believe any updates are required.</p>
2	<p><a href="#">Nitin Walia</a>: I welcome the development of the draft CPE Evaluation Guide as an important step toward improving transparency and consistency in</p>	<p>Thank you for the comment. ICANN has divided its response below by the different areas covered in this comment.</p>

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	<p>Community Priority Evaluations for the New gTLD Program: 2026 Round. However, given the critical role of CPE in contention resolution, the guide would benefit from further strengthening in several areas. Key recommendations include enhancing objectivity by introducing clearer measurable benchmarks and illustrative examples, standardizing the methodology for independent research to ensure transparency and auditability, and providing clearer guidance on determining “majority support” and evaluating “relevant opposition.” The submission also highlights the need to ensure inclusivity of diverse global community structures, particularly informal, grassroots, and digitally native communities, which may not always have formal documentation. Additional guidance is recommended for evaluating linguistic communities and Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs), ensuring alignment with Universal Acceptance (UA) principles and equitable treatment across languages and scripts. Further, strengthening calibration, quality assurance mechanisms, and transparency in evaluation reporting will improve consistency and applicant confidence in the process. Overall, with targeted refinements, the evaluation guide can become a robust, fair, and globally inclusive framework that supports the diverse nature of the Internet community.</p>	<p><u>Limited Independent Research</u> See response on <a href="#">Comment #1</a>.</p> <p><u>Determining Majority Support</u> See response on <a href="#">Comment #1</a>.</p> <p><u>Benchmarks and Examples</u> The Evaluation Guide and the Guidebook provide examples of documentation that may be submitted to meet the CPE Criteria. For example, for Engagement, under Criterion 1, the Guidebook and Guide state that the applicant should submit the following:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“In support of demonstrating active <b>Engagement</b>, the applicant should provide documentation of the following practices, which should have occurred within the two years leading up to application submission:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Offering support</li> <li>2) Sharing information</li> <li>3) Responding to specific community needs</li> <li>4) Fostering and strengthening relationships within the identified community”</li> </ol> <p>ICANN notes that to further define the type of documents or provide examples of “acceptable” documents may become limiting, as such examples may not be available to or applicable for all types of communities.</p> <p><u>Linguistic Communities and IDNs</u> In general, ICANN believes that changes to the criteria based on SubPro policy allow for different types of communities, including linguistic and IDN communities, as indicated in ICANN’s response to <a href="#">Comment #1</a>. Additionally, the Evaluation Guide and the Guidebook allow for the panel to consult with relevant community experts. For example, under Organization (under Criterion 1), the Guidelines state that “[t]he panel may consult with relevant community experts to gain insight into how the organization presents itself in different types of communities” (see Guidebook Section 5.4.4 and Criterion 1 in the Evaluation Guide).</p> <p><u>Quality Assurance</u> ICANN is planning for a robust quality control program for all evaluations. ICANN</p>

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		<p>opened a Request for Proposal (RFP) process in <a href="#">January 2026</a> to identify a potential quality control vendor. Additionally, ICANN will include in the updated Evaluation Guide the CPE Panel Process and Procedure Document, developed by the CPE vendor and published by ICANN. This document provides an overview of the CPE vendor/panels processes as it relates to conducting the evaluation, more information regarding the panel make-up, and highlights quality control/assurance mechanisms employed by the vendor.</p>
3	<p><a href="#">Valerie Yan Tong Chua</a>: This submission offers observations on the draft CPE Vendor Evaluation Guide from a researcher with active engagement in ICANN's capacity development programmes and sustained interest in how evaluation processes affect multilingual and community-based applicants in the 2026 Round.</p> <p>On the evaluation criteria overall, the guide is clearly structured and the scoring rubrics provide useful operational clarity for panels. The distinction between the vendor's facilitation role and the evaluator's independent judgment is appropriately drawn, and the calibration requirement across panels is a meaningful safeguard against inconsistency.</p> <p>On Criterion 2 (Nexus) and IDN strings, the guide includes a pertinent question — whether an applied-for IDN string is in the language and script of use for the identified community — but does not develop this into substantive guidance. For linguistic and script-based communities, the nexus between string and community is inseparable from the script in which that string is expressed. A panel evaluating an IDN application without expertise in the relevant script may struggle to assess whether a string constitutes a full match, a well-known alternative, or a partial match. The</p>	<p>Thank you for the comment.</p> <p>ICANN notes that this comment recommends providing explicit guidance to the panel to consult with community experts with relevant experience when a string is related to a linguistic community and/or is an Internationalized Domain Name (IDN). The panel has been tasked with conducting evaluations according to the criteria and in response to the information provided by the applicant. As it relates to Nexus, the applicant is instructed to note:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“1. Explain how the applied-for string clearly relates to or represents the community.</li> <li>2. Explain whether the applied-for string has any other significant meaning beyond identifying the community or community members described in the application. The applying entity may wish to provide pertinent information regarding any particular geography, region, or themes that may be alluded to by the string, of which the community may or may not be a part.”</li> </ol> <p>The panel's task is to determine whether the applicant's provided information can be verified, and the panel may or may not choose to conduct research in this regard or consult with a community expert. Additionally, there is no policy guidance to suggest that this should be required for IDN applications.</p> <p>Finally, one of ICANN's considerations in <a href="#">choosing a CPE vendor</a> was that it has the ability to “[form] one or more panels of evaluators that possess the requisite expertise and qualifications to evaluate applications from a diverse set of communities.” As noted in <a href="#">Comment #1</a>, ICANN will include in the updated Evaluation Guide the CPE Panel Process and Procedure Document, developed by the CPE vendor and published by ICANN. This document provides an overview of</p>

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	<p>guide should specify that panels evaluating IDN strings must include or consult an evaluator with relevant linguistic and script competence, and that independent research for such applications should extend to script-specific sources rather than relying solely on Latin-script internet searches.</p> <p>On community expert consultation, the guide permits but does not systematise expert consultation. Given the diversity of community types anticipated in the 2026 Round, clearer guidance on when expert consultation is expected rather than optional, and how expert input is weighted against applicant-submitted evidence, would strengthen consistency and the defensibility of outcomes under Evaluation Challenge.</p>	<p>the CPE vendor/panels processes as it relates to conducting the evaluation, more information regarding the panel make-up, and highlights quality control/assurance mechanisms employed by the vendor.</p>
4	<p><b><u>Nazma Akter</u></b>: The draft Community Priority Evaluation (CPE) Vendor Evaluation Guide is a well-structured and comprehensive document that meaningfully enhances clarity, consistency, and transparency in the evaluation process. It effectively complements the Applicant Guidebook by translating high-level criteria into operational guidance for evaluators, particularly through detailed scoring rubrics, defined roles, and documentation requirements. The emphasis on evidence-based assessment, conflict-of-interest safeguards, and quality assurance mechanisms is commendable and aligns with ICANN’s accountability principles.</p> <p>However, a few areas could benefit from further refinement. While the guide promotes consistency, some rubric elements especially, under Community Establishment and Community Endorsement still allow for subjective</p>	<p>Thank you for the comment. ICANN has divided its response below by the different areas covered in this comment.</p> <p><u>Benchmarks</u> Please see response on <a href="#">Comment #2</a>.</p> <p><u>Quality Assurance and Panel Calibration</u> Please see response on <a href="#">Comment #2</a>.</p> <p><u>Sample Evaluation Reports</u> ICANN notes the request for “anonymized sample evaluation reports.” As in the 2012 round, ICANN plans to publish the evaluation reports from the CPE panel for each applicant participating in CPE. Although ICANN is not able to produce sample evaluation reports at this time, there are a few sources which may be useful in this regard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2012 Evaluation Reports: <a href="https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe#status">https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe#status</a>.</li> <li>- Sample evaluation conducted as an exercise with the SubPro IRT (“Stress</li> </ul>

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	<p>interpretation. Providing more concrete examples or benchmark scenarios could reduce variability across evaluators. The scope of Limited Independent Research should also be more clearly bounded to avoid inconsistent application and potential overreach. Also clearer guidance on assessing Majority Support in diverse or informal communities would strengthen fairness, particularly where quantifiable metrics are difficult to establish. Additionally, greater transparency around how evaluator judgments are calibrated across panels would further build trust in the process. Finally, consideration could be given to publishing anonymized sample evaluation reports to improve predictability for applicants. Overall, this draft is a strong and practical framework, and with minor clarifications, it can significantly improve the robustness and credibility of the CPE process.</p>	<p>Test<sup>2</sup>):  <a href="https://icann-community.atlassian.net/wiki/spaces/SPIR/pages/112200175/1.+Working+Documents#:~:text=Stress%20Test%20Materials%20(pdf).">https://icann-community.atlassian.net/wiki/spaces/SPIR/pages/112200175/1.+Working+Documents#:~:text=Stress%20Test%20Materials%20(pdf).</a></p>
5	<p><b>Roshatey Jannat:</b> Thank you for publishing this draft for public input. The guide is well-structured overall and provides useful clarity on the evaluation process. I offer a few general observations that may help strengthen the final version.</p> <p>It would be helpful to ensure that the scoring rubrics in the guide are fully consistent with those in the Applicant Guidebook, so that applicants and panelists are working from the same framework.</p> <p>Some of the language in the guide could benefit from closer alignment with the Guidebook to avoid unintended differences in how criteria are interpreted, particularly for smaller or more specialized communities.</p>	<p>Thank you for the comment. ICANN notes the suggestion to ensure that the language in the Evaluation Guide and the Guidebook is consistent. ICANN will review the language for consistency as it prepares the final draft of the Evaluation Guide.</p> <p>As it relates to calibration and panel procedures, including challenges, as noted in <a href="#">Comment #1</a>, ICANN will include in the updated Evaluation Guide the CPE Panel Process and Procedure Document, developed by the CPE vendor and published by ICANN. This document provides an overview of the CPE vendor/panels processes as it relates to conducting the evaluation.</p>

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	<p>Adding more detail on the timing and frequency of calibration sessions would give further confidence that evaluations will be applied consistently across all cases.</p> <p>Overall the required deliverables and reporting expectations are clear and the inclusion of a defined challenge response timeline is a welcome addition.</p>	
6	<p><b><a href="#">Duy Dang Cong</a></b>: First, the concept of “majority support” lacks a standardized quantitative definition. While the guide allows flexibility in assessing community size and representation, the absence of clear thresholds or metrics may lead to inconsistent interpretations across evaluation panels. Establishing clearer benchmarks—such as percentage thresholds or weighted criteria—would enhance comparability and fairness.</p> <p>Second, the reliance on “limited independent research” introduces potential subjectivity. The guide does not define the scope, acceptable sources, or validation standards for such research. This creates risks of evaluator bias and uneven application of evidence standards. A more structured research protocol, including source validation criteria, would strengthen objectivity.</p> <p>Third, the evaluation framework does not sufficiently address how community size and legitimacy should be verified. Since applicants self-report these elements, the lack of standardized verification mechanisms may allow</p>	<p>Thank you for the comment. ICANN has divided its response below by the different areas covered in this comment.</p> <p><u>Majority Support and Thresholds</u> As it relates to determining majority, please refer to the response on <a href="#">Comment #1</a>. ICANN understands the request for “benchmarks” and “thresholds,” however—while ICANN has sought to provide guidelines on determining majority—ICANN believes that such benchmarks may be potentially limiting, as a “majority” may look different for different types of communities. Additionally, it is not possible at this stage to add new criteria or thresholds, as such changes may amount to policy changes, which ICANN cannot unilaterally make.</p> <p><u>Limited Independent Research</u> See response on <a href="#">Comment #1</a>.</p> <p><u>Verification Mechanisms</u> Section 5.4.6 of the Guidebook states:</p> <p>“The panel may conduct limited independent research deemed necessary to evaluate the application according to the criteria and verify the information provided by the applicant. The panel is expected to focus its limited independent research on the fact-checking required to verify information provided by the applicant. Additionally, as part of this research, the panel may consult with relevant community-related experts to gain insight into highly specialized or localized communities. The guidelines for each criterion in <a href="#">Section 5.4.8 CPE Criteria</a> allow for the panel to consider</p>

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	<p>overstatement or misrepresentation. Introducing independent verification requirements or third-party validation could mitigate this risk.</p> <p>Finally, the binary scoring approach for Registration Policies limits the ability to assess policy quality and enforceability. Expanding this criterion into a more nuanced scoring scale would better reflect differences in policy robustness and alignment with community objectives.</p>	<p>how a criterion should be evaluated in the context of different types of communities.”</p> <p>Within each of the criterion sections, the Guidelines state, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Does limited independent research deemed necessary to evaluate this criterion (for example, an Internet search) corroborate the evidence provided by the applicant? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Such research may corroborate the existence of bodies or groups that are relevant to the identified community, or, if applicable, evidence of the applicant acting on behalf of the identified community.</li> <li>○ The panel may review and verify letters of support or opposition to better understand the organization of the identified community.</li> <li>○ The panel may consult with relevant community experts to gain insight into how the organization presents itself in different types of communities.”</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>At this stage, it is not possible to introduce new requirements for “independent verification” or “third-party validation,” as this could amount to a policy change, which ICANN is not able to unilaterally make.</p> <p><u>Registration Policies</u> The scoring for each criterion was discussed extensively with the SubPro Implementation Review Team (IRT). It is not possible at this stage to change the scoring, as this could amount to a policy change, which ICANN is not able to unilaterally make.</p>
7	<p><a href="#">Prince Andrew Livingstone Zutah: International Online Safety Corp. (IOSCORP)</a>: Community Priority Evaluation is a highly consequential mechanism because it determines whether a community-based application should receive priority in a contention set. The integrity of this process is therefore critical not only for applicants, but also for the credibility of ICANN’s multistakeholder model, the predictability of the</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. ICANN has divided its response below by the different areas covered in this comment.</p> <p><u>Applicant Guidebook and the Evaluation Guide</u> ICANN appreciates this comment and agrees it would be valuable to add such language. ICANN has made updates to the Evaluation Guide in this regard.</p> <p><u>Limited independent research</u></p>

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	<p>2026 Round, and the protection of genuine communities within the DNS ecosystem. The draft guide is a positive operational step. It provides clearer direction for the selected CPE vendor, outlines the roles of the evaluator, vendor, and ICANN org, and reinforces important principles such as objectivity, consistency, transparency, confidentiality, and accountability. I also support the guide's recognition that CPE is limited to Community Applications and that the guide is intended to complement, not replace or supersede, the Applicant Guidebook.</p> <p><b>Summary of Submission:</b></p> <p>I support the publication of ICANN org's Draft Community Priority Evaluation (CPE) Vendor Evaluation Guide for the New gTLD Program: 2026 Round. The guide provides a strong operational foundation by outlining evaluator, vendor, and ICANN roles, and by reinforcing key principles such as objectivity, consistency, transparency, confidentiality, and accountability.</p> <p>My submission recommends targeted improvements to strengthen fairness, predictability, and trust in the CPE process. In particular, the final guide should clearly state that the Applicant Guidebook prevails in the event of any inconsistency, and that the Evaluation Guide should not create new substantive criteria or evidentiary burdens.</p>	<p>Please note responses on this topic provided throughout this document, including in <a href="#">Comment #1</a>.</p> <p><u>Formal Communities and Evidence Requirements</u> Please see response to a similar topic to <a href="#">Comment #1</a>.</p> <p>Additionally, note that one of the SubPro Working Group's items of implementation guidance (34.2) was to ensure that the "Evaluation Guidelines [include] provisions that allow communities which are not economic in nature (and which therefore may not have clear and straight-forward membership structure) with an equal opportunity to score [full or partial]...points..."</p> <p>One example of how this concept was incorporated into the 2026 Round CPE process is visible in the Guidelines for Criterion 1: Community Establishment, where applicants are asked to provide (via its response to application questions):</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">"...an overview of the identified community structure, as applicable, and whether it is formal or informal: 1. Formal communities typically have well-defined organizational structures and membership lists, such as economic communities or coalitions of nonprofit organizations. 2. Non-formal communities may consist of self-identified members, or individuals, such as those in linguistic or cultural groups."</p> <p>This information will be considered by the CPE Panel as it evaluates the Community Establishment criterion.</p> <p><u>Support and opposition</u> As it relates to determining support and opposition, please note the Guidelines in section IV.a of the Evaluation Guide. For example, under "Relevant Organizations," the Guidelines state:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">"In considering relevant support or opposition, the panel should consider both the size of the group or groups expressing support or opposition as well as the relevance to the identified community or the string.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ For example, a letter of opposition from an organization claiming to represent millions but weakly connected to the</li> </ul>

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	<p>I also recommend clearer safeguards for limited independent research, including documentation of sources, rationale, relevance to scoring, and applicant response opportunities. The guide should avoid over-formalizing community evidence so that legitimate communities with informal, decentralized, traditional, linguistic, regional, or Global South structures are not disadvantaged.</p> <p>The submission further recommends that support and opposition be assessed based on relevance, legitimacy, substance, and representativeness rather than volume alone. It also calls for a stronger “no double-counting” quality assurance checkpoint, greater transparency in final reports, clearer procedures for Evaluation Challenges, documented evaluator calibration, and more granular milestone timelines.</p> <p>Overall, I believe these refinements will help ensure that CPE outcomes are evidence-based, globally inclusive, procedurally fair, and trusted by applicants, affected communities, and the wider ICANN ecosystem.</p>	<p>community may carry less weight. In contrast, a letter from a small, closely connected group may be more relevant and impactful. The same principle applies to letters of support.”</p> <p>As it relates to majority, the Guidelines state:</p> <p>“In some cases, the panel may consider support from outside the community if the applied-for string has multiple meanings or the applicant has identified a narrower community than the scope suggested by the applied-for string.”</p> <p>As such, ICANN believes that the existing Guidelines cover the concerns expressed in this comment.</p> <p><u>Double-counting</u> ICANN appreciates this comment and agrees that adding such language would be useful. ICANN has made updates to the Evaluation Guide in this regard.</p> <p><u>Transparency of Evaluations</u> As noted in response to other comments in this document, ICANN will publish all evaluation reports from CPE in the 2026 Round, as was done in the 2012 Round. These reports will include the scoring and rationale, and, as required by policy and the Applicant Guidebook, this rationale will include citations, where relevant.</p> <p>As noted throughout this document, ICANN will include in the updated Evaluation Guide the CPE Panel Process and Procedure Document, developed by the CPE vendor and published by ICANN. This document provides an overview of the CPE vendor/panels processes as it relates to conducting the evaluation, more information regarding the panel make-up, and highlights quality control/assurance mechanisms employed by the vendor.</p> <p><u>Evaluation Challenges</u> ICANN appreciates this comment and agrees that adding more information regarding Evaluation Challenges would be useful. While there already was a section in the Evaluation Guide on this topic, ICANN has made updates to the existing language in the guide to provide some additional information.</p>

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		<p><u>Quality Control/Assurance</u> Please see response on <a href="#">Comment #2</a>.</p> <p><u>CPE Timeline</u> Based on this comment, and others, ICANN has added a visual representation of the timeline in the Evaluation Guide, which is intended to show the major milestones for an applicant participating in CPE. ICANN expects to provide more information regarding timelines and exact dates as the Program progresses and there is more certainty about the number of applications received, which is a dependency for Program timelines.</p>
8	<p><a href="#">At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC) Policy staff in support of the At-Large Community:</a> Overall, we find the guide to be well structured and aligned with the AGB. It clearly explains the evaluation criteria, scoring system, and process steps, and it highlights the importance of fairness, transparency, and evidence-based decision-making. However, we wish to offer some feedback that we believe would improve the use of this draft Guide.</p> <p>1. For clarity, we recommend using either the term “vendor” or “provider” throughout the document for consistency instead of using them interchangeably.</p> <p>2. As transparency and accountability are essential to building trust in the CPE process, we welcome the requirement for evaluators to provide clear and detailed rationales for their scores and decisions. This is especially important because, even with guidance and scoring rules, different panels may still reach different conclusions. Clear rationales will help ensure that decisions are</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. ICANN has divided its response below by the different areas covered in this comment.</p> <p><u>“Vendor” vs. “Provider”</u> ICANN has updated all instances of “provider” to say “vendor.”</p> <p><u>Transparency of Evaluations</u> Please see response on <a href="#">Comment #7</a>.</p> <p><u>Clarifying Questions</u> As allowed per Guidebook Section 5.4.6.1, evaluators may issue Clarifying Questions. As noted throughout this document, ICANN will include in the updated Evaluation Guide the CPE Panel Process and Procedure Document, developed by the CPE vendor and published by ICANN. This document provides an overview of the CPE vendor/panels processes as it relates to conducting the evaluation, including related to clarifying questions and any limited research.</p> <p>ICANN will ensure that the CPE vendor understands that the Clarifying Questions process is a mechanism that should be used when there are insufficient or incomplete descriptions. However, ICANN would like to note that it is incumbent upon the applicant to provide all required information in response to the application questions related to its identified community.</p> <p><u>CPE Process Timeline</u></p>

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	<p>understandable, consistent, and can be constructively reviewed if challenged.</p> <p>3. We also recommend that clear instructions be included to guide evaluators in managing scenarios involving conflicting evidence, especially cases that fall near the decision threshold (i.e. borderline determinations). Evaluators should be encouraged to use the Clarifying Question mechanism if they find sections in any Community application with insufficient or incomplete descriptions.</p> <p>4. Finally, we recommend improving clarity around the overall CPE process, whether provided within this draft Guide or as another addendum to the AGB. Information should be included on the process by which applicants are to submit challenges to CPE determinations to the Provider. Indications of clear and realistic timelines to each key step in the CPE process would also help. These aspects are important and would greatly benefit applicants' appreciation of the entire CPE process.</p>	<p>As noted throughout this document, ICANN will include in the updated Evaluation Guide the CPE Panel Process and Procedure Document, developed by the CPE vendor and published by ICANN. This document provides an overview of the CPE vendor/panels processes as it relates to conducting the evaluation.</p> <p>Additionally, ICANN has added a timeline to the Evaluation Guide, which is intended to show the major milestones for an applicant participating in CPE.</p>
9	<p><a href="#">Juan Rojas (NCSG)</a>: NCSG appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this process and urges ICANN to give full consideration to the views expressed herein. We remain committed to constructive engagement in support of ICANN's mission to ensure an open, secure, and stable Internet.</p> <p>Our primary concern remains the integrity and accessibility of the Community Priority Evaluation (CPE) process. As currently drafted, the framework's heavy evidentiary requirements and</p>	<p>Thank you for this comment. ICANN notes that this comment is largely related to the criteria, scoring, and general model of CPE, which is beyond the scope of this Evaluation Guide. These matters were discussed extensively as ICANN org worked with the SubPro IRT to develop the Applicant Guidebook, which was adopted by the ICANN Board in October 2025. However, ICANN would like to address the following points relevant to the Evaluation Guide below:</p> <p><u>Terminology consistency</u> ICANN has updated the Evaluation Guide to be consistent in the use of the term "CPE vendor." References to "CPE provider" have been removed.</p> <p><u>"Inclusivity of Diverse Community Structures"</u></p>

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	<p>rigid documentation standards create a significant disleverage for resource-constrained or small organizations and grassroots communities and indigenous tribes and peoples. To ensure a fair and equitable New gTLD Program, the CPE must transition toward a model that balances technical rigor with procedural accessibility. We urge ICANN to implement the transparency and eligibility safeguards we have proposed to ensure that smaller entities are not structurally disadvantaged in favor of well-established, formalized institutions.</p>	<p>Please see response to <a href="#">Comment #7</a> regarding “formal communities.”</p> <p><u>“Evidentiary Burden and Accessibility”</u> This comment goes beyond the scope of the Evaluation Guide.</p> <p><u>“Transparency and Consistency in Evaluation and Eligibility”</u> Please see response to <a href="#">Comment #7</a> regarding “transparency and evaluations.”</p> <p><u>“Treatment of Opposition”</u> The guidelines for the panel (found both in the Applicant Guidebook and the Evaluation Guide) as it relates to opposition are clear:</p> <p>“The panel should consider any objections or comments from this application round noting opposition. While these will be assessed, they do not automatically influence the Opposition score, as the panel should consider whether the sources of opposition are clearly spurious, unsubstantiated, or filed for the purpose of obstruction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The panel should assess whether relevant organizations (for example, official, quasi-official, established, publicly recognized, or peer organizations) oppose the proposal, and if such opposition represents a minority or majority within the community. See guidelines below regarding relevant organizations.</li> <li>• Letters of opposition submitted against a Community Application must be considered in balance with documented support for the application.”</li> </ul> <p>ICANN believes these guidelines address the concerns in this comment.</p> <p><u>Evaluation Challenges</u> Please see response to <a href="#">Comment #7</a> regarding “Evaluation Challenges.”</p> <p><u>“Equity Between Global and Local Communities and Context-Sensitive Evaluation”</u> This comment goes beyond the scope of the Evaluation Guide. However, please see response to <a href="#">Comment #7</a> regarding “formal communities” as well as the response to <a href="#">Comment #1</a> regarding “Community boundaries.” Further, note the guideline that is included throughout the Applicant Guidebook and Evaluation</p>

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		<p>Guide that the panel should consider different types of communities as they evaluate an application. For example, under Engagement, the guideline states:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“The inability to demonstrate recent Engagement-related activities may be an indicator of a community that lacks engagement. However, the panel should take into account different types of communities in evaluating this sub-criterion and the relevance of recent activity.”</p>
10	<p><a href="#">Margaret Milam (Intellectual Property Constituency)</a>: The IPC’s position reflects a balance between three equally important imperatives among IPC membership. While it is important respecting the integrity of ICANN’s policy development process there is a legitimate need for a CPE framework that is genuinely robust and resistant to abuse - which may be questioned under the current CPE framework laid out in the AGB and specified by the Draft subject to this comment.</p> <p>The IPC recognises that CPE, when properly developed and applied, serves a valuable purpose in protecting the interests of genuine, established communities and ensuring that the new round of gTLDs delivers meaningful benefits to those communities it was also designed to protect. However, this value largely depends on how well the criteria for CPE are defined and how they are applied by the expert panel. A CPE framework that can be exploited by loosely organised groups or bad actors is not merely ineffective — it is counterproductive and risks discrediting the new gTLD program as much as it endangers the communities that it serves to protect.</p> <p>The IPC therefore calls upon ICANN to ensure that the Draft review addresses the concerns</p>	<p>Thank you for this comment. ICANN notes that this comment is partially related to the criteria, scoring, and general model of CPE, which is beyond the scope of this Evaluation Guide. These matters were discussed extensively as ICANN org worked with the SubPro IRT to develop the Applicant Guidebook, which was adopted by the ICANN Board in October 2025. However, ICANN would like to address the following points relevant to the Evaluation Guide below:</p> <p><u>Criterion 1</u> As noted, ICANN believes that any changes to the criteria or scoring thresholds are beyond the scope of this Evaluation Guide and are matters of policy. However, ICANN would like to call attention to responses to <a href="#">Comment #7</a> regarding “formal communities” as well as the response to <a href="#">Comment #1</a> regarding “Community boundaries” as they are related to the issues addressed here.</p> <p>As it relates to the evaluation of different types of communities, ICANN selected the CPE vendor because it has shown that it “possess[es] the requisite expertise and qualifications to evaluate applications from a diverse set of communities,” as was required as part of the <a href="#">RFP process</a>. Further, as noted in the Applicant Guidebook, ICANN has worked with the SubPro IRT to design the CPE process to “identify qualified Community Applications while preventing false positives (awarding priority to unqualified applications for a coveted generic string) and false negatives (overlooking qualified Community Applications).” This latter phrase has been added to the Evaluation Guide to reemphasize this point.</p> <p><u>Requirements related to Specification 12 and Registry Commitment Evaluation (RCE)</u> ICANN understands the request for additional information regarding these topics and has added a section in this regard. However, ICANN notes that the RCE process goes beyond the scope of this Evaluation Guide.</p>

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	<p>raised in this comment, in particular, with respect to the interpretation of community identity under Criterion 1, the absence of any reference to the Specification 12 pre-condition, and the risk posed by the current scoring system's failure to distinguish meaningfully between strong and marginal community applications.</p> <p>The IPC stands ready to engage constructively with ICANN and other stakeholder groups in refining the evaluation guide and remains committed to a New gTLD Program that is fair, transparent and credible all participants, including for applicants of dotbrand (.brand) domains and for applicants of community applications.</p>	
11	<p><b><u>Registries Stakeholder Group (RySG):</u></b></p> <p>In our comments on the draft AGB, we stressed the importance of the CPE process because of the advantage it confers to successful applicants. The CPE Provider must be sufficiently trained and informed, and understand the weight of the process, to ensure that applicants are evaluated properly (i.e., that CPE does not result in either "false positives" or "false negatives").</p> <p>The RySG believes it is important to highlight that the CPE panel should consider both comments in support and comments in opposition to the application, submitted during the application comment period. Similarly, the CPE panel should observe the Objections process to ensure that formal Objections submitted on an application also factor into the evaluation. This includes</p>	<p>Thank you for this comment. ICANN has divided its response below by the different areas covered in this comment.</p> <p><u>"False Positives"/"False Negatives"</u> ICANN has added the reference to this clause from the Applicant Guidebook to reemphasize this core objective of the CPE process.</p> <p><u>Support and Opposition</u> ICANN has added reference to application comments to the "Review of Evidence" activity under the "Evaluation Panel Activities" section of the Evaluation Guide.</p>

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	<p>introducing an explicit reference to public comments (what is called Community Input in the AGB) as a factor that evaluators can elect to consider.</p>	
12	<p><b><u>Giacomo MAZZONE (AUB/WBU)</u></b>: Performing the function of the vendor in charge of the CPE in the new gTLD’s programme is a very delicate task, that requires a lot of knowledge and expertise in many different fields. So it is important to keep in account a lot of factors and to rely on various competent bodies external to ICANN. In the attached submission are mentioned 7 criteria that could improve the mandate of the Vendor, trying to remediate to some of the errors that emerged from the gTLD’s round 2012 that could, unfortunately, happen again this time.</p> <p>1) The vendor has to duty to approach relevant existing bodies among international organizations that have the authority to confirm or not the representativeness of the applicants in CPE, because no vendor in the world could have 360 degrees expertise on all kind of communities that exist in the world;</p> <p>2) The vendor has the obligation not only to apply, but also to interpret the norms of the guidebook;</p> <p>3) The vendor has to install a dialogue with the applicant and not only proceed by “tabula”;</p> <p>4) The abusive objections are not penalized and remains possible in the current procedure, but could be very damaging for community applicants</p>	<p>Thank you for this comment. ICANN has divided its response below by the different areas covered in this comment. However, ICANN notes that some of the concerns noted in this comment are matters of policy and go beyond the scope of this Evaluation Guide.</p> <p><u>Consultation with Experts (Item 1)</u> Please see discussion on this topic in responses to <a href="#">Comment #1</a>, <a href="#">Comment #3</a>, and <a href="#">Comment #7</a>.</p> <p><u>Consistency of Evaluation (Item 2)</u> ICANN understands this particular comment to refer to the evaluation of different types of communities, as well as the measure of support of those types of communities. Please see responses related to these concepts in responses to <a href="#">Comment #1</a>, <a href="#">Comment #6</a>, <a href="#">Comment #7</a>, and <a href="#">Comment #9</a>.</p> <p><u>Vendor-Applicant Dialogue (Item 3)</u> While the Applicant Guidebook does not allow for direct communication between the panel and the applicant (any clarifying questions must be submitted via TAMS), it is true that the panel may wish to issue clarifying questions before conducting limited independent research or after. ICANN has updated the Evaluation Guide to make that clear.</p> <p><u>Opposition and Objections to Community Applications (Item 4)</u> For discussion related to Community Endorsement and Opposition, please see response to <a href="#">Comment #9</a>.</p> <p>As it relates to Objections, please note this guideline under Community Endorsement:</p> <p>“The panel should consider any objections or comments from this application round noting opposition. While these will be assessed, they do not automatically influence the Opposition score, as the panel should</p>

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	<p>and, more in general, for ICANN impartiality and credibility;</p> <p>5) The timeline of the CPE is also very important for community applicants. But in this new version of the Guide for the Vendor, this problem is substantially ignored and neglected. At page 7 it is written: “Evaluation Panel Activities ICANN anticipates that the CPE process will take approximately 90-180 days from the time that the CPE panel begins its evaluation until the publication of evaluation determination, depending on the complexity of the evaluation”;</p> <p>6) The public general interest has to be the main guidance criteria for the whole exercise of the evaluation of Community application. In case of doubts, because ICANN recognized the COMMUNITY applications as a special category necessitating of a special treatment.</p> <p>7) The role of the vendor could also be pro-active during the CPE process in order to facilitate cooperation among various competitors for the same string as community. Currently the only solution proposed in case of more community applicants competing for the same string, is to auction. This would be good for the ICANN treasurer, but would a defeat for the community ideal that ICANN intend to preserve</p>	<p>consider whether the sources of opposition are clearly spurious, unsubstantiated, or filed for the purpose of obstruction.”</p> <p>ICANN does not believe any updates are required in this regard.</p> <p><u>CPE Timeline (Item 5)</u> Please see response to <a href="#">Comment #7</a> and <a href="#">Comment #8</a> regarding this topic.</p> <p><u>Public Interest (Item 6)</u> The purpose of the Evaluation Guide is to provide guidance to the vendor. The Applicant Guidebook notes in the introduction to Section 5.4 that:</p> <p>“In the 2007 GNSO Final Report on the Introduction of New Generic Top-Level Domains, Implementation Guidance F states that “[i]f there is contention for strings, applicants may: i) resolve contention between them within a pre-established timeframe[;] ii) if there is no mutual agreement, a claim to support a community by one party will be a reason to award priority to that application.”<sup>16</sup> In the Final Report on the new gTLD Subsequent Procedures Policy Development Process (SubPro PDP Final Report), the SubPro PDP Working Group affirmed “the continued prioritization of applications in contention sets that have passed Community Priority Evaluation (CPE).”</p> <p>ICANN believes that any updates to the Evaluation Guide in this regard are out of scope.</p> <p>See also responses to <a href="#">Comment #9</a>, <a href="#">Comment #10</a>, and <a href="#">Comment #11</a>.</p> <p><u>Role of the Vendor (Item 7)</u> ICANN notes that this comment appears to go beyond the scope of the Evaluation Guide and existing policy. ICANN would like to point out a key principle of CPE and the role of the vendor, as prescribed by policy, which is that: “...panelists are cautioned not to assume an advocacy role either for or against the applicant or application” (see Section 5.4.6).</p>

## NEW gTLD PROGRAM: NEXT ROUND



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