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Governmental Advisory Committee

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Governmental Advisory Committee Comments Regarding Community Consultation on ICANN Public Meetings: *Recommended Strategic Changes for Future Meetings*

Introduction

As described in a recent document prepared by ICANN org staff, a number of ICANN org proposals have been made regarding particular ICANN public meeting enhancements - as interpreted by analysis of recent community survey responses regarding the future of ICANN public meetings.

The proposals include a range of potential public meeting changes including time-shifting some community (SO/AC) meeting sessions from the core public meeting week to be potentially spread throughout the calendar year, development of a unified community event/meeting calendar and enhanced working opportunities and tools for ICANN community groups.

Additional proposals are directed toward the structure of future meetings, time zone considerations based on a planned rotation among ICANN regions, the use of regional face to face meetings and other specific implementation recommendations relating to a phased return to face to face public meetings.

The comments offered by the GAC in this document attempt to address each element of the proposals, in turn. For organizational purposes, the various proposals from ICANN org have been numbered and summarized so that the GAC comments can be easily identified.

General GAC Comments

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The GAC appreciates the intentions of ICANN org to continue to review and assess its public meeting capabilities to best serve the various community groups and to help them operate efficiently and effectively. As presented, the proposals appear to offer some potentially positive improvements for how ICANN public meetings can be organized, but any changes will need to preserve substantial flexibility for community groups to conduct sessions in conjunction with public meetings that meet their operational needs.

The GAC has worked very hard over the last nine months to evolve its virtual meeting program to a framework that balances time, attention and workload demands into a discrete period of time. The proposals seem to head in a different direction, suggesting that the committee now embark on a new set of expectations with few attending benefits. If implemented, the proposals would serve to have the GAC begin that adjustment process all over again.

The fundamental concern the GAC perceives from the combined proposals is the effect of shrinking the current GAC meeting structure to a compact four-day period that provides only limited opportunities for substantive internal and cross community opportunities - instead providing a series of more superficial production periods that will make it difficult to produce progress on issues of importance to governments. At a time when Board-approved Work Stream 2 Accountability and ATRT3 recommendations demand more accountability and transparency from community groups, the proposed meeting structure would challenge the GAC, and likely other communities, to maintain some hard-won operational efficiencies achieved over the last nine months of virtual meetings.

There is certainly room for improvements in the public meeting structure and implementation, but the GAC supports evolutionary changes and not revolutionary ones.

Proposed Enhancements to ICANN Public Meetings Based on Perceived Community Recommendations

ICANN org Recommendation 1 - Rescheduling Community Sessions Away From Public Meetings:

ICANN org staff recommends that SO/AC work sessions and intersessional meetings be spread throughout the year to make more efficient use of time. As justification for the proposal the staff suggests that such a change would:

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Reduce stress on the schedule and prevent volunteer burnout during the public meetings.

Eliminate session conflicts and allows public meetings to focus on cross-community interaction and policy development work.

Create more flexibility to schedule other sessions throughout the year in preferred time zones.

GAC Reaction 1:

For all their perceived flaws, ICANN public meetings provide the GAC with a unique opportunity to bring Members and Observers together in a discrete high profile focused time period three times a year to conduct targeted discussions, learn issues and topic details and build consensus. ICANN public meetings provide a valuable “cross-roads” opportunity for all communities, including governments, to gather and discuss matters of common interest. Government representatives garner valuable insights by meeting together and by interacting with members of other communities that make up the ICANN ecosystem.

The suggestion to limit or eliminate time blocks available for community sessions and spread them throughout the year fails to appreciate that the GAC already manages a very active intersessional calendar populated by GAC leadership and working group meetings as well as a full calendar of cross community PDP work. The new proposals would dilute the GAC’s focused public meeting efforts without any demonstrable improvements intersessionally.

The proposals would potentially take away the current benefits of focused government attention on ICANN work and cause the GAC to try to squeeze more and less-well-attended intersessional meetings into an already busy calendar. Ironically, the dilution of the collective GAC-wide meeting focus three times a year would actually only “shift” the perceived attendee “burn out” to other times of the year (or the whole year) rather than have community members focusing their energies on a discrete period of time that is then “over” before the cycle begins again.

GAC members are able to manage the annual committee workload chiefly because they can focus and leverage their week-long GAC public meeting experience. Most government representatives manage many other policy, diplomatic and internal government matters as part of their portfolios. The dedicated week-long meeting format gives them the opportunity to manage their collective calendars and join to focus on priority matters that result in a consensus Communiqué document.

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During the virtual environment in 2020, the GAC has actually managed to increase its meeting attendance. Proposals to change an approach that seems to be working appear to be unnecessary and counter-productive.

The GAC hopes to solidify its productivity and attendance gains and maintain an effective working program of 4 to 5 focused days of meetings with time availability for about 15 scheduled sessions. If this does not turn out to be possible, the GAC hopes that it might be able to time-shift its sessions out of the core meeting week, but only by a week or two before or after the core meeting week, all focused in one week.

ICANN org Recommendation 2 - Unified Online Calendar

Development of a unified online calendar for the community to populate with all SO/AC work sessions and intersessional meetings to provide greater opportunity for community participation. This recommendation includes continued technical support for virtual participation of select sessions throughout the year.

GAC Reaction 2:

A unified online calendar showing a variety of community meetings and activities throughout the year would be a valuable information and collaboration tool for all stakeholders in the ICANN community. The GAC supports development of this proposal and would support it by sharing calendar information about public GAC activities to increase opportunities for cross community understanding and collaboration. This proposal is not necessarily dependent on any public meeting proposals.

ICANN org Recommendation 3 - Enhanced Networking Opportunities:

ICANN org recommends that enhanced networking opportunities and tools be offered during ICANN Public Meetings. These enhancements would include non-conflicted networking sessions following each plenary session to allow time for further community discussion on important topics; ability to engage in discussion boards directly from session webpages and ability to request and schedule one-on-one meetings with all publicly registered attendees.

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GAC Reaction 3:

While networking can be a valuable tool for meeting participants, it is not entirely clear that all members of the community define the term the same in a “virtual” context. The GAC welcomes various experiments and pilot efforts to determine additional ways for community members to “network” in a virtual meeting environment. It is not clear that a networking session after EVERY substantive public meeting session is needed. Discussion boards and potential one on one meetings are novel ideas that could be attempted as pilot efforts.

The GAC does not support devoting nearly a third of the meeting block schedule (6 hours out of 18.5 hours) to networking events at the expense of substantive community meeting or drafting time. Perhaps one networking session could be held each day as an initial pilot effort.

ICANN org Recommendation 4 - Trained Staff Facilitators:

ICANN org staff proposes the availability of trained staff facilitators for interactive sessions during the public meetings.

GAC Reaction 4:

GAC public sessions have operated quite smoothly with committee members, GAC leadership and working group chairs moderating various sessions. Generally, cross community sessions have already had professional staff member or community moderators in place to organize and moderate sessions where appropriate. An additional option of making trained facilitators available for certain sessions is potentially a good option to have available for certain sessions.

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Proposals for Structure of ICANN Public Meetings

Draft Block Schedule				DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4
Block	Dur	UTC	CST (UTC-6)	Mon 22 March	Tue 23 March	Wed 24 March	Thu 25 March
1	90	16:00-17:30	10:00-11:30	SO/AC Updates	Cross-Community Policy Work	Cross-Community Policy Work	Cross-Community Policy Work
2	45	17:30-18:15	11:30-12:15	Networking 1	Networking 1	Networking 1	Networking 1
3	90	18:15-19:45	12:15-13:45	Plenary Session	Plenary Session	Plenary Session	Public Forum
4	45	19:45-21:00	13:45-15:00	Networking 2	Networking 2	Networking 2	Networking 2

Note: ICANN70 Community Forum shown above is for illustrative purposes.

ICANN org Recommendation 5:

Each Public Meeting would feature the following sessions:

- a. One session for SO/AC Updates to the ICANN Board - with an opportunity for each SO/AC to brief the ICANN Board and community on current work - 10 minutes per group (9 total groups)

GAC Reaction 5(a):

The joint Board-GAC meeting is an important session that has been held at every in-person and virtual ICANN public meeting and it should be retained in the core meeting schedule. The meeting provides an important communications vehicle for both bodies, is a highly attended session of interest for the whole community and it has been acknowledged as an important event by a number of community accountability and transparency reviews.

The GAC does not believe that the joint meeting should be replaced by an alternative 10-minute update from the committee that can be done by email.

Some GAC members would value a collection of community updates in written form. It has been suggested that the ICANN Policy Outlook Report circulated before each public meeting would be a good vehicle by which to circulate this information.

b. Three sessions for Cross-Community Policy Development Work

GAC Reaction 5(b):

The distinction between cross-community policy development work and plenary sessions is not particularly clear in the proposal document. If “cross-community policy development work” means participation in ongoing GNSO or ccNSO work efforts where the meeting session furthers that work, then the GAC would be supportive as GAC members find cross-community work efforts to be quite productive and informative.

c. Three plenary sessions designed to be interactive and inclusive

GAC Reaction 5(c):

The distinction between cross-community policy development work and plenary sessions is not particularly clear in the proposal document. If “plenary” sessions are defined as the current practice of community members gathering to discuss common topics of interest, then the GAC is supportive of holding up to a maximum of three of this type of sessions per public meeting. At past public meetings GAC members have been aware of criticisms that some plenary sessions do not add value to what is discussed in actual policy-development sessions. Considering how scarce time is in the new proposed block schedule, such sessions should be only held if there is strong support and substantial evidence of cross-community interest. Otherwise those slots should be left open for policy work sessions or internal SO/AC work.

d. A Public Forum for community comment and Board response

GAC Reaction 5(d):

Public Forums are a fundamental part of the ICANN Meeting DNA. It is reasonable to limit the number of public forums to one per week in a virtual environment.

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General GAC reaction to all four Recommendation 5 proposals:

The GAC appreciates the recognition that the virtual environment creates its own unique stressors for meeting attendees. The GAC learned over its experiences with ICANN67, 68 and 69 that fewer targeted sessions devoted to substantive policy topics and adequate Communique drafting time were important for the committee in a virtual environment. A substantial majority (83%) of GAC survey respondents indicated that the ICANN69 schedule presented an appropriate number of sessions for the GAC. This represents an apparent comfort zone of about 13 to 15 GAC public sessions per meeting to allow for substantive policy discussions, adequate GAC Communique drafting time and room for consensus discussions that help the committee plan intersessional activities and strategies. Perhaps only the GAC has the need for this amount of time during the meeting week. A reasonable accommodation might be to extend three of the four days by one or two work block sessions to permit these sessions to be scheduled by individual communities, if necessary.

Meeting Time Zones Proposal

ICANN org Recommendation 6 - Rotating Time Zones:

ICANN org staff noted that for virtual ICANN public meetings, community survey responses indicate a preference to rotate the time zone through ICANN's five geographic regions and therefore future meeting schedules will be planned during general working hours of the assigned region for each meeting.

GAC Reaction 6:

The GAC notes that it is unfortunate that a single time-zone approach is not possible for all community participants around the world. Recognizing this reality, the committee supports staff efforts to identify common times that present reasonable accommodations for as many potential attendees as possible but notes that with a global community reach, participants from some region will always experience the inconvenience for a particular meeting. The rotation system seems to offer the best compromise.

Proposals Regarding Regional Face-to-Face Meetings

Where pandemic conditions allow, ICANN org proposes the following:

ICANN org Recommendation 7 - Regional meetings to be held on specific topics or issues to support regional/sectional community engagement and networking opportunities

GAC Reaction 7:

Prior to the global pandemic, the GAC leveraged regional community and Internet industry meetings for capacity building and networking opportunities. The GAC supports this concept as a reasonable means to begin the return to in-person meetings on a larger scale.

ICANN org Recommendation 8 - Regional hub meetings to be held during Virtual ICANN Meetings

GAC Reaction 8:

Some GAC Members recall past ICANN public meetings where local or regional conditions prevented some community members from traveling to and attending the public meetings in-person. It is recalled that during those meetings, local/regional hub meetings were hosted by various members of the multistakeholder community. The GAC would endorse financial support or other sponsorship (by ICANN or other parties) of these supplemental regional meetings in conjunction with an otherwise in-person public meeting where community members could gather safely and follow all appropriate health protocols being observed in that region.

Other Implementation Proposals for Return of In-Person Meetings

ICANN org also recommends that the strategic changes proposed for ICANN Public Meetings also apply to all phases outlined in an additional Draft Proposal for Phased Return to Face-to-Face Meetings (i.e., proposed Phase 0 through Phase 3) including:

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ICANN org Recommendation 9:

During Phase 2, the schedule will include the sessions outlined in Phase 0 but held in person at the meeting venue.

GAC Reaction 9:

The GAC agrees that whatever proposed block schedule is finally agreed to, it can be used as a productive initial template to begin organizing an in-person event. For attendee planning, this would apply particularly to the appropriate number of calendar days needed for the meeting.

ICANN org Recommendation 10:

Face-to-face SO/AC-specific working sessions and additional cross-community sessions will be added to the schedule as requested.

GAC Reaction 10:

As already indicated in its more general responses to the ICANN org proposals, the GAC expects to ask for additional sessions both at in-person and further virtual meetings to enable it to conduct its necessary business in conjunction with ICANN public meetings.

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