

ccNSO Council comments on the Recommended Strategic Changes for Future ICANN Public Meetings

The ccNSO Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on ICANN's Recommended Strategic Changes for Future meetings. In preparing this response, the ccNSO Council worked closely with the ccNSO Meeting Programme Committee (MPC) and sought direct input from the ccTLD community by email and by conducting two interactive webinar sessions. The summarized results of the consultations are included as Annex A to this note.

We appreciate and support the effort of the ICANN Board to seek community input to the strategy of progressively returning from fully virtual meetings to face-to-face meetings. We also strongly support the effort to make virtual meetings more effective. However, we also have strong reservations about applying this strategy prematurely to ICANN70.

As a result of our internal discussion and consultations, we urge ICANN to separate the short-term goal of organizing ICANN70 from the longer-term strategic considerations and goals. For the short term, we urge ICANN to set the block schedule and other parameters for the ICANN70 meeting as soon as possible. We strongly advise to use and start the block schedule based on the ICANN68 (KL meeting) meeting format. We recognize that ICANN68 was a Policy Forum and ICANN70 will be a Community Forum; however, in our view, the fact that both will (most likely) be 100% virtual is more important. We also urge the community to restrain themselves and limit the number of sessions they intend to organize, and to prepare these sessions properly to enhance the experience of the audience.

For the longer-term goals, we suggest to first look at the potential consequences and impact of the proposed meeting enhancements and use the time to undertake a more detailed and community focused impact analysis, before taking a decision on future meetings and future meeting strategy.

In this feedback note we will focus first on our major reservations with respect to the short term, immediate impact on ICANN70 and then focus on the longer-term aspects.

Short-Term Implications

If we interpret the community consultation document correctly, the recommendations in the document will be launched for implementation for the ICANN70 Community Forum in March 2021, subject to Board approval. As a result of this approach, we note that the ccNSO preparations for ICANN70 are unnecessarily frustrated and strained.

- To serve the ccNSO and broader community, the ccNSO meeting program and related sessions are published well before (at a minimum two months) the meeting, whether this is an in-person or virtual meeting during which the ccNSO is organizing sessions. The reason is to allow people to schedule their attendance in time, without too much interference into their day jobs. It has been our experience that this is even more important when participating remotely. We realize that for ICANN70 it might not be not possible; however, ICANN68 and 69 have proven that timely availability of schedules and meeting agendas is feasible.

- It is the experience of the ccNSO that organizing virtual meetings requires a lot more preparation time and effort. Several preparatory meetings are needed on top of the usual work of identifying topics, defining the goal and objective of the sessions including, but not limited to, identifying the intended audience, finding presenters, moderators, etc. However, specifically scheduling ccTLD (related) sessions only makes sense if the high-level block-schedule and related parameters are known in advance.
- Related, the MPC started its preparations for ICANN70 on Friday 23 October 2020, as usual one day after closure of the previous meeting to do a review of the previous meeting. Since then, the MPC has held several calls to prepare for ICANN70, but as the block-schedule of ICANN70 and other logistical parameters are up in the air awaiting decisions from the Board and ICANN Org, the effective time to define, organize and prepare the meeting has been reduced from 18 to 8 weeks. Instead of the intended reduction of volunteer fatigue and burnout the short-term impact is quite the opposite.

With respect to the short-term impact of the proposed enhancements we make the following observations:

- ***Continue the three-meeting schedule annually but increase concentrated time for cross-community policy work.***

The impact of this enhancement is unclear. The ccNSO policy work is open to all who want to participate or observe the proceedings. We appreciate that in the ICANN environment this may be more in the context of GNSO originating policy efforts, but we want to warn against imposing attendance of sessions on attendees with exclusion of ability to attend a session which is more of interest to them. As an alternative, we propose that sessions targeted at the same audience should not be scheduled at the same time. For example, Tech Day and a session on Sub-pro could very well be organized in parallel.

- ***Reduce session overlap and conflicts to allow more opportunity for community-wide participation.***

Again, it is the view of the ccNSO that overlap, and conflicts of sessions targeted at the same audience should be avoided. This relates clearly to the next point as well.

- ***Determine goals and overall meeting objectives early in the planning process to facilitate more effective engagement and progress during the meetings.***

The ccNSO fully supports this enhancement and strongly suggests taking the intended audience of the session into consideration as well. As mentioned above, the preparation time for sessions has been reduced substantially due to the decision-making process regarding ICANN70.

- ***Increase time for networking and develop better tools to support networking opportunities during virtual meetings.***

The ccNSO supports increasing network opportunities, however, for both intra- and inter-stakeholder groups and not at the expense of excluding other kinds of sessions.

- ***Increase visual/video/graphic elements and encourage use of video cameras by all participants.***

We support this enhancement as long as it does not make the experience of participants deteriorate, especially those on lower bandwidth Internet connections.

- ***Add trained session facilitators.***

As our experience has shown, the role of facilitators is less critical than due preparation of a session. This is particularly the case if a session is intended to be interactive and having a dialogue between panelists and/or with the audience. As noted before, preparation time more than doubles in a completely virtual and remote environment. Adding trained (staff) facilitators only makes sense if they participate during the preparation.

- ***When virtual, reduce the meeting length (fewer days/fewer hours per day) to prevent volunteer burnout.***

The ccNSO agrees with this enhancement. The vast majority of the people who participated in the consultations in preparation of this note prefer the ICANN68 meeting format. From a ccTLD perspective that meeting was limited in duration and included a limited set of ccTLD relevant sessions.

- ***Rotate the time zone for meetings among ICANN's five geographic regions.***

The ccNSO, being a truly global constituency, concurs with a rotation basis. However, for the short term it will most likely have no impact. We also wonder whether reducing the number of time zones to 3 (i.e., NA/LAC, AF/EU, AP) and rotate accordingly in the virtual environment might be equitable.

- ***One session for SO/AC updates to the Board.***

The way we understand this proposal, it is intended to replace the bilateral meeting between the Board and a community group, such as the ccNSO. We note that such an approach has already been tested before (at the Hyderabad meeting) and not continued. We believe that the same reasons not to continue such a session are still valid. If such a session were to be pursued, it may be worth to pre-record the updates.

Long-Term Implications

With respect to the proposed enhancement of ICANN public meetings, the ccNSO strongly supports the development and use of a unified calendar. Such a tool adds to transparency and understanding of all the work the SOs and ACs undertake. In our view, such an instrument adds value, independently of the meeting strategy. However, we want to caution against the potential workload of maintaining such a calendar.

With respect to the proposal to spread SO/AC work sessions throughout the year, we would like to understand the implications and impact before any further steps are taken. Currently, ccNSO WGs do meet and conduct their business throughout the year. The ccNSO also

undertakes other activities throughout the year such as conducting topical meetings and webinars (for example, the very recent consultation on the meeting strategy paper). However, if the implication is that no ccTLD related meetings are organized during ICANN meetings, the ccNSO strongly opposes such an approach. Feedback we have heard from ccTLD managers is that ccTLD related sessions on the schedule are the reason for them to attend an ICANN meeting (either in person or remotely). It offers them the opportunity to meet and contact their peers from other regions. In addition, it was noted that up and until the proposed calendar is functional, the proposal would increase, rather than decrease, conflicts.

Related, and as also noted during the consultation, ICANN is not the only environment where the duration of meetings is extended, and the number of sessions is prohibitively high to attend. Already, ccTLD related participants find that ICANN and other meetings are back-to-back and therefore they find themselves in a position that they cannot attend all relevant sessions at ICANN and other meetings, as this would be at the detriment of their primary responsibilities. We believe that with spreading the number of meetings and sessions this unwanted side-effect will increase, and as a result, at least for some ccTLD managers, ICANN and ccNSO meetings would become non-attendable.

With respect to the suggestion for Regional face-to face meetings, the ccNSO community would first like to understand what is intended. Will these regional meetings be held in conjunction with an ICANN meeting? Are they foreseen to take place at another time? We note that ccTLDs have regional meetings organized by the ccTLD Regional Organisations (AFTLD, APTLD, CENTR, and LACTLD), Those meetings are attended by the majority of the ccNSO membership and ICANN observers for that matter. It is unclear to us how ICANN's regional meetings would add value. In addition, we are of the opinion that the unwarranted side-effect with respect to spreading the meeting will be reinforced by ICANN organizing regional meetings.

On behalf of the ccNSO Council,

Katrina Sasaki
Chair

Annex A: Consultation Results

The MPC Chair hosted two consultation sessions via Zoom, aimed at collecting the ccTLD community's feedback regarding [ICANN org's recommended strategic changes for future ICANN Public Meetings](#) and its impact on the ccNSO schedule. During the consultation sessions, feedback was sought on both the short-term impact on the ccNSO (ICANN70), and the long-term impact (post-ICANN70 meetings).

There were two options to participate, on 15 and 16 December 2020 respectively. A recording has been made available [here](#).

The topic has also been discussed by the ccNSO Meeting Programme Committee (MPC) during its 10 December meeting, and by the ccNSO Council during its 17 December meeting. Deadline for comments by the ccTLD Community is 17 December 2020. The ccNSO will submit its consolidated feedback to ICANN org on 18 December

Highlights of the input received via the ccTLD community consultation webinars:

- Timely planning, with a clear goal setting of the sessions is a must.
- The block schedule should become available early in the planning process. 2 months ahead of the meeting is an absolute minimum.
- Preference for a short ICANN public meeting (1 week, similar to ICANN68), with a limited number of sessions, including ccNSO sessions
- The ccNSO sessions should be included on the ICANN public schedule, to allow for cross-community interaction, to showcase the work of the ccNSO, to recognize its relevance, and to maintain the value of ICANN and its Public Meetings for ccTLDs.
- A meaningful interaction by the ccNSO with the full ICANN Board is important. The proposed SO/AC update session, with limited time for each SO/AC, could easily be converted into a written update.
- Out of all the proposed enhancements proposed by ICANN org - (1) SO/AC work sessions and intersessional meetings spread throughout the year; (2) Unified online calendar with all SO/AC work sessions and intersessional meetings; (3) Enhanced networking opportunities and tools; (4) Trained staff facilitators for interactive sessions during the public meetings; (5) Revised proposed meeting structure; (6) Rotate meetings across 5 time zones; (7) Regional Meetings – the unified calendar was welcomed the most. The ccTLDs mentioned that SO/AC work is happening already in between ICANN meetings, including ccNSO policy work. The unified calendar would increase the transparency around the work done by the various SO/ACs. This enhancement is not directly related to the public meeting strategy.
- Effectively, there are 3 major time zone blocks: NA & LAC | AF & EU | AP. A rotation among these blocks at a minimum seems fair. Rotation among the 5 geographic zones is accepted. One should strive to equally inconvenience all and at the same to find time slots that cause least pain for all. When scheduling sessions, even within a limited block schedule, try to spread them, to allow for participation from across the globe. (e.g., not all plenary sessions starting at the same time, throughout the ICANN week(s))

- It is unclear what the involvement of trained staff facilitators would mean for the role of volunteers from the ccNSO.
- Online networking cannot replace face-to-face networking. Limited enthusiasm from the ccTLD community regarding the proposed enhancements and the networking slots on the proposed ICANN block schedule