

ICANN BOARD PAPER NO. 2026.03.26.1a

TITLE: ICANN additional funding for the Applicant Support Program within the New gTLD Program: 2026 Round

PROPOSED ACTION: For Board Consideration and Approval

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Board is being asked to take action allocating up to an additional US\$4.9 million from the 2012 New gTLD Program Auction Proceeds for funding support of the Applicant Support Program (ASP) within the New gTLD Program: 2026 Round. This funding request is in addition to the [Board's prior approval](#) of the [ASP Funding Plan](#) budgeted using auction proceeds to support up to 45 gTLD applicants. Seventy-six applicants applied to the ASP and as of 19 March 2026, 75 applicants could qualify for support. Using auction proceeds to fund the incremental direct costs for supporting more than the initial 45 ASP applicants avoids the need to change the new gTLD evaluation fee (for cost-recovery purposes) or to use contingency funding. Direct costs for supported gTLD applicants are the costs of evaluating their gTLD applications, providing capacity development, and providing discounts on base Registry Agreement fees, post-delegation.

BOARD FINANCE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Board Finance Committee (BFC) recommends that the ICANN Board approves up to an additional US\$4.9 million of the 2012 New gTLD Program Auction Proceeds be used to fund the direct costs of the expanded scope of support and gTLD evaluation fee discount for the Applicant Support Program.

PROPOSED RESOLUTION:

Resolution Text Superseded

Resolution Text Superseded

PROPOSED RATIONALE

Why is the Board addressing the issue?

The ICANN Board is authorizing the commitment of up to an additional US\$4.9 million dollars from the auction proceeds from the 2012 of the New gTLD Program to be used to fund the direct costs for ASP supported gTLD applicants participating in the 2026 Round and ensure available funds to support up to 75 qualified applicants. This funding contributes to the capacity development efforts, the reduced base Registry Agreement fees, and the gTLD evaluation fee discounts for up to 75 qualified supported gTLD applicants.

The ASP provides financial and non-financial support to gTLD applicants that qualify for support based on predefined eligibility criteria. The (up to) an additional US\$4.9 million would serve to ensure funds are available to support all qualified ASP applicants as an ICANN contribution.

The ASP was developed as part of ICANN's New Generic Top-Level Domain (gTLD) Program and is intended to provide financial and non-financial support for applicants that work in the public interest and demonstrate financial need. The Final Report on the new gTLD Subsequent Procedures Policy Development Process re-confirmed that the next iteration of the ASP should

continue “to serve the global public interest by ensuring worldwide accessibility to, and competition within, the new gTLD Program” (p.77).

The (up to) US\$4.9 million contribution would be used to fund the direct costs of support to ASP applicants, including:

- US\$1.9 million of for the expanded scope of support (ASP capacity development program and base registry agreement fee reduction)
- US\$0.7 million for incremental staff support and shared services
- US\$2.3 million of the ASP Subsidy—the costs of providing the 75-85% fee reduction in evaluating supported applicants’ gTLD applications.

The direct costs of support reflect a maximum of 75 supported gTLD applicants receiving discounts across the applicant - Registry Operator lifecycle: from the gTLD evaluation fees to post-delegation base Registry Agreement fees. Only funds required to support applicants who qualify in excess of the originally budgeted amount of 45 applicants will be utilized.

Qualified ASP applicants will have access to a portfolio of financial and non-financial support that includes:

- Access to pro bono (volunteer) professional service providers and mentors that offer their services to supported applicants.
- An ASP capacity development program: Resources and information for potential applicants to better understand the New gTLD Program, what it means to operate a gTLD, and how to participate in ICANN’s multistakeholder community.
- Access to an Applicant Counselor
- A reduction of 75-85% in New gTLD Program evaluation fees for qualified supported applicants.
- A “bid credit” – an amount applied to supported applicants’ bids in the case that they participate in contention resolution procedures.
- Reduced or waived base Registry Operator fees, should the supported applicant prevail in the New gTLD Program evaluation and proceed to contracting and delegation.

What is the proposal being considered?

The Board is taking action to allocate up to an additional US\$4.9 million from the auction proceeds from the 2012 Round of the New gTLD Program to fund the direct costs for supported gTLD applicants participating in the 2026 Round and ensure available funds to support up to 75 applicants that qualify.

The proposed action is in furtherance of Board resolutions 2023.03.16.04 - 2023.03.16.08 to implement an Applicant Support Program that is aligned with the community policy recommendations in the New gTLD Subsequent Procedures Final Report and 2024.09.07.13 to approve the allocation of up to US\$5 million from the 2012 Round of the New gTLD Program Auction Proceeds to be used to fund the direct costs of support to ASP applicants in the New gTLD Program: 2026 Round.

Which stakeholders or others were consulted?

The community was extensively involved in the development of the Applicant Support Program via the Generic Names Supporting Organization policy development process and the resulting [SubPro Final Report](#). Throughout the implementation phase of the Applicant Support Program, ICANN has provided regular updates to the ICANN Board and community on the progress of implementation.

Stakeholder updates have been posted on the [ASP webpage](#) and the engagement sessions conducted with the Implementation Review Team have provided opportunities for updates to be delivered, and community input to be collected, throughout the program implementation. The key updates on the Applicant Support Program have been shared with all stakeholders during various [ICANN sessions and webinars](#) and in [meetings with the Implementation Review Team](#).

What significant materials did the Board review?

In 2024, the Board Chair [sought community input](#) on the potential use of auction proceeds for the Applicant Support Program. Community feedback from [ALAC](#), [Public Interest Registry \(PIR\)](#), [Business Constituency](#) (BC), and the [GNSO Council](#) indicates supported for using up to

US\$5 million from auction proceeds to fund up to half of the direct costs for supported gTLD applicants participating in the 2026 Round.

The Board considered additional community input, such as the [Board-GAC Bylaws Consultation on ICANN80 GAC Advice](#) and the [ALAC-GAC Joint Letter regarding the Applicant Support Program](#).

On 3 March 2026 the Board [sought community input](#) on the potential use of up to an additional \$4.9 million from auction proceeds to ensure available funds to support up to 75 applicants that qualify for support in the Applicant Support Program. Community feedback ([GAC ICANN85 Communique](#); ALAC Correspondence [\[LINK\]](#)) was supportive of allocating additional funding using auction proceeds to expand the number of applicants supported through the Applicant Support Program.

Are there positive or negative community impacts?

There are no direct positive or negative community impacts as a result of this Board resolution. Community stakeholder groups may have diverse views on the use of auction proceeds for the Applicant Support Program, some positive, some negative. The decision to allocate up to an additional US\$4.9 million from auction proceeds from the 2012 Round of the New gTLD Program would eliminate the need to use funds from the new gTLD application fees to support the ASP and ensure available funds to support up to 75 applicants that qualify.

Are there fiscal impacts or ramifications on ICANN (strategic plan, operating plan, budget), the community, and/or the public?

This is a commitment to distribute a portion of the auction proceeds from the 2012 Round of the New gTLD Program, which have been segregated for use with the ICANN community's direction. The allocation of up to an additional US\$4.9 million to the Applicant Support Program will help to further the accessibility of and competition for new gTLDs. In addition, utilizing the auction proceeds from the 2012 New gTLD Program to subsidize the ASP lessens the impact of

cost-recovery fees to the fully paying new gTLD applicants.

The use of up to US\$4.9 million for the ASP does not hinder or deter from ICANN org's mission and current work on the Grant Program and expected grant distributions. The distribution of this funding is an exceptional opportunity to make a difference in the Internet ecosystem, in furtherance of ICANN's mission.

Are there any security, stability or resiliency issues relating to the DNS?

This action does not have a direct impact on the security, stability, or resiliency of the Internet's DNS. It is possible that some supported gTLD applicants that become Registry Operators may have an impact on the security, stability, and resiliency of the Internet's DNS.

Is this decision in the public interest and within ICANN's mission?

This decision supports ICANN's mission and is in the public interest as it is implementing policies to create an Applicant Support Program for the New gTLD Program developed through a bottom-up consensus-based multistakeholder process. The Applicant Support Program furthers the public interest by making progress towards fostering diversity, encouraging competition, and enhancing the utility of the DNS.”

Is this either a defined policy process within ICANN's Supporting Organizations or ICANN's Organizational Administrative Function decision requiring public comment or not requiring public comment?

There is no defined policy process guiding this specific Board action.

Signature Block:

Submitted by: Xavier Calvez

Position: Senior Vice President, Planning and Chief Financial Officer

Date Noted: 20 March 2026

Email: xavier.calvez@icann.org