

15 August 2025

Tripti Sinha
Chair, ICANN Board of Directors

Re: Urgent Review of Next Round Applicant Support Program

Dear Tripti,

We write to formally request an expedited review of the Applicant Support Program (ASP) in light of its critical role in ensuring equitable participation in the Next Round of New gTLDs. Following extensive bilateral discussions between the GAC and ALAC since ICANN83, we are deeply concerned about the program's current trajectory, particularly given the limited time remaining in the application window and the disproportionately low representation from underserved regions.

We have carefully reviewed and analyzed many different inputs from within our constituencies, and came up with three main topics that we should address:

I. Context for Urgency

- On the one hand, there is a timeline pressure: with just slightly over three months remaining in the 12-month ASP application window, ICANN's data (as of 10 July 2025) shows fewer than 20 – in fact, nil - qualified applications, far below the projected 40–45 target.
- On the other hand, we also identified a geographic imbalance from ICANN's data (as of 10 July 2025): despite seven months of outreach, potential applications from North America (33%) vastly outnumber those from the LAC region (3%), raising questions about the inclusivity of the program.
- Finally, we see a “risk of missed opportunity” situation: delaying the mid-term review until 20 completed applications are received risks leaving insufficient time for corrective action, jeopardizing the ASP's foundational goal of broadening participation.

II. Proposed Review Framework

A. Communications & Outreach Efficacy

- As regarding the regional disparity analysis, there are some questions:
 - Why has outreach in LAC, Africa, and APAC underperformed relative to North America?
 - Are localized strategies (e.g., language-specific materials, regional ambassadors) being prioritized?

- In terms of potential course corrections:
 - Will ICANN reallocate resources to mitigate the said geographic imbalance before the 19 November 2025 deadline?
 - What measurable targets (e.g., 25% applications from LAC/Africa/APAC) are being set for the final three months?

B. Application Process Challenges & Bottlenecks

- Stage 1: “Started” to “Organization Submitted”:
 - Delays: are applicants struggling with eligibility criteria interpretation, language barriers (non-English materials), or documentation complexity (e.g., corporate document requirements, financial disclosures)?
 - Support Interventions: how many applicants have utilized ICANN’s guidance services? What success rates have been observed post-intervention? What barriers have been identified? Are these clustered around a set of factors?
- Stage 2: “Organization Submitted” to Final Application:
 - Abandonment Trends: are applicants withdrawing due to mismatched expectations (e.g., underestimating post-approval costs) or administrative burdens?
 - Feedback Loop: has ICANN incorporated applicant feedback into process simplifications (e.g., streamlined templates, multilingual helplines, helpfulness of ICANN staff, ASP pro bono service providers and mentors)?

C. Policy Implementation & Metrics

- SubPro Compliance:
 - Status of Recommendation 17.3 (outreach for applicants) and Implementation Guidance 17.8/17.9 (metrics on equitable access).
 - How are these policies being operationalized in outreach and applicant evaluation?
- GGP Metrics:
 - Is ICANN tracking qualitative indicators (e.g., applicant satisfaction, perceived accessibility) alongside quantitative targets to measure “success”?
 - What thresholds would trigger contingency plans (e.g., extending the application window, increasing funding)?

III. Collaborative Next Steps

- We kindly suggest an Immediate Review Timeline:
 - Conduct a review by 22 August 2025, with findings shared with the IRT and community by 1 September 2025.
 - Include a stakeholder consultation phase (that should be quick and straightforward) to incorporate stakeholder feedback.
- In terms of transparency measures:

- We suggest publishing anonymized data on application abandonment reasons and regional outreach expenditures.
- Host a joint GAC-ALAC-Board webinar to discuss review outcomes.

Based on the rationale explained above, we really think that the ASP is not merely a procedural requirement but a cornerstone of the Next Round's credibility. At minimum, failure to address its structural challenges risks perpetuating the dominance of well-resourced entities, undermining ICANN's multistakeholder principles. We kindly request the Board to treat this matter with the urgency it demands and would greatly welcome your prompt confirmation of next steps.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Nicolas G. Caballero".

Nicolas G. Caballero
Chair, Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jonathan Zuck".

Jonathan Zuck
Chair, At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC)