ICANN | RrSG
Registrar Stakeholder Group

RrSG Input: [Additional Funds for 2026 Round Applicant Support Program]

17 April 2026

The Registrar Stakeholder Group ("RrSG") appreciates the opportunity to provide input to the ICANN Board on the topic of [Additional Funds for 2026 Round Applicant Support Program.]

The Registrar Stakeholder Group is the representative body of ICANN-accredited domain name registrars. Operating with numerous subgroups focused on specific topics of interest, the RrSG contributes to policy development, issue advocacy, and negotiations with ICANN. We work to advance the interests of registrars and our customers by promoting data-driven policy outcomes. Learn more about the RrSG on our website [rrsg.org].

Having reviewed the [relevant blog post], the RrSG understands that the initial budget for discounting gTLD evaluation fees was $5 million USD and the ICANN Board resolved in March 2026 to nearly double this amount by allocating an additional $4.9 million USD. The Board is now considering further increasing the gTLD evaluation fee discount and associated budget by a total of an additional $3.2 million USD.

The RrSG is concerned with both the substance of this decision and the process of requesting Community input for this decision.

Significant funds allocated for uncertain return

Experience from the 2012 round of new gTLD applications suggests that **reducing evaluation fees alone does not ensure the long-term sustainability of new gTLDs**. Of the four applicants referenced in the [April 2026 blog post] only one TLD remains in operation today, indicating that initial financial support at the application stage is not sufficient to ensure lasting success.

If similar trends continue, a significant portion of the current round's supported applications may not achieve long-term viability. In this context, **allocating over $13 million USD primarily toward application fee discounts will have a limited impact on strengthening the resilience and stability of the DNS**.

An effective approach to supporting underrepresented regions would also involve focusing on the full lifecycle of a TLD, including ongoing operational and market support, rather than concentrating resources primarily at the application stage.

With this context in mind, **the RrSG reiterates its call for the ICANN Board and ICANN Org to provide financial support to registrars in underrepresented regions.** Although registries can receive application discounts, registrars cannot similarly receive a reduction of the financial requirement, despite the fact that ICANN Staff has confirmed it is entirely arbitrary. This financial requirement is not in any way related to or indicative of the registrar's future ability to operate as a gTLD registrar. The requirement that registrars have access to working capital of at least $70,000 is cost-prohibitive in many regions, as detailed during both the CPH session with the ICANN Board and an RrSG/ALAC session at ICANN84. The RrSG has provided evidence of existing ccTLD registrars that could not become ICANN-accredited because they lacked access to such levels of capital. **Although the ICANN Board and ICANN Org indicated support for registrars in underrepresented regions, to date, there has been no movement towards reducing this financial burden for registrars in those regions; this is a gap that should be addressed, and the Applicant Support Program can provide a model or inspiration for how to improve funding for underrepresented groups including registrars.**

Process for Community input is lacking

The RrSG is also concerned about the process for requesting Community input on allocating these significant sums of money to the Applicant Support Program.

The original $5 million USD was increased by a further $4.9 million USD just after ICANN85, after requesting community input via a blog post, where the topic could be easily missed and with an unclear input path. The timing was also not conducive to proper consideration, with the publication and input scheduled to coincide with ICANN85. Essentially doubling the ASP budget was not raised in Community and Board interactions, where it could have been flagged for review; any lack of input should therefore not be taken as support.

Moving forward, **significant budget adjustments should go through a clear and accessible input process; we strongly recommend the use of the ICANN Public Comment process as it is the standard.**

Calculation questions

The RrSG is somewhat confused by the numbers provided. The blog post specifies that a 10% increase to the discount (from 75% to 85%) on the gTLD evaluation fees would increase the budget by $3.2 million USD. If 75% support costs $9.9 million USD, then 100% support would be $13.2 million USD, so 10% of that total would be $1.32 million USD (not $3.2 million USD).

Moving forward, **significant budget adjustments should be accompanied by clear information allowing the Community to understand how the numbers are arrived at.**

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Next steps

The RrSG understands that the decision to almost double the existing budget from $5 million USD to $9.9 million USD has already been made and, as such, these funds *will* be used to provide the 75% evaluation fee discount to all 75 applicants.

The RrSG does not support increasing the applicant support discount from 75% to 85%; there is no indication the allocation of an additional $3.2 million USD would result in a more secure, stable, and resilient DNS or even in a significant increase in successful new gTLD applicants.

Thank you,

Owen Smigelski
Registrar Stakeholder Group Chair