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# Public Comment Summary Report

## ICANN FY26-30 Operating & Financial Plan, ICANN/IANA FY26 Op Plans & Budgets

**Open for Submissions Date:**

Tuesday, 17 December 2024

**Closed for Submissions Date:**

Friday, 14 February 2025

**Summary Report Due Date:**

Wednesday, 02 April 2025

**Category:** Operations

**Requester:** ICANN org

**ICANN org Contact(s):** [planning@icann.org](mailto:planning@icann.org)

**Open Proceeding Link:** <https://www.icann.org/en/public-comment/proceeding/icann-fy2630-operating-financial-plan-icanniana-fy26-op-plans-budgets-17-12-2024>

**Outcome:**

ICANN received comments from six community groups and one individual about the: (i) Draft ICANN FY26 Budget; (ii) Draft ICANN FY26–30 Operating and Financial Plan and Draft ICANN FY26 Operating Plan; and (iii) Draft IANA FY26 Operating Plan and Budget. These contributions reflect the community’s invaluable insight and engagement with the draft plans.

The comments were reviewed and have been categorized into seven themes: Plan Introduction and Assumptions, Plan Structure, Strategic Initiatives, Functional Activities, Financial Management, FY26 IANA Operating Plan and Budget, and Other. The Public Comment Summary Report includes ICANN’s response to the submissions.

ICANN appreciates the community’s participation in the Public Comment proceeding as input is key to the development of the plans, in keeping with ICANN’s multistakeholder model. Where appropriate, suggested changes will be considered, and the revised draft plans will be presented to the ICANN Board for consideration in May 2025.

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## Section 1: What We Received Input On

ICANN org posted the following documents for Public Comment: (i) the Draft ICANN FY26–30 Operating and Financial Plan and Draft ICANN FY26 Operating Plan; (ii) the Draft ICANN FY26 Budget; and (iii) the Draft IANA FY26 Operating Plan and Budget.

The Draft ICANN FY26–30 Operating and Financial Plan and Draft ICANN FY26 Operating Plan, along with the Draft ICANN FY26 Budget, define how ICANN will implement the ICANN Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2026–2030, which will be presented to the ICANN Board for consideration in May 2025.

Specifically, these plans detail the feasibility, cost, and timing of activities and milestones identified to achieve the Strategic Plan’s objectives and goals. They also provide an overarching view of the activities ICANN is undertaking or will undertake, in support of the Strategic Plan, to carry out its mission in the public interest.

The IANA Operating Plan and Budget includes the work conducted by the Public Technical Identifiers (PTI) pursuant to a contract it has with ICANN (as reflected in the PTI Operating Plan and Budget), plus the plans for and costs incurred directly by ICANN for overseeing and enabling performance of the IANA functions. Once the PTI Operating Plan and Budget is adopted by the PTI Board, it is then incorporated into the broader IANA Operating Plan and Budget, which is considered by the ICANN Board to support the operations of the IANA functions.

## Section 2: Submissions

### Organizations and Groups:

| Name                                         | Submitted by                                            | Initials   |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| At-Large Advisory Committee                  | ICANN Policy Staff in support of the At-Large Community | ALAC       |
| Business Constituency                        | N/A                                                     | BC         |
| Governmental Advisory Committee              | Robert Hoggarth                                         | GAC        |
| Registrars Stakeholder Group                 | Sarah Wyld                                              | RrSG       |
| Registries Stakeholder Group                 | N/A                                                     | RySG       |
| ccNSO Strategic Operating Planning Committee | Irina Danelia                                           | ccNSO SOPC |

### Individuals:

| Name             | Affiliation (if provided) | Initials |
|------------------|---------------------------|----------|
| João Rocha Gomes | N/A                       | JG       |

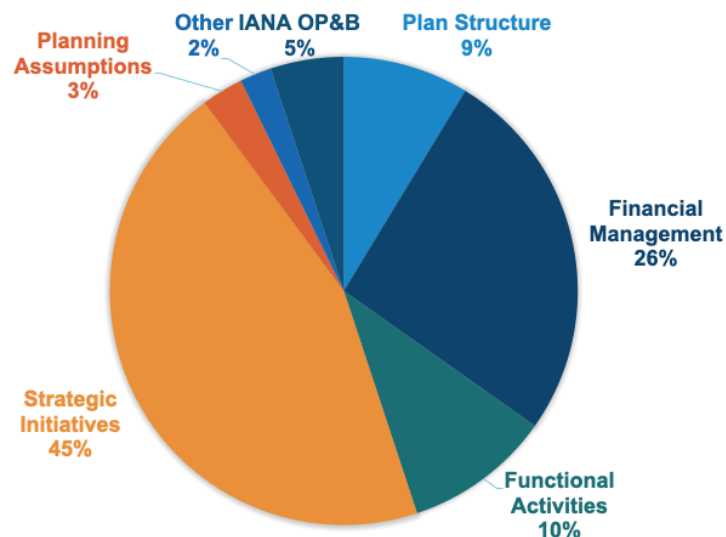
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## Section 3: Summary of Submissions

ICANN received 138 comments from six community groups and one individual about the: (i) Draft ICANN FY26 Budget; (ii) Draft ICANN FY26–30 Operating and Financial Plan and Draft ICANN FY26 Operating Plan; and (iii) the Draft IANA FY26 Operating Plan and Budget.

This Public Comment Summary Report addresses all three of these plans, and categorizes the comments into seven groups: (1) Plan Introduction and Assumptions; (2) Plan Structure; (3) Functional Activities Plans; (4) Strategic Initiatives Plans; (5) Financial Management; (6) IANA Operating Plan and Budget; and (7) Other. These categories were chosen to enhance readability and ensure that comments are clearly linked to the relevant sections of the plans.

This report includes ICANN’s response to the submissions. All received comments will be taken into consideration, and where appropriate and feasible, incorporated into a Revised Draft ICANN FY26–30 Operating and Financial Plan, a Revised Draft ICANN FY26 Operating Plan, a Revised Draft ICANN FY26 Budget, and a Revised Draft IANA FY26 Operating Plan and Budget, prior to Board consideration. All comments received by the submission date are also available on the Public Comment page.



## Section 4: Analysis of Submissions

### 4.1 Plan Introduction and Assumptions

The Draft ICANN FY26–30 Operating and Financial Plan includes an introduction with the FY26–30 Planning Assumptions, which outline the assumptions guiding ICANN’s operations for both the Five-Year and Annual Operating Plans.

The FY26–30 Financial Plan also includes a contribution to support ICANN’s efforts to preserve and enhance the security, stability, and resiliency of the Domain Name System (DNS). This

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includes activities related to Root Server System (RSS) governance, mitigation of DNS abuse, promotion and facilitation of DNS Security Extensions deployment, mitigation of name collisions, and DNS operations research. The BC encouraged ICANN to move beyond general commitments and establish clear, measurable actions in FY26 to strengthen DNS security and maintain trust in the ecosystem. ICANN appreciates the comment and notes that these various activities are represented in Strategic Initiatives and Functional Activities. Each of these initiatives and activities have measurable outcomes and progress will be shared annually.

Four comments were received on the Planning Assumptions. The ALAC expressed support of the Travel, Meetings, and Engagement planning assumption, as well the Planning Prioritization Process. As an active participant in the Planning Prioritization Process Framework, the ALAC emphasizes that this process is critical to the planning of ICANN's work. ICANN appreciates the ALAC's engagement and support in this effort.

The ccNSO SOPC welcomed the planned activities addressing country code top-level domains (ccTLDs) in the Draft ICANN FY26–30 Operating and Financial Plan, but noted that the introduction of a review mechanism for decisions pertaining to the delegation, transfer, revocation, and retirement of ccTLDs (ccNSO Policy Development Process 3) and the de-selection of Internationalized Domain Name (IDN) ccTLDs (ccNSO Policy Development Process 4) were not reflected in the five-year plan. As outlined in the Planning for Board-Approved Activities assumption, ICANN supports community-led activities resulting in recommendations from reviews, cross-community working groups, policy development processes, and other community-based groups. Expected implementation work, including work related to ccNSO policies, is incorporated into the plans once recommendations receive Board approval and are prioritized through the community-led Planning Prioritization Process. Once prioritized, activities are scheduled based on available funding and resources.

## 4.2 Plan Structure

Twelve comments were received regarding the general structure of the plans, particularly the length and level of detail, as well as suggestions for future enhancements to this area.

ICANN appreciates the support for improvements in the FY26 draft plans. Enhancing the structure of these plans has been an ongoing effort for ICANN. The GAC noted continued improvements in format and detail over the past few years and that priorities recognizing government participation and contributions were well reflected in the planning and budgeting documents. The ALAC expressed strong support for the new style and format of the Draft ICANN FY26–30 Operating and Financial Plan, highlighting its simplicity, clarity, and effective visuals and the delineation of the Functional Activities into the five service groups. The ccNSO SOPC suggested implementing a simple serialization and linkage process for the multiple documents.

The Highlights document included in the proceeding is intended to help community members identify key elements across the various documents. Currently, ICANN's Bylaws require the production of a five-year operating plan for ICANN, a one-year operating plan and budget for ICANN, and a one-year operating plan and budget for IANA. This results in a substantial number of documents for review. To improve clarity and navigation in future planning cycles, ICANN will consider revisiting the opportunity to better link and serialize the documents.

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In regards to the Draft ICANN FY26–30 Operating and Financial Plan and Draft ICANN FY26 Operating Plan specifically, both the ALAC and GAC showed support for the documentation of the Strategic Initiatives and Functional Activities. The ccNSO SOPC noted the removal of the one-year Functional Activity Resource Tables from the Functional Activity sections, which is now consolidated in the [FY26 Expense by Service Group Worksheet](#). It noted the importance of ensuring all stakeholders are aware of the relocation.

ICANN appreciates this observation and acknowledges the concern. This change was implemented to aid in the reduction of page count and duplication of information in the draft FY26 plans. Communication of this change can be found on Page 163 of the Draft ICANN FY26–30 Operating and Financial Plan & Draft ICANN FY26 Operating Plan and Budget, and it was also introduced in the accompanying [Community Webinar](#). ICANN will consider how it can more explicitly indicate this change, if feasible, for the proposed-for-adoption plan documents and future plan documents.

The ALAC appreciated the budget breakdown by activity (Activity-Based Reporting) and the clickable Table of Contents for easier navigation in the Draft ICANN FY26 Budget. The ccNSO SOPC requested an alternative view or chart to Activity-Based Reporting, referring to a "traditional view" but without specifying details. ICANN appreciates this comment and notes that while some figures have been adjusted for readability, the budget continues to provide the same types of information as in previous years (see Section 4.1 FY26 Budget Versus FY25 Adopted Budget).

Additionally, the ccNSO SOPC provided feedback on progress measurement in the Draft ICANN FY26–30 Operating and Financial Plan and the Draft ICANN FY26 Operating Plan. While acknowledging improvements in key performance indicators (KPIs), the ccNSO SOPC expressed ongoing concerns and a desire for further engagement with ICANN to refine these metrics. It noted that some KPIs lacked specificity and that there was minimal evolution in certain recurring activities. The ccNSO SOPC recommended refining KPIs to emphasize actionable and measurable outcomes. ICANN appreciates the feedback, noting that progress indicators for the Strategic Initiatives are included in the [ICANN FY26–30 Strategic Plan](#).

Additionally, a progress measurement and reporting framework is underway. To confirm measurement approaches for Functional Activities – such as contractual compliance complaint processing – will largely remain consistent on an annual basis. ICANN looks forward to continued engagement with the members of the ccNSO SOPC and other community members on this topic.

## 4.3 Strategic Initiatives

ICANN received 62 comments specific to the Strategic Initiatives in the Draft ICANN FY26–30 Operating and Financial Plan and the Draft ICANN FY26 Operating Plan. Strategic Initiatives are the programs and projects designed to support the achievement of the 28 Strategies outlined in the ICANN FY26–30 Strategic Plan. The community was invited to share feedback on the clarity of the term "Strategic Initiatives," and the name and approach appeared to receive support.

The BC appreciated that the presented Strategic Initiatives addressed many areas that it felt were vital to ICANN's continued success. ICANN appreciates this comment.

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Several comments expressed support for the Strategic Initiatives including WSIS+20 Review Project and Outreach Network; Evaluating ICANN's Funding Structure; Identifying Opportunities to Enhance the Stable and Secure Operations of Unique Identifiers; KINDNS, Domain Metrica, and Identifier Technologies Health Indicators; Implementations of the Recommendations of the RSS Governance Working Group; and Support Coordinated Plans to Address DNS Root Server System Attacks. ICANN acknowledges and appreciates these comments.

There were additional subcategories that evolved from the Strategic Initiative comments that are grouped below.

### 4.3.1 Prioritization and Timing of Strategic Initiatives

The ccNSO SOPC sought clarity between the initiatives set in the FY25–29 Operating and Financial Plan and the ones in the FY26–30 Operating and Financial Plan. They also asked if there is a framework for how these priorities were determined. To clarify, ICANN confirms that while the ICANN FY26–30 Strategic Plan builds on the ICANN FY21–25 Strategic Plan, it introduces new goals and strategies to achieve ICANN's vision for 2030, while fulfilling ICANN's mission. The Board provided phasing to guide the five-year execution road maps. The Strategic Initiatives outline the activities that ICANN will undertake to achieve the 28 Strategies laid forth in the ICANN FY26–30 Strategic Plan.

The SOPC inquired whether the CEO Goals would be used to set directions and priorities. ICANN has begun the process to develop the FY26 CEO Objectives (previously CEO goals). For each goal, key metrics and specific outcomes will be defined that support the objectives outlined in the Strategic Plan. The CEO Objectives will be finalized prior to the start of FY26 to better align with the fiscal year and to develop cascading goals for the ICANN organization staff.

Public Comments were also received regarding the timeline of project plans for Strategic Initiatives, as outlined in Appendix A. The ccNSO SOPC noted that some Strategic Initiatives did not include detailed project plans and a leading Functional Activity. In response, ICANN would like to highlight that as this is a five-year plan, not all initiatives have been fully planned at this stage. Some will be initiated after FY26 as the plan progresses. ICANN will continue to share updates with the community in future planning cycles as more project plans for Strategic Initiatives become available.

The ccNSO SOPC asked if there was a document available that maps out project plans for Strategic Initiatives and the resources available to ensure implementation of the Strategic Initiatives. The ccNSO SOPC also suggested that having a framework for how the priorities were determined would enhance transparency and inquired how resources would be ensured for implementation of a Strategic Initiative.

Appendix A in the Draft FY26–30 Operating and Financial Plan reflects what activities for the Strategic Initiatives that ICANN will carry out over the five years of the ICANN FY26–30 Strategic Plan. This reflects resource allocation from ICANN operations and separately funded programs, such as the New Generic Top-Level Domains (gTLD) Program: Next Round. The FY26 Expenses by Service Group and Functional Activity provides an overview of the expenses for each function. ICANN strives to enhance transparency and will consider additional ways to incorporate additional views of the resource allocation into future reporting.

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### 4.3.2 Relationship of Strategic Initiatives to Functional Activities

The ccNSO SOPC suggested adding the activities of the Strategic Initiatives to the Functional Activities, indicating that this would improve clarity of the plans. The RySG also requested similar details for Strategic Initiatives in Functional Activity plans. In the Draft ICANN FY26–30 Operating Plan, the Strategic Initiatives are intentionally reported separately from the Functional Activities, as the former represents added effort being taken to support the Strategic Plan whereas the latter represents the continuing operations for a function. ICANN will consider enhancing the narrative in the plans to better clarify this distinction.

### 4.3.3 Specific Comments by Strategic Initiative

There were also multiple comments about specific Strategic Initiatives. ICANN has provided responses to the comments below.

#### 1. Pilot Holistic Review

The ccNSO SOPC and RySG remarked on the Pilot Holistic Review (PHR) Strategic Initiative. The ccNSO SOPC expressed concern about running implementation work for the PHR and work for a fourth Accountability and Transparency Review (ATRT4) in parallel. ICANN appreciates this comment and notes that the consideration of which activities can be supported in parallel is expected to be considered by the Board in determining the timing of the ATRT4. The RySG indicated support but emphasized that achievable and manageable deliverables should be the focus. ICANN appreciates this input and support.

#### 2. Continuous Improvement Program

The ALAC and RySG commended ICANN's work on the Continuous Improvement Program (CIP) and its proposed model of the Principles, Criteria, and Indicator approach. The ALAC encouraged ICANN to work across all communities and constituencies to develop indicators. ICANN is looking forward to working with the ALAC and the community more broadly to support and coordinate continuous improvement activities. The RySG commented that organizational reviews should help ICANN community structures evaluate their accountability and the CIP should not be used to broaden accountability to the wider ICANN community. ICANN appreciates this support and input.

#### 3. Improving Stakeholder Representation

The ALAC, ccNSO SOPC, and RySG were all supportive of this Strategic Initiative.

The ccNSO SOPC noted additional details and clarity on the coordination of various initiatives undertaken by the Supporting Organizations (SOs) and Advisory Committees (ACs) and/or their subgroups would be beneficial. Community insights and guidance on this topic is critical to ICANN's ability to capture, synthesize, and evaluate all relevant information, while collaboration and coordination is needed to improve stakeholder representation. One of the key tools that will be leveraged to conduct a stakeholder analysis is the Community Engagement System, which will provide ICANN with the data it needs to carry out a comprehensive analysis. The Engagement Programs team will also work with various other functions across ICANN to also ensure internal coordination and avoid duplication of efforts. The current FY26 language

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specifies that ICANN will “support adoption and expansion of Community Engagement System (CES) platform use across ICANN.”

The RySG encouraged maintaining transparency and continuing use of the ICANN Public Comment process as the primary channel to gather community input. ICANN welcomes community suggestions on enhancing feedback channels to ensure continuous input. The goal of introducing new feedback mechanisms is to expand options for engagement while gathering valuable insights to improve processes and operations. These channels are designed to complement, not replace, existing avenues such as the ICANN Public Comment process. Feedback collected will be shared with the community, and ICANN will maintain ongoing engagement by both providing recommendations and incorporating community input.

## 5. Improving Community Engagement and Retention

The ALAC commended ICANN for enhancing the ICANN Learn platform to make courses accessible to persons with disabilities and encouraged older courses to also be accessible. ICANN appreciates this observation and encouragement to increase accessibility. While e-reader accessible written transcripts are now available for all courses, planning is underway to pilot a new audio accessible format, which requires fewer resources to produce and enables ICANN Learn training modules to not only be made accessible in English, but across other languages as well. If this pilot is successful, the format will be rolled out across all courses assigned to ICANN program participants (NextGen@ICANN, Fellowship, Leadership Program, Board training, and the Accelerator Program).

The ALAC also appreciated the enhancement of stakeholder representation and engagement through programs like NextGen@ICANN and the Fellowship Program, and recommended additional actions to sustain community participation and strengthen ICANN’s multistakeholder model. ICANN appreciates these recommendations and recognizes the importance of aligning with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 4 (Quality Education). It remains committed to strengthening the newcomer programs, including the Fellowship Program and NextGen@ICANN, and working closely with community groups to enhance stakeholder representation and diversity. ICANN continues to work toward ensuring data-driven discussions take place on many of the issues outlined in the ALAC’s response. ICANN looks forward to ongoing discussions and collaboration and will take these comments into account as project plans are refined for Strategic Initiatives 3: Improving Stakeholder Representation; 4: Improving Cross-Community Collaboration; and 5: Improving Community Engagement and Retention. The ALAC also recommended transparency in budgeting for end-user priorities and SDGs. ICANN notes that the budget is allocated to end-user priority through funding the ALAC, regional diversity with the Coalition for Digital Africa Strategic Initiative, and other project milestones associated with the Strategic Initiatives that support Strategic Goal: 1.1.3: Foster an appealing environment for the next generation and Strategic Goal 1.1.4: Develop a new generation of leaders.

The ccNSO SOPC noted that the review of 15 years of data is a deliverable in the review of NextGen@ICANN Program, but not as a key activity for this item. ICANN appreciates this comment and clarifies that leveraging and expanding the use of the CES will help set up the foundation for work that remains to be done in subsequent fiscal years. The NextGen@ICANN Program 15-year review will take place in FY 2030, corresponding with the program’s 15-year anniversary.

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## 6. Academic Engagement Plan

The ALAC expressed support for this Strategic Initiative, noting that more research and study on ICANN and its mission will enhance awareness of ICANN, its community, and its activities, and ICANN org is appreciative of its comments.

## 7. New Skills and Leadership Training for the Community

The ccNSO SOPC and the RySG both commented on funding for this Strategic Initiative. The RySG emphasized the value of the leadership program as a platform for mentoring and developing community leaders, recommending that ICANN continue to fund and enhance the program, particularly in light of significant investment gains. The ccNSO SOPC requested greater clarity on the availability of new funds and the expected timeline for the program's launch.

ICANN appreciates the support and these comments. Successfully implementing this Strategic Initiative will require close collaboration with the community to ensure that resources are allocated appropriately to the highest-priority programs and activities. ICANN looks forward to sharing further details about its proposed implementation plan, following the assessment of ICANN's existing capacity-development programs with a view toward enhancing community readiness for participation in policymaking at ICANN.

## 8. Developing Pathways to Community Leadership

The ccNSO SOPC sought clarification on the purpose of this Strategic Initiative and its impact on the community. It requested details on the criteria for identifying the leaders, how leadership is defined, and the roles and responsibilities of both ICANN and the community in this initiative. The RySG expressed concern that the project plan deliverables focus primarily on process while lacking efforts to strengthen and further develop the leadership program.

A robust leadership training program is essential for mentoring and developing new community leaders. As noted in the draft plan, the primary activity to implement this Strategic Initiative will be collaboration between ICANN and the community, to "develop criteria for identifying community members with high potential for leadership, and who have demonstrated interest in assuming greater responsibilities." This is an exercise that will require ICANN to work closely with the community leaders to identify these potential future leaders, whether from within or outside the current community, and in developing the relevant criteria as well as prioritizing the relevant activities in light of available resources.

## 9. Coalition for Digital Africa

The ALAC and ccNSO SOPC commended this initiative to support Africa's digital economy and recommended alignment with the U.N. SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), among other suggestions. ICANN appreciates these valuable insights. The Coalition for Digital Africa is committed to fostering digital economic growth in the region through inclusiveness and capacity development. In collaboration with partners, ICANN has actively promoted the Coalition's work through social media and local media interviews and will further strengthen these efforts as recommended.

ICANN recognizes the emphasis on capacity building and has launched several initiatives focused on DNS management and security. In terms of inclusiveness, ICANN continues to

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advance its Universal Access campaign, develop scripts in local languages, and integrate universal access curricula into various African universities and research centers.

## 10. Facilitating Consensus in Policy and Advice Development

The RySG expressed concern that the project plan for this Strategic Initiative, which focuses on a “community consultation to identify specific challenges, priorities, and ways to address them,” may duplicate or overlook previous work conducted under the “Enhancing the Effectiveness of ICANN’s Multistakeholder Model” project.

ICANN thanks the RySG for its interest in and regular contributions to discussions on this important topic and the Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO) Council and community for undertaking initiatives such as PDP 3.0, committing to continuous improvement. As noted in the draft, the FY26 implementation plan will be “integrated with ongoing community work on the same topic.” including work completed as well as underway by the GNSO. The activities noted under this Strategic Initiative are intended to ensure there is clarity and alignment on what specific challenges may need to be prioritized and the ways in which ICANN can resource and support the work in question. ICANN agrees with the need to avoid duplication of work and that any decision to change the existing gTLD policy development process is one for the GNSO Council to make.

## 11. Improving ICANN Hybrid Meetings

The ALAC suggested greater emphasis on accessibility tools such as real-time transcription. The RySG requested further clarity on the meaning of “community agreement” within the context of this initiative.

ICANN appreciates the constructive feedback on real-time transcription and remains committed to improving accessibility and enhancing remote participation. To ensure that linguistic and transcription services evolve with community needs while remaining cost-effective, ICANN has been assessing usage data to align services, including live interpretation at ICANN Public Meetings, with actual demand.

Since the publication of the Draft ICANN FY26–30 Operating and Financial Plan and Draft ICANN FY26 Operating Plan, ICANN and a group of community volunteers have continued working to identify and refine potential options for wider community input. ICANN thanks the RySG for recognizing its commitment to pursuing changes that have broad community support. Among other mechanisms, a Public Comment proceeding is planned for the period between ICANN82 and ICANN83, and all feedback will be considered by ICANN and the community discussion group. The goal is to publish a final list of options at ICANN83, ensuring any approved changes are incorporated into the annual budgeting and planning process for implementation in FY27.

## 13. Geopolitical Monitoring, Engagement, and Mitigation

The RySG expressed support for this Strategic Initiative and emphasized that engagement in the 20-year review of the World Summit on the Information Society outcomes (WSIS+20) is a key component of ICANN’s Geopolitical Monitoring, Engagement, and Mitigation efforts. The ccNSO SOPC underscored the need to avoid duplication with existing activities and recommended a strategic, sustained approach to outreach, particularly in fast-changing political

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and policymaking environments. The ALAC advocated for a more proactive and collaborative approach to addressing critical global challenges.

ICANN appreciates these comments and understands the importance of this engagement and it is exactly because of this understanding that the Government and Intergovernmental Organization Engagement (GE) function was established. The comments very much reflect ICANN's understanding of the importance of the outcome of the WSIS+20 review for the future of the multistakeholder model of Internet governance, as well as the role of the technical community in said model. ICANN will continue to engage with all Supporting Organizations and Advisory Committee (SOs/ACs) through the discussion group, created in 2024, and with the broader community via the WSIS+20 Outreach Network.

ICANN values the ALAC's recommendation for a more proactive and collaborative approach. Efforts such as the WSIS+20 Outreach Network and targeted collaboration with ICANN's SOs/ACs reflect this commitment. The ALAC is a key partner in this effort, given its members' experience in the Internet governance arena. ICANN also plans further engagement with organizations including the ITU, UNESCO, UNDESA, and other U.N. agencies, as well as permanent missions in New York and Geneva.

ICANN acknowledges the ccNSO SOPC's concerns and is committed to ensuring that efforts in this space are complementary rather than duplicative. Aligning objectives across events and initiatives is critical to maximizing impact. Additionally, ICANN recognizes the need for a strategic, sustained presence in dynamic policymaking environments and agrees that adequate resourcing is essential to achieving meaningful outcomes.

#### 14. Policy Development and Implementation Process Improvements

For this Strategic Initiative the RySG noted that any changes to the policy development process (PDP) should be carefully considered and can only be made by the GNSO. ICANN appreciates this comment. As noted in the response to the feedback on Strategic Initiative 10: Facilitating Consensus in Policy and Advice Development, ICANN understands and agrees that any changes to the gTLD policy development process remains a decision for the GNSO.

#### 15. Evolving Communications on ICANN's Multistakeholder Model

The RySG questioned why planning for this Strategic Initiative is set to begin in FY26 rather than continuing as part of existing efforts, given that the WSIS+20 review will take place in 2025.

WSIS+20-related communications efforts are addressed in ICANN's current work. WSIS+20 is meant to be a platform for multistakeholder discussions with the objective to take stock of the achievements and key trends, challenges and opportunities over the past 20 years; it is not specifically focused on ICANN. Work has been done to communicate the value of the ICANN's multistakeholder model, and the elevation to a Strategic Initiative directly supports the achievement of Strategy 1.3.1: "Demonstrate that ICANN's multistakeholder model of governance remains the right model for delivering ICANN's mission." Because of the synergy between the ongoing WSIS+20 and this Strategic Initiative, the timeline to begin development of this initiative will actually begin in Q4 of FY25, with implementation beginning in early FY26. ICANN will consider updating the project plan and Strategic Initiatives roadmap to reflect this.

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The ALAC suggested under this initiative that ICANN should give more attention to schools of Internet governance and to add these efforts as a budget item. ICANN regularly supports a number of schools of Internet governance at a regional and national level. ICANN has been a key supporter of the Middle East and Adjoining Countries School on Internet Governance for many years, along with programs such as the South School on Internet Governance, Indian School of Internet Governance, and the European Summer School on Internet Governance. ICANN annually evaluates its contribution and sponsorship of regional events and programs such as schools on Internet governance, and needs to preserve flexibility to support both existing and new programs that may emerge at a national and regional level.

## 17. Improve ICANN Org Agility

The RySG expressed support for the purpose of this initiative. The ccNSO SOPC asked for further details on this initiative and provided a general observation that agile progress of work is needed. The ICANN FY26–30 Strategic Plan has two Strategic Objectives that have goals and strategies related to agility.

Strategic Objective 1: “Evolve and promote ICANN's multistakeholder model, to sustain its inclusive approach to Internet governance.” This is supported by Strategy 1.2.4: “Incorporate flexibility and agile methodologies into the policy and advice development and implementation life cycle.” This strategy is to improve the policy development process and advice development at ICANN, ultimately strengthening ICANN's multistakeholder model, and Strategic Initiative 14: “Policy Development and Implementation Process Improvements,” is how ICANN plans to execute on the strategy.

Strategic Objective 2: “Enhance organizational excellence supports organizational agility,” is supported by Strategic Goal 2.1: “Pursue a sustainable future: and Strategy 2.1.1: “Improve institutional agility and adaptability.” This is focused on ICANN itself, identifying and addressing ways to enhance the organization's policies, operations, and governance to improve overall institutional effectiveness. This strategy contributes to organizational excellence rather than the broader multistakeholder model, and Strategic Initiative 17: “Improve ICANN Org Agility,” is how ICANN will execute this strategy.

The key difference is the scope, and Strategic Objective 2 is meant to address the agile progress of work. To note, in setting these objectives, goals, and strategies to address agility, the Board considered the environmental scan data received from the community, Board, and org, and determined that there needs to be a focus on progressing the work in a more agile manner.

## 20. Improving Forecasting and Financial Planning

The ccNSO SOPC and RySG both requested additional information regarding this Strategic Initiative. The ccNSO SOPC commented that details on how financial assumptions and external economic conditions influence projections are missing, as well as specific methodologies for initiatives like improving forecasting and financial planning. The RySG requested that under this initiative, ICANN provide more information regarding the actual spending and income amounts from previous years in the annual budget documents.

ICANN notes this includes evolving the funding projections process to ensure it is formulated to address market changes effectively. The funding projections process consists of three key

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steps: 1. Marketplace Horizon Scan, 2. Formulation of Assumptions, and 3. Forecast Generation. ICANN incorporates various assumptions of growth or decline for each of its funding categories to develop multiple plausible viewpoints of how ICANN's funding might evolve over the five-year period. These are developed for the specific purpose of creating reasonably conservative funding assumptions and are outlined each fiscal year in the Funding Forecast Assumptions document that is provided as a resource document.

The annual budget provides comparative financial statement information for the most relevant fiscal periods. In the Draft ICANN FY26 Budget, the FY26 financials are compared with the ICANN FY25 Adopted Budget and also with the FY25 Forecast. ICANN publishes quarterly unaudited financial statements and annual audited financial statements that provide additional information on actual financial results.

## 21. Ongoing Cost Controls

The ccNSO SOPC requested that ICANN explore more concrete activities related to this Strategic Initiative. The RySG commented that it looks forward to engaging with ICANN on the implementation of cost control measures, regular reviews of expenses and the identification and elimination of inefficiencies. ICANN appreciates this comment and notes that financial sustainability, resource management and operational efficiency are critical to the organization and ICANN looks forward to further engagement on this topic.

## 23. Ecological Responsibility

The ccNSO SOPC, RySG, and ALAC all expressed support for this Strategic Initiative and the audit process. However, the ALAC suggested additional actions such as embedding sustainability across ICANN's operations and events, as well as collaborating with ICANN stakeholders to co-develop innovative sustainable practices.

ICANN appreciates the ongoing support and guidance on this topic. ICANN will continue to work toward better understanding and minimizing its ecological footprint in collaboration with the community. To establish a baseline and identify improvements, ICANN will engage an external vendor for an environmental sustainability audit.

## 24. Universal Acceptance and Internationalized Domain Names

The ccNSO SOPC, ALAC, and RySG are supportive of this Strategic Initiative. ICANN appreciates this support. The ccNSO SOPC recommended that ICANN increase outreach to hardware and software providers, as well as others in the value chain, to shift the value proposition of IDNs for customers. The ALAC suggested additional funding for end-user engagement on Universal Acceptance (UA) and outreach in underserved areas and multilingual regions.

ICANN has dedicated resources that are focused on outreach to hardware and software providers, technical companies, and universities. Regular updates about this work are provided at UA community update sessions during ICANN Public Meetings, and the community is encouraged to engage and provide input.

ICANN appreciates the ALAC's interest in greater end-user engagement activities on UA. Technical implementation work is conducted by ICANN, with insight from the Universal

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Acceptance Steering Group and the community into UA challenges. ICANN has also undertaken significant efforts through the New gTLD Program: Next Round, focusing on reaching underserved and multilingual regions, highlighting the importance of IDNs and UA. Recently, additional resources have been dedicated to outreach with private sector companies and academic institutions to provide education and technical support for UA. ICANN works with universities worldwide to train faculty using a UA curriculum developed with community input. The IDN and UA Program team publishes an annual UA Readiness Report and an annual report on IDNs at both the top and second levels of the DNS.

ICANN is collaborating with UNESCO and other regional and international organizations to promote IDN and UA adoption by governments. ICANN also continues to support UA Day and UA local initiatives promoting grass-roots level efforts to promote UA awareness and adoption. The ICANN Board recently asked the organization to evaluate how it provides support for community work on UA. ICANN would welcome ideas from the ALAC on specific end-user engagement activities to best support this initiative. ICANN also welcomes further input on how to improve these efforts from the community.

## 25. New gTLD Program

The ALAC provided specific recommendations about targeted outreach for underserved regions, prioritizing marginalized communities, greater transparency in the application review process, and conducting consultations with enterprises to reduce entry barriers for the application process for new top-level domains (TLDs). ICANN appreciates the comment and notes the application window for the Applicant Support Program (ASP) will have closed ten weeks after the initiation of the ICANN FY26–30 Operating and Financial Plan. Fortunately, activities responding to each recommendation are underway. The team has prioritized ASP-eligible entities and underserved, developing regions during calendar year 2024, with activities continuing until the application window for ASP closes. Outreach for the New gTLD Program: Next Round, while led by ICANN, has been a collaborative effort drawing from the experience of the ICANN community, especially Supporting Organizations and Advisory Committees.

Accordingly, ICANN will continue to target businesses of all sizes, with incubators, digital chambers of commerce, and entrepreneur gatherings. Brands associations are among the organizations ICANN has approached and invited to give feedback. It is important to note that, while ICANN's communication and outreach activities have prioritized underserved regions and marginalized communities, there is no policy basis for the ASP to give priority to some ASP applicants over others in terms of qualifying for support (See [Rec. 17.1 in the SubPro Final Report](#)).

With regard to transparency of the application review process, for the ASP, ICANN has published an [ASP Handbook](#) outlining the criteria and indicators to qualify, as well as the step-by-step process of the ASP evaluation. The ASP Handbook indicates that ICANN will maintain business confidentiality for all ASP applicants until the New gTLD Program: Next Round "Reveal Day," when public portions of the gTLD applications will be published, including whether a gTLD applicant was supported pursuant to the ASP. Similarly, ICANN will publish the Applicant Guidebook (AGB) that will outline the process and criteria for applying for a new gTLD, as well as other supporting documents that will help guide applicants and ensure transparency of the application review process.

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The RySG noted its appreciation of the work ICANN has done to prepare for the next round of the New gTLD Program. It noted the considerations listed acknowledged a large number of dependencies that must be resolved before the next round can begin. As such, RySG had concerns on the timely launch and suggested ICANN should provide more detailed reporting about the nature of the dependencies. ICANN appreciates the comment and is pleased to note that the dependencies for the AGB listed in the [Next Round Implementation Plan](#) have been resolved and work is on track to address other dependencies identified for the opening of the Next Round application submission period, set to begin in April 2026. ICANN appreciates the support it has received from the community, including the RySG, and hopes this support continues as there is still implementation work that remains. For detailed reporting on the state of implementation, please refer to the [Pre-ICANN meeting briefing reports](#) that are published prior to every ICANN Public Meeting, which also include further details on the ongoing work in relation to addressing operational dependencies for the first delegation as part of the post-contracting project.

## 28. Technological Development and Assessment and Responsiveness

The ccNSO SOPC encouraged ICANN to work closely with ccTLDs directly or through the ccNSO or/and regional ccTLD organizations to achieve the goals of this Strategic Initiative. ICANN thanks the ccNSO for these suggestions. As plans for this Strategic Initiative continue to develop, ICANN will take these suggestions into consideration. ICANN notes the importance of continuing collaboration and communication with the ccTLD community, to strengthen information exchange and discussions on relevant topics of mutual interest.

## 30. Regional Events Redesign

The RySG commented that regional events represent opportunities to reach out and engage with local and regional stakeholders who do not attend the ICANN Public Meetings. It noted that it greatly values the Contracted Parties Summit (CPS) and the colocation with the Board Workshop, without overlap, allowing Board members to participate in the CPS. However, the ccNSO SOPC expressed concerns that it had regarding regional events, such as too many regional meetings and a lack of coordination.

ICANN thanks the ccNSO for its thoughtful observations that regional coordination can be improved between ICANN, regional ccTLD organizations, and ccTLDs in the planning and delivery of regional events run by ICANN. These suggestions will be incorporated as future regional events are considered.

## 35. Support Coordinated Plans to Address DNS Root Server System Attacks

The ALAC and ccNSO SOPC both shared their support for this initiative. Specifically, the ALAC supported the funding allocated to DNS security and technical upgrades. The ALAC also provided recommendations for this initiative to broaden awareness programs as well as allocating additional resources to research on emerging risks and to educate end-users on DNS abuse mitigation and emerging technologies.

ICANN welcomes these suggestions as they align with ICANN's mission and will be taken into consideration as training sessions are planned out. In line with these efforts, the Emerging Internet Technologies sessions will continue to be offered at many ICANN Public Meetings.

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## 4.4 Functional Activities

ICANN received 14 comments specific to the Functional Activities in the Draft ICANN FY26–30 Operating and Financial Plan and Draft ICANN FY26 Operating Plan.

The ALAC submitted six comments that expressed support and agreement with the presented plans for the following Functional Activities: Office of the Chief Technological Officer, Technical Services, Global Domains Division Accounts and Services, Global Stakeholder Engagement, Meetings, and the Grant Program. ICANN appreciates the ALAC's support and continuing interests in these activities.

### 4.4.1 Policy Development and Advice

The ALAC highlighted the significant resources required to support the ICANN policy development processes and the advisory work of ICANN ACs, which are core to ICANN's multistakeholder model.

ICANN appreciates the ALAC's recognition of the importance of adequate resource allocation, including staff support, to ensure that priority work is completed efficiently. ICANN regularly evaluates staffing levels across the organization, including the use of consultants and contractors as needed. Resource planning is an integral part of ICANN's annual planning and budgeting process. In line with the strategic priorities under the next Five-Year Operating and Financial Plan, ICANN looks forward to engaging with the community to ensure that planned activities related to policy, technical and other community work are well supported while maintaining a balanced staff.

### 4.4.2 Policy Research and Stakeholder Programs

The ALAC noted the importance of specific policy research at various stages of ICANN policy development and with several Specific Review Teams, and noted that budgeting will help with the effectiveness of the outcomes. The Policy Research and Stakeholder Programs team appreciates the ALAC's support for its work, particularly its inputs toward robust data and research in Specific Review processes.

### 4.4.3 Strategic Initiatives (GDS)

The ALAC highlighted that support for this function is essential and that if other necessary and supported work also needs to be undertaken, it can be provided for without negatively affecting the support for the Strategic Initiatives function. Specifically, the ALAC recommends that ICANN allocate sufficient resources to the key activities to enforce compliance and mitigate DNS abuse. The ALAC also suggests that non-affiliated research organizations could play a role in identifying abuse trends and crafting effective countermeasures. ICANN appreciates the ALAC's support for this function and ensures that resourcing for this function is considered in planning.

### 4.4.4 Constituent and Stakeholder Travel

The ALAC and RySG submitted comments on Constituent and Stakeholder Travel. The RySG noted the importance of travel funding to ensure diverse participation in ICANN.

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ICANN is committed to enhancing diversity and broadening participation across its global community. Travel serves as a vital component in achieving these objectives. In FY24, ICANN funded 518 SO/AC unique travelers for 769 funded positions to ICANN Meetings. Additionally, ICANN annually supports 165 individuals through initiatives such as the Fellowship and NextGen@ICANN Programs, alongside offering translation services, regional engagement opportunities, and virtual participation options for all interested stakeholders. While acknowledging the significant expenditure associated with travel, ICANN is focused on optimizing spending to ensure effective contributions from funded travelers.

Both the NextGen@ICANN and Fellowship Programs have selection committees composed of individuals appointed by their respective community groups, who are responsible for determining the selection criteria and diversity priorities. Travel funding for the community is likewise largely determined by individual community group selection processes and their commitments to diverse participation, which vary from group to group. The [Work Stream 2 \(WS2\) Diversity Subgroup](#) recommended that each SO/AC/constituency group create diversity criteria objectives and strategies, and the [WS2 Community Coordination Group](#) agreed that individual groups are empowered to expand upon the seven WS2 diversity elements as best fits the needs of their respective communities, while also acknowledging that diversity elements do not have universal applicability due to each group's nuanced nature.

The ALAC commented that it would appreciate additional flexibility in ICANN's Community Travel Support Guidelines to allow for more effective use of available travel funding and maximum participation of At-Large volunteers. The flexibility mentioned includes reallocation of funding to maximize in-person attendance, as well as initiating the travel process sooner to allow for ample time for participants to request visas.

ICANN appreciates the ALAC's detailed insights and feedback regarding the ICANN travel support process. ICANN understands and appreciates the concerns raised by the ALAC and the At-Large community, particularly regarding the flexibility of travel fund allocations and the challenges associated with obtaining visas in a timely manner.

The suggestion to reallocate unused travel funds promptly to other active participants is valuable and is currently available within the planning timeline of ICANN supported meetings. However, reallocating these funds on short notice – specifically in less than 45 days – is not feasible for ICANN Travel Support. This limitation is due to a need to adhere to established travel booking requirements and procedures. Additionally, any cost savings that reduce the overall expenses for ICANN cannot be repurposed to cover other costs. Unused funds play a crucial role in covering cost overruns and accommodating increases, such as higher flight costs and inflation adjustments. Therefore, these funds are essential for maintaining budgetary stability and ensuring that all financial obligations are met without compromising the quality or scope of activities.

ICANN anticipates a community review of the Travel Support Guidelines in 2025, and this will be the time for community input on changes to these guidelines. Community suggestions are welcomed for future updates to the Travel Support Guidelines that enhance the efficiency of fund usage, ensuring that resources can be optimized for community participation.

Currently, the ICANN Travel Support team engages with community stakeholders 120 days (three months) before the upcoming Public Meeting. In most cases, community groups are not

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prepared to select or discuss funded travelers before that; however, if they are, the team is willing to support the earlier requests.

The dates for ICANN Public Meetings are provided in advance on the [meeting calendar](#), through October 2028, with future locations being added as they are confirmed by ICANN. With the diverse and global participants attending ICANN meetings in-person, each government and embassy has its own process for allocating and granting visas; ICANN does not have the agency or power to dictate how quickly or slowly these processes occur or have authority to grant visas. It is important for individuals seeking visas to understand that the embassy's decision-making process is independent of ICANN's operations and thus may vary in terms of speed, efficiency, and outcome. Therefore, travelers should plan accordingly.

#### 4.4.5 Engagement Programs

The ALAC and At-Large Community were largely supportive of ICANN's engagement programs and offered that ICANN could consider collaboration with non-affiliated research organizations and academics to develop regionally relevant learning content. Engagement with academic communities is an important part of ICANN's stakeholder engagement work and ICANN is appreciative of this comment. ICANN offers a variety of capacity development and learning opportunities for non-affiliated research organizations and academia, through the online learning platform ICANN Learn, as well as with regional and national training and webinars. The ALAC also reiterated its suggestion for a specific budget item for schools of Internet governance. Please refer to section 15. Evolving Communications on ICANN's Multistakeholder Model, for ICANN's response.

#### 4.4.6 Ombuds

The ALAC commented on the importance of the Ombuds Office and reiterated its call for the Ombuds independence from ICANN org. It urged full implementation of the WS2 recommendations for improving the Ombuds Office and sought clarification on the conflict-of-interest policy.

ICANN appreciates the ALAC's support and thoughtful feedback. As noted in the draft plans, implementing the WS2 recommendations remains a priority for the Ombuds Office, with most having a target implementation timeline by June 2025. The Ombuds Office's authority, as outlined in the Bylaws, aligns with industry standards, enabling it to investigate complaints, issue reports, and make recommendations to minimize future complaints. The Community Anti-Harassment Policy provides additional powers in terms of deciding and determining remedial measures.

The Ombuds Office is committed to protecting community members who engage with it and ensuring a fair, just, and effective resolution process. While no system can fully eliminate incidents of harassment, the goal is to address concerns promptly, fairly and justly treating all parties with dignity and respect and applying appropriate consequences as required. Complaints serve as valuable insights for systemic improvement, contributing to a more resilient and effective system.

Confidentiality is a core principle of the Ombuds Office, ensuring that community members' identities are protected for both complainants and respondents. While anonymized data may be reported, case details are only shared when there are a significant number of cases (typically

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more than five) to prevent identification. In line with the WS2 recommendations, the Ombuds Office is developing a strategic communication and engagement plan to enhance transparency on cases, how they are handled, outcomes, and lessons learned. Data tracking and analysis remain a priority for the Ombuds to improve case management and inform ongoing improvements.

## 4.5 Financial Management

ICANN received 36 comments related to the Financial Management Functional Activity in the Draft ICANN FY26–30 Operating and Financial Plan and Draft ICANN FY26 Operating Plan and Budget. Please note: all numbers in this document are in U.S. dollars unless otherwise stated.

### 4.5.1 Funding Assumptions and Projections

The ALAC, BC, and ccNSO SOPC agreed with the Funding Projection approach and methodology. The BC highlighted its agreement with the funding and expense scenarios as presented in the Draft ICANN FY26–30 Operating and Financial Plan. ICANN appreciates this feedback. The ccNSO SOPC was supportive of the approach to further reduce the funding level to \$142M, while there is potential for an increase and was neutral on the planned 3 percent fee increase.

The RySG also noted that ICANN did not include the registry fees increases in the Draft ICANN FY26 Budget even though increases will have been in place for six months prior to the effective date of the ICANN FY26 Budget, and thus any additional funding available to ICANN from registry fees will not have been allocated. ICANN appreciates the comment and notes that the Draft ICANN FY26 Budget was developed prior to the approval of registry fee increases. Updates to funding will be taken into account in future versions of the ICANN FY26 Budget prior to its adoption by the Board.

The ccNSO SOPC is supportive of the Draft ICANN FY26 Budget but suggested not only using external metrics for the future market assessment, but also the expertise of ACs and SOs, including contracted parties. ICANN appreciates the comment and as part of the current recurring process of developing the five-year funding forecast, ICANN engages with a DNS industry analyst to conduct interviews with various industry representatives, which also factors in a goal of attaining representation across the ecosystem. The key trends are summarized in the [Funding Assumptions report](#), and include potential global macroeconomic impact on the DNS industry, that are identified from in-depth qualitative interviews.

### 4.5.2 Financial Reporting

The Draft ICANN FY26 Budget included Activity-Based Reporting, which was introduced in the Draft ICANN FY25 Budget. This type of reporting was introduced to simplify financial reporting for the community by breaking down ICANN's expenses based on specific activities or projects.

The ccNSO SOPC seeks to understand how personnel costs were distributed in the four Activity-Based Reporting categories. ICANN notes that personnel costs are allocated to the four activities using the same methodology as other costs. The work each function performs is evaluated and separated into the different activities. For example, the IANA functions are part of the Technical Mission Functional Activity. The IANA portion of that activity includes expenses from all cost categories, including personnel.

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The ccNSO SOPC commented that while the budget allocations were well-documented, they asked ICANN to elaborate on the assumptions driving changes in specific expense categories and metrics for assessing the return of investment on certain Strategic Initiatives, e.g. the New gTLD Program: Next Round. It recommended ICANN conduct a cost-benefit analysis for high-priority projects to confirm alignment with the organization's objectives. ALAC noted application fees collected are intended to cover program costs as a 'cost recovery model'.

The Next Round is built as a cost-recovery program, which means that the application fee is planned to cover all costs of running the program. Next Round implementation has been funded by both application fees from the 2012 Round and from the Supplemental Fund for Implementation of Community Recommendations (SFICR).

The RySG was appreciative of the time and effort ICANN put into preparing the materials, but stated more details, particularly regarding account for expenses, would aid in analysis of ICANN's activities. ICANN notes these comments and notes additional expense details can be found in ICANN's published [quarterly](#) and [annual](#) reports.

### 4.5.3 Fund Management

The ALAC noted support of the planned activities to enable ICANN to achieve a sustainable rate of expenses by the end of FY25 as outlined in the [5 May 2024 Board Resolution](#). This support is noted and appreciated.

The ALAC commented on whether the SFICR would be replenished once the New gTLD Program: Next Round is in place. ICANN notes that the decision regarding whether to replenish the SFICR after the next round of the New gTLD Program launches has not been made due to unknown levels of applications and operational funding based on delegation. A decision regarding replenishing the SFICR will be made at a later date once these variables are known and based on organizational and operational need.

The RySG also commented that ICANN should consider keeping the Reserve Fund at 12 months of operating expenses and using its investment gains to address operational issues. ICANN appreciates these comments. While there is a 12 months operating expenses minimum set for the Reserve Fund, as stated in the [ICANN Investment Policy](#), no maximum amount above which funds can be allocated for other purposes has been established. Additionally, the Reserve Fund is ICANN's Funding of Last Resort and withdrawals from the Fund require Board approval. Therefore, withdrawals from the Reserve Fund are not budgeted.

### 4.5.4 Headcount/Personnel

The ccNSO SOPC, RrSG, and an individual composed five comments in this area.

The ccNSO SOPC is supportive of cost-saving measures to ensure ICANN's financial sustainability. The slight decline in projected funding and continued inflationary pressures impacting ICANN's financial position have resulted in ICANN's continued efforts to evaluate processes to improve efficiencies to maintain financial sustainability. The ccNSO SOPC reflected that this should not undermine ICANN's mission and recommended that ICANN secure savings in future budgets rather than measures in the current budget year. ICANN appreciates the ccNSO SOPC's comments. ICANN is deeply committed to ICANN's mission while achieving quality outcomes and financial sustainability.

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The ccNSO SOPC also welcomed the forward-looking personnel planning and had specific questions about the staff allocated to the New gTLD Program: Next Round after final implementation. ICANN appreciates the comment and notes that the 51 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff referenced on Page 11 of the Draft ICANN FY26 Budget include both staff members working on the next round implementation of the program as well as those working on the processing phase of the program. The processing portion of the budget includes staff that are already processing applications for the Applicant Support Program and the Registry Service Evaluation Program, as well as the onboarding and training of staff for gTLD application processing activities in preparation for the opening of the next new gTLD application window, scheduled for April 2026. ICANN also notes that the FTE allocation represents the total of all time spent across the organization, which also includes fractions of time that FTEs are working on the program. For example, to date, approximately 66 individual staff members have spent fractions of their time working on the program which adds up to an average of approximately 33 FTEs.

ICANN has already started working on the operating model for the processing phase to confirm staff allocation once the implementation phase is completed. ICANN expects that many of those who are currently involved in the implementation phase will also have a role in the processing phase. As part of that planning work, ICANN will also plan for different scenarios of application volume, as workload and resource needs will be driven by the number of applications received. Current planning assumes 2,000 applications, but scenario planning will also focus on how to scale down in case of a lower number of applications as well as scaling up in case of a higher number of applications.

The RySG asked for additional information relating to staff compensation. ICANN notes that it does not publicly share detailed breakdowns of remuneration by region, level, or role. ICANN adheres to defined remuneration practices (referenced by the RrSG), as posted on ICANN's website, which serve to attract and retain the skills required to deliver on ICANN's mission. ICANN strives to remunerate staff competitively in line with these defined practices, annual benchmarking across all regions, and affordability. The FY26 budgeted amount is impacted by many variables including, but not limited to, location, type of role and number of staff (price, mix, and volume).

The individual suggested a breakdown of anticipated personnel costs into categories and volume of people (e.g., core vs. contractors) would help improve understanding and transparency. ICANN appreciates this comment and details headcount by ICANN segment (ICANN Operations, New gTLD Program, SFICR Projects, and Grant Program) at this time. Total ICANN FTE headcount in the Draft ICANN FY26 Budget is 439, of which 384 are in ICANN Operations. FTEs refer only to ICANN staff and not contractors, which are budgeted in Professional Services. The full details for this headcount are included on Pages 8 and 11 of the Draft ICANN FY26 Budget.

#### 4.5.5 Travel and Meeting Expenses

Ten Public Comments were received on Travel and Meeting Expenses. Three subcategory themes were identified in this area: ICANN Public Meetings Budget Forecasting; Cost Savings in Travel and Meeting Expenses; and Community Request for Travel Support.

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## ICANN Public Meetings Budget Forecasting

The BC and the RySG both expressed concern about ICANN Public Meetings exceeding budget in recent years and recommended that ICANN provide a more accurate and realistic budget for FY26 Public Meetings.

ICANN appreciates the BC and RySG's feedback and interest in this area. Budgeted amounts for FY26 ICANN Public Meetings align with the actual costs of the most recent meetings. The ICANN84 Annual General Meeting (AGM) is budgeted at \$5.3M compared with an actual cost of \$5.4M for the ICANN78 AGM and \$4.9M for the ICANN81 AGM. The overall \$14.4M budget is slightly below the FY24 actuals, but above FY23. There is a \$0.6M increase from the FY25 budget and \$1.1M from FY24 due to increased costs. Similarly, budgets for the Community and Policy Forums remain in line with past meetings of those same types.

## Financial Sustainability in Travel and Meeting Expenses

The ccNSO SOPC and RrSG both noted the significant costs of meetings and travel support and inquired if ICANN had additional plans to reduce these costs. The ccNSO SOPC requested information for how ICANN determines the appropriate number of travel slots and costs per community group, and the RrSG questioned if the number of travelers should be reduced. The RrSG also suggested that ICANN look at sponsorship or charging delegates a nominal fee to attend.

ICANN is aware of the significant annual expenditures associated with meetings and travel support for members of various community groups every year. The organization is focused on optimizing future spending to ensure effective contributions from funded travelers and welcomes suggestions from the community for how these systems can be improved through the "How We Meet" initiative with community leaders. ICANN regularly evaluates its ability to fund community travel. This allocation process is based on careful analysis and planning, considering several key factors:

- Annual Review and Evaluation: Travel slots and associated costs are reviewed each year based on the available financial resources to ensure alignment with ICANN's current fiscal capabilities and priorities.
- Publication in the Operating Plan and Budget: The final allocation is published in the annual budget before the start of each fiscal year ensuring transparency for stakeholders.
- Community Feedback: The ICANN community can submit Public Comments on the Operating Plan and Budget, allowing for adjustments based on community needs and priorities.
- Allocation by Representative Bodies: A specified number of travel slots for ICANN Supporting Organizations, Advisory Committees (ACs), the Fellowship Program, the NextGen@ICANN Programs, and review teams, are allocated by each of those groups to support diverse participation.

Travel slot allocation and event budgeting are guided by historical participation data, balanced against current and anticipated needs as well as available resources, and alignment with Strategic Objectives. Aligning community requests for travel and event support with broader

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organizational goals ensures that resources are used effectively and distributed equitably across the community to meet each group's policy priorities and strategic goals, within financial constraints.

ICANN continues to implement financial sustainability measures around travel and meetings, including reducing the number of staff attending meetings, which allows ICANN to budget similar amounts for future meetings while mitigating inflationary pressures on meeting costs. ICANN expects the ongoing expense reductions made to be sufficient to offset any inflation between the end of FY24 and FY26. Additionally, ICANN does solicit meeting sponsorships. However, these are budgeted as part of ICANN Funding. Please see page 16 of the Draft ICANN FY26 Budget for details.

### Community Request for Travel Support

The GAC commented that community travel support is a valuable resource that enables the committee to assure in-person delegate participation. While the GAC appreciates that this support has been retained for FY26, it hopes for an expansion of travel slots for the GAC and other communities during the FY26–30 period. The GAC also sought assurance that the Draft ICANN FY26 Budget accounts for travel support for each High-Level Government Meeting (HLGM), noting that it is not explicitly identified.

ICANN acknowledges the GAC's input and recognizes the value of in-person engagement in the multistakeholder model, alongside improvements in virtual and hybrid participation. ICANN appreciates the GAC's commitment to assessing its future travel support needs and using allocated funds efficiently.

ICANN remains focused on optimizing travel expenditure to ensure effective contributions from funded travelers. ICANN believes that changing the number of travel slots is a matter for broader community discussion, to ensure that travel support is provided equitably across the community and in a manner commensurate with agreed priorities and current needs. ICANN welcomes suggestions from governments through the "How We Meet" initiative to improve these systems.

Regarding the HLGM, ICANN clarifies that, as in previous budgets, the "Other Community Events" line item covers SO/AC events, including the HLGM and GNSO Working Sessions, with funding levels consistent with the ICANN FY25 Budget.

The BC also proposed equal financial support for an annual Non-Contracted Parties House Summit, similar to the Contracted Parties Summit. ICANN appreciates this suggestion and remains committed to inclusivity and collaboration. This proposal will be factored into the next planning and budgeting process, recognizing that funding for intersessional events should be part of a broader community discussion on prioritization.

The RySG commented on the elimination of the Additional Budget Request (ABR) Process, which it previously used to request ICANN funded travel support for events like the Contracted Parties Summit. ICANN notes that the ABR process was discontinued in FY24 after an analysis of community requests showed a steady decline. Many ABR allocations transitioned from pilot projects to programs incorporated into ICANN's annual budget and planning process. Support for funded travelers to the Contracted Parties Summit is now included in the core budget, along with other formerly ABR-funded initiatives. ICANN encourages all community groups to regularly

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assess their needs and priorities with their ICANN support staff, including to align these with the Strategic Plan.

#### 4.5.6 Grant Program Financials

The ALAC and ccNSO SOPC indicated support for the Grant Program, but inquired about the staffing and handling costs. ICANN appreciates their interest in the program and confirms that the ICANN Grant Program budget is monitored monthly. Overhead costs, including staff, are in line with or lower than those of comparable global grant program organizations, as is overall implementation costs. The program operates with two fully dedicated staff, supported by staff for services such as implementation operations, communications, legal services, and financial reviews – totaling approximately 3.5 FTE. This staffing level is expected to remain stable even as the number of grantees and awards increase.

The program's handling cost of \$1.6M covers all operational expenses, including eligibility checks, independent panel assessments, and preparations for future cycles, as outlined in the Grant Program Applicant Guide and aligned with the community's recommendations. Future cycle costs will depend on application volume. ICANN is committed to optimizing internal and external administrative expenses to maintain efficiency.

#### 4.5.7 Contingency Fund

The BC requested clarification on ICANN's rationale for the proposed \$2M contingency increase, and an individual commenter suggested ICANN outline contingency plans if funding scenarios deviated significantly from projections.

ICANN appreciates these comments and notes that, over the years, contingency has become a smaller portion of ICANN's overall budget. Increasing it to \$7.5M maintains it at about 5 percent of total budget, a reasonable benchmark percentage rather than a strict dollar amount. The ALAC also felt this amount was suitably maintained and recognized potential pressure on work implementation and activities while balancing the budget and maintaining this contingency. This comment is appreciated.

This increase is strategically aligned with current domain name industry conditions, including slower funding growth, inflation, and potential unforeseen litigation costs. Contingency funding ensures financial flexibility for significant, unforeseen costs.

### 4.6 FY26 IANA Operating Plan and Budget

Seven comments were received on the Draft IANA FY26 Operating Plan and Budget.

The ALAC and the BC expressed support for the Draft IANA FY26 Operating Plan and Budget, with the BC noting that it aligns with IANA's priorities and needs. The ccNSO SOPC agreed with the IANA FY26 Operating Plan and Budget format for its clarity in year-over-year comparison and inclusion of major expenses. The ALAC appreciated the consideration of inflation, the reduction in Professional Services costs, and the increase in FTE personnel, noting that core functions in ICANN should be carried out internally. ICANN and IANA appreciate these comments.

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An individual commenter suggested discussing how ICANN funding fluctuations may impact IANA's long-term sustainability. The ALAC supported the \$0.4M increase to the PTI FY26 Budget but questioned if it would be sufficient to achieve the IANA and PTI Strategic Plans. ICANN remains committed to funding PTI and ensuring the stability of the IANA functions, as shown in the ICANN FY26–30 Strategic Plan under Strategic Goal 3.3: "Deliver and Enhance the IANA Functions to Meeting Evolving Community Needs" and Supporting Strategies 3.3.1 and 3.3.2. The PTI FY26 Budget is aligned with key activities outlined in the Draft PTI FY26 Operating Plan and Budget and the initial phase of IANA's long-term sustainability plan.

The ccNSO SOPC noted that the Strategic Initiatives in the Draft IANA FY26 Operating Plan and Budget align with the broader goals of the Draft PTI FY26–30 Strategic Plan should remain sufficiently funded. While appreciating the inclusion of the major expense areas, the ccNSO SOPC recommended closer scrutiny of large projects and further clarification of cost-efficiency measures. ICANN and IANA value this input and will provide projected expense details when available.

## 4.7 Other

The ALAC submitted three comments that were thematically different from the usual categories. The ALAC expressed that ICANN should align with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals to enhance end-user impact. In its comments, the ALAC noted that inclusivity, sustainability and proactive risk management enhancements would help ICANN better align with the Sustainable Development Goals and the ICANN Strategic Objectives. ICANN appreciates these comments and notes that securing ICANN's financial stability and sustainability are key principles.

## Section 5: Next Steps

ICANN appreciates all community input and support in this Public Comment process. ICANN reviewed and responded to all comments received, and where appropriate, will incorporate the comments into the next version of the related documents or, will evaluate and incorporate into the further planning cycle as appropriate.

Following the publication of this report, ICANN will update the: (i) Draft ICANN FY26 Budget; (ii) Draft ICANN FY26–FY30 Operating and Financial Plan & Draft ICANN FY26 Operating Plan; and (iii) Draft IANA FY26 Operating Plan and Budget, taking into consideration the Public Comments, and where appropriate and feasible, incorporating the comments into the next version or Proposed for Adoption plans. These plans will be published and available prior to the Board's consideration.

In mid-April 2025, the Board Finance Committee will consider recommending that the Board adopt the: (i) ICANN FY26 Budget; (ii) ICANN FY26-FY30 Operating and Financial Plan & FY26 Operating Plan; and (iii) FY26 IANA Operating Plan and Budget. The plans will be presented to the Board for consideration in May 2025. Following the Board's adoption of these plans, the Empowered Community will consider the plans as adopted. If no Empowered Community rejection process is initiated or remains pending, the proposed plans will go into effect on 1 July 2025.