

Continuous Improvement Program Framework

Continuous Improvement Program Community
Coordination Group (CIP-CCG)

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Background

Organizational Reviews are mandated by the ICANN Bylaws ([Article 4.4](#)). They assess ICANN's Supporting Organizations (SOs), Advisory Committees (ACs), and the Nominating Committee (NomCom) to determine how effectively they operate, how well they achieve their purpose and how accountable they are to the ICANN multistakeholder model of governance. After two cycles of Organizational Reviews, the community identified challenges and opportunities to improve Organizational Reviews.

Challenge

There are community-perceived shortcomings in Organizational Reviews, which led to the development of the Third Accountability and Transparency Review ([ATRT3 Recommendation 3.6](#)). The perceived shortcomings include the understanding and competence of the Independent Examiners who have conducted Organizational Reviews and produced recommendations. The community has debated the quality of the Independent Examiner recommendations, and the volume of recommendations led to a backlog in implementing several recommendations.

In most cases, Independent Examiners avoided determining whether the organization has a continuing purpose and whether the organizational structure should be changed. Thus, most Independent Examiners' recommendations were intended to improve operational effectiveness and accountability.

ICANN previously [received](#) broad support from the community to defer the next scheduled Organizational Reviews, considering the need to plan for changes to the Organizational Review processes including implementation of the Continuous Improvement Program (CIP). Accordingly, the ICANN Board took action in [June 2022](#) to defer the next cycle of Organizational Reviews. By June 2025, the Board will consider the progress made toward evolving Organizational Reviews to determine whether or not the Organizational Reviews should be resumed.

Solution

ATRT3 Recommendation 3.6 calls for Organizational Reviews to evolve into a Continuous Improvement Program. The Board directed ICANN org to work with the community to develop a pilot Continuous Improvement Program before a Bylaws amendment is completed to ensure it yields the outcomes intended by ATRT3.

The language of ATRT3 Recommendation 3.6 states: "ICANN org shall work with each SO, AC, and the NomCom to establish a Continuous Improvement Program. Such a Continuous Improvement Program shall have a common base between all SOs, ACs, and the NomCom but will also allow for customization so as to best meet the needs of each individual SO, AC, and NomCom."¹

The Continuous Improvement Program (CIP) will be flexible enough to enable each organizational structure within ICANN to utilize the CIP Framework to fit its unique needs. It will also have the common base needed to assess the health of each ICANN organizational

¹ See p. 72 of the [ATRT3 Final Report](#).

structure in a predictable and consistent manner so that results can be understood holistically across the community.

ICANN org facilitated the formation of the Continuous Improvement Program Community Coordination Group (CIP-CCG), convened in January 2024, with the goal of developing the CIP Framework for implementation of ATRT3 Recommendation 3.6. The CIP-CCG was tasked with:

1. Developing a shared understanding of the meaning of Continuous Improvement in the context of ATRT3 Recommendation 3.6,
2. Considering a range of methodologies for effective continuous improvement programs,
3. Agreeing on the methodology that is fit for ICANN's purpose, and
4. Formulating a CIP Framework, which each SO, AC, and NomCom will use.

The development of the Continuous Improvement Program results from implementing ATRT3 recommendations pertaining to Specific and Organizational Reviews. The Continuous Improvement Program outputs will serve as inputs for the Holistic Review in the evaluation of its objectives (below), provided the work on the implementation of ATRT3 Recommendation 3.5 advances as planned², eventually culminating in the incorporation of the Holistic Review in the ICANN Bylaws. The eventual Holistic Review would serve as checks and balances on the self-assessment and continuous improvement efforts by the SOs, ACs, NomCom and their constituent parts.

The Holistic Review objectives (as described in the [ATR3 Final Report](#), p. 22) are to:

1. Review the effectiveness of the various inter-Supporting Organizations/Advisory Committees/Nominating Committee (SOs/ACs/NomCom) collaboration mechanisms.
2. Review the accountability of Supporting Organizations/Advisory Committees or constituent parts to their members and constituencies (this will include an in-depth analysis of the survey results).
3. Review SOs/ACs/NomCom as a whole to determine if they continue to have a purpose in the ICANN structure as they are currently constituted or if any changes in structures and operations are desirable to improve the overall effectiveness of ICANN as well as ensure optimal representation of community views (but taking into consideration any impacts on the Board or the Empowered Community).
4. Review continuous improvement efforts of SOs/ACs/NomCom based on good practices.

² See [Pilot Holistic Review Revised Terms of Reference \(ToR\) Public Comment proceeding](#). In January 2024, the ICANN Board agreed to proceed with Pilot Holistic Review with guidance to the Pilot Holistic Review Team, and to initiate consultation with SO/AC Chairs on the timing and potential deferral of the Fourth Review of Accountability and Transparency (ATR4). ICANN also initiated a community consultation on the timing of ATR4 to ensure efficient use of community resources. See [April 2024](#) Board resolution to initiate the Pilot Holistic Review and timing of ATR4.

Research and Development

Several activities were completed to prepare for the successful development and launch of a Continuous Improvement Program (CIP). Reference the [Continuous Improvement Project \(CIP\)](#) home for ongoing updates.

ICANN org conducted preliminary research into [tools](#) for community consideration in developing a Continuous Improvement Program draft framework for assessment, as detailed in this document. The research involved looking at continuous improvement tools used by other organizations and uncovered that there is a broad range of continuous improvement tools because there is a broad range of types of organizations and use cases. ICANN org researched and analyzed various tools based on the five criteria noted below, and proposed the principles/criteria/indicators approach to the CIP-CCG. The CIP-CCG determined this approach to be the best fit for the ICANN community in the development of a Continuous Improvement Program.

Proposed Definition of Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement is an ongoing process of identifying, analyzing, and making incremental improvements to systems, processes, products, or services. Its purpose is to drive efficiency, improve quality, and value delivery while minimizing waste, variation, and defects. The continuous improvement process is driven by ongoing feedback, collaboration, and data.³

Research Considerations

ATRT3 Recommendation 3.6 calls for the ICANN community to “evolve the content of Organizational Reviews into [a] Continuous Improvement Program in each SO/AC/NomCom.” It also states: “ICANN org shall work with each SO/AC/NomCom to establish a Continuous Improvement Program [that shares] a common base between all SOs, ACs, and the NomCom but will also allow for customization so as to best meet the needs of each individual SO/AC/NomCom.” ICANN org research looked for a solution that could provide:

- **Flexibility:** CIP Framework must offer flexibility for individualized fit to different structures.
- **Commonality:** Ensure a common base for assessing the health of various structures as articulated in the scope for Organizational Reviews as set forth at Article 4, Section 4.4 of the ICANN Bylaws.
- **Efficiency:** Seek an effective and efficient approach to avoid overburdening community resources.
- **Build on Existing Work:** Identify and build upon existing work to avoid duplicating efforts.
- **Areas for Improvement:** Understand what is working well and identify opportunities

³ Source: [BusinessMap.io](#).

for improvement.

The CIP-CCG reviewed ICANN org's research and [agreed](#) the principles, criteria, and indicator framework were fit for purpose.

Objectives of ATRT3 Rec 3.6 and Bylaws Article 4.4

While the process may change — from Organizational Reviews led by Independent Examiners into a Continuous Improvement Program led by the ICANN community — the mandate is the same:

Organizational Reviews are anchored in Article 4.4. of the [ICANN Bylaws](#) to assess the effectiveness of ICANN's Supporting Organizations, Advisory Committees⁴, and the Nominating Committee. Organizational Reviews specifically assess: (i) whether that organization, council or committee has a continuing purpose in the ICANN structure; (ii) if so, whether any change in structure or operations is desirable to improve its effectiveness; (iii) whether that organization, council or committee is accountable to its constituencies, stakeholder groups, organizations and other stakeholders.

Understanding Principles, Criteria and Indicators

A Continuous Improvement Program following a principles-based approach is broken down into Principles, Criteria, and Indicators.

- **Principles** describe the objectives of the Continuous Improvement Program (CIP) and define its fundamental goals.
- **Criteria** are the conditions that must be met to comply with a principle. A criterion is an element or set of conditions or processes by which a system characteristic is judged. Criteria define how a principle will be achieved without themselves being a measure of performance.
- **Indicators** define what the CIP will measure. Indicators are measurable states that allow assessing whether or not associated criteria are being met. Indicators are flexible, and they can include metrics, assessments, and or new processes put in place to meet criteria.

Consistency is provided by having shared principles. Flexibility is provided because each stakeholder group prioritized criteria and developed custom indicators to test the framework.

Please note that these customized frameworks were developed by the respective groups led by the representatives to the CIP-CCG. Several representatives to the CIP-CCG volunteered their group's work on the framework to serve as illustrative examples of the framework's application (see p. 9).

⁴ Currently, the Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC) is not subject to the Organizational Reviews as defined within the ICANN Bylaws.

Developing Principles

Principles were designed to describe the objectives of the Continuous Improvement Program. The objectives of Organizational Reviews are already defined in the current ICANN Bylaws. Historically, ICANN [Organizational Reviews](#) have asked whether the Supporting Organizations (SOs), Advisory Committees (ACs), and the Nominating Committee (NomCom) have a continuing purpose within the ICANN community. Using the Bylaws regarding Organizational Reviews as guidance, the CIP-CCG developed principles for the CIP. At the ICANN79 Community Forum in Puerto Rico, CIP-CCG volunteers held their first hybrid working meeting. During [this meeting](#), the group made substantial progress toward developing five common principles for the CIP. The CIP-CCG furthered its development of the principles in subsequent Phases of its work (see Appendix, “CIP-CCG Roadmap” and “Phases of CIP-CCG Timeline”), including the description of the “bottom-up” ICANN multistakeholder model. In consideration of SO, AC, and NomCom accountability (as described in Principle 4), the CIP-CCG recognized that the work of ICANN also benefits the global Internet population.

The CIP-CCG balanced the focus of Organizational Reviews on the structures (Supporting Organizations, Advisory Committees, and the NomCom) with the ATRT3 recommendation that the continuous improvement efforts by each structure also delve into their substructures, where applicable. The CIP-CCG acknowledged that the culture of continuous improvement is built from the “bottom-up” within the substructures where community members gather regularly to do their work. At the same time, the CIP-CCG concluded that the CIP Framework should apply at the organizational level (SO, AC, NomCom) to begin with. As the ICANN community continues working on how the overarching principles apply to each SO, AC, NomCom and their respective substructures, any necessary adjustments and fine-tuning to these overarching principles can evolve over time. For avoidance of doubt, substructures may apply the CIP framework to their individual substructure as a part of their ongoing continuous improvement activity. Such continuous improvement activity at the substructure level is encouraged.

The CIP-CCG adopted the following five overarching principles to be used by each SO, AC and NomCom to develop the criteria and indicators relevant to their groups (see “Developing Criteria and Indicators” for further information). The CIP-CCG envisions that the CIP Framework will be consistently applied across all structures while also providing the flexibility needed in recognizing the unique circumstances of each ICANN structure⁵.

⁵ Organizational structures with substructures include, for example: At-Large community and its At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC) and five Regional At-Large Organizations (RALOs), as well as the Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO) and its stakeholder groups and constituencies. These Organizational structures have existing processes to address continuous improvement, which continue to evolve. ICANN org will also support the community by putting uniform processes and tools in place to help the community prioritize and implement improvements. See p. 9 for more detail.

These overarching principles are as follows:

1. **The SO, AC, or NomCom is fulfilling its purpose.**
2. **The structures of SO, AC, or NomCom are effective.**
3. **The operations of SO, AC, or NomCom are efficient.**
4. **The SO, AC, or NomCom is accountable internally to its stakeholders and substructures (where applicable), and externally to the wider ICANN community.**
5. **The SO, AC, or NomCom collaborates to further the mission of ICANN and the effectiveness of the ICANN bottom-up multistakeholder model.**

Developing Criteria and Indicators

Leveraging Existing Continuous Improvement Work

The CIP-CCG volunteers mapped the existing continuous improvement activities of their community structure/group to inform the CIP Framework, including the established principles, criteria and indicators relevant to their groups. The information was used to compile a database (see Appendix, “CIP-CCG Existing Continuous Improvement Activities”), including information on identifying those activities, whether there are existing working groups involved in those activities, whether this information is publicly available, and examples of challenges and improvements related to continuous improvement in their structure.

This existing continuous improvement activity included content from a collaborative brainstorming from the hybrid meeting during the ICANN79 Community Forum. The group determined to use the “SMART” approach for indicators - i.e. an indicator or metric to measure or form a process for criteria, that should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound, (SMART). The CIP-CCG was also determined to utilize a minimum of [3-5 criteria](#) for each group.

Principles, Criteria, Indicators Framework Example

Below is an example of the principles, criteria, and indicators framework applied to a single CIP principle.

Principle

- **The operations of SO, AC, or NomCom are efficient.**

Criteria

- **Each structure has a process for planning and setting priorities.**
- Each structure efficiently assesses inputs related to its scope of responsibility.
- Each structure efficiently develops and recommends outputs relevant to its purpose (policy development, support policies, leadership placement).
- Each structure’s outputs are implemented efficiently, and implementation of outputs is monitored.

Indicators for criterion, “Each structure has a process for planning and setting priorities”:

- Yes (example of the process or working group).
- If No, the indicator could be to develop a process, that is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound (SMART).

Illustrative Examples of Draft Continuous Improvement Program (CIP) Framework

Several representatives to the CIP-CCG volunteered their group’s work on the framework to serve as illustrative examples.

- [At-Large Advisory Committee \(ALAC\)](#)
- [African Regional At-Large Organization \(AFRALO\)](#)
- [Asian, Australasian and Pacific Islands Regional At-Large Organization \(APRALO\)](#)
- [Nominating Committee \(NomCom\)](#)
- [Root Server System Advisory Committee \(RSSAC\)](#)

ICANN Community Engagement

All CIP-CCG volunteers consistently attended CIP-CCG meetings on a biweekly basis, with the majority of those attending 80% or more of meetings. CIP-CCG volunteers engaged consistently throughout the 2024 calendar year both within the CIP-CCG and with their respective groups to develop the draft framework, including criteria and indicators relevant to their groups. For example, one CIP-CCG representative noted “two and half months of continuous engagement and hard work with our group, including around 10 working sessions.” Other representatives to the CIP-CCG formed their own subgroup to discuss and align on the Continuous Improvement Program and how it would be implemented within their own organizational structure.

Executing the Continuous Improvement Program

The work of the CIP-CCG is focused on formulating a CIP Framework, which each SO, AC, and NomCom will use. This represents a portion of the entire Continuous Improvement Program. Other aspects of the CIP include two, three-year self-assessment cycles to each include an Assessment and Prioritization phase, Improvements phase, and Reporting Phase. The self-assessment cycle(s) will inform the Holistic Review, provided it will be supported by the ICANN community and approved by the ICANN Board. The Pilot Holistic Review team of community volunteers is designing how the eventual Holistic Review would work, taking into consideration this Continuous Improvement Framework.

Because the implementation of the Continuous Improvement Program by its nature is expected to be an iterative process, the execution of the next steps of the CIP following the adoption of the CIP Framework offers flexibility for the activities and the processes to evolve based on the needs of the SOs, ACs, NomCom, and their constituent parts where applicable.

The CIP Framework developed by the CIP-CCG is published for ICANN Public Comment before adoption by each SO, AC, and the NomCom, before the first CIP assessment period commences.

The first CIP assessment period is estimated to begin in 2025 and conclude at the end of 2027 (a period of three years), and the second assessment period is estimated to begin in 2028 and conclude at the end of 2030 (another three years). The CIP assessment cycle(s) will inform the Holistic Review. The three phases of each assessment period are broken down below. At a high level, the CIP-CCG proposes that the community-adopted CIP Framework be put into action through two, three-year assessment cycles:

- **Year 1:** Conduct a satisfaction survey to identify areas that need improvement. Analyze the input and identify priority improvement work to be carried out by each SO/AC/NomCom.
- **Year 2:** Carry out prioritized improvement work.
- **Year 3:** Analyze the results achieved through improvement work, report progress and results utilizing the CIP framework. Prepare to carry out the second three-year assessment cycle.

Assessment and Prioritization Phase (1st year)

As the work on the CIP Framework progresses with community support, the next phase of implementation of ATRT3 Recommendation 3.6 will include the CIP survey, gathering information, and establishing the cadence of work for the CIP Assessment periods.

The CIP Framework developed by the CIP-CCG will be used by each SO, AC, and the NomCom, to establish an assessment of their continuous improvement activities. The [ATRT3 Final Report](#) also described a “satisfaction survey of members/participants” for the CIP Assessment period, which would be administered during this phase.

This survey input and application of the CIP Framework will allow the SOs, ACs, and the NomCom to easily analyze input from their members/participants and prioritize improvements. Prioritization processes are in place for the SOs, ACs, and the NomCom to assess improvements from surveys and assessments utilizing the framework, to determine their feasibility given existing resources and evolving context.

Improvements Phase (2nd year)

The SOs, ACs, and the NomCom will implement identified improvements. Each Organizational structure will work with its leadership and/or relevant working group for their planning and implementation.

ICANN org will support this phase by putting consistent processes and tools in place to help the community prioritize and implement improvements.

Reporting Phase (3rd year)

The reporting phase would entail the SOs, ACs, and NomCom publishing reports of what each uncovered, what improvements were implemented and what results were achieved over the preceding two years of the assessment period. The reports will be based on the CIP Framework and will be published for Public Comment.

ICANN org will support this phase where appropriate, including the preparation of materials related to the Public Comment proceedings and summary reports.

The CIP-CCG acknowledges that several SOs and ACs have already identified subgroups within the structures to be responsible for leading the Continuous Improvement work, while others leveraged existing processes to report on the progress of this work. The CIP-CCG would like to encourage all groups to follow these good practices to help implement a culture of continuous improvement within ICANN.



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