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# Applicant Journey

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# 1. General Information

## 1.1 Eligibility

Established corporations, organizations, or institutions may apply for a new gTLD. Applications from individuals or sole proprietorships will not be considered. Applications from or on behalf of yet-to-be formed legal entities, or applications presupposing the future formation of a legal entity (for example, a pending Joint Venture) will not be considered.

## 1.2 Fees

Applicants are required to pay a gTLD evaluation fee of [USD \$227,000] per application. The only exceptions are qualified Applicant Support Program applicants, who are eligible to pay a reduced fee, and those applying for variant gTLDs and who meet specific criteria. Applicants may also be required to pay additional fees for conditional evaluations, e.g. if they wish to be designated as a Brand gTLD or have a Registry Voluntary Commitment added to their Registry Agreement. More information can be found in the [Fees and Payments] section.

## 1.3 Application and String Types

As described in [Application and String Types], certain application types may require differential treatment according to the nature of the application, string, or applicant.

The different types of applications are the following: General, Community, Geographic Name, Reserved Name, Brand, Internationalized Domain Name (IDN), Variant of Existing gTLD, Primary IDN TLD including one or more Variants, Category 1 Safeguard, Government/IGO Applicant, Applicant Support Applicant.

In addition, certain strings will trigger specific processing and evaluation procedures: Geographic Names, IDN TLDs, Blocked and Reserved Names, and Strings subject to Category 1 Safeguards.

# 2. Application Stages

This section provides a description of the stages that an application passes through once it is submitted. Some stages will occur for all applications submitted; others will only occur in specific circumstances.

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## 2.1 Application Submission

*Expected duration: 15 weeks*

### 2.1.1 Creation of an ICANN Account

Before they can access the TLD Application Management System (TAMS) in order to submit their application, applicants must register for a valid ICANN user account on the ICANN account website, and enable multi-factor authentication (MFA).

### 2.1.2 Application Submission Period

The application submission period is scheduled to open for 105 days on [27 April 2026] at 00:01 UTC and close on [10 August 2026] at 23:59 UTC. Applications must be submitted electronically through TAMS. Applicants are encouraged to consult the [TAMS User Guide] for information on how to use the system.

To be considered, all applications must be submitted by the close of the application submission period; the system will not allow for late submissions. Applicants are encouraged to submit their completed applications as soon as practicable after the application submission period opens because waiting until the end of this period to begin the process will not provide sufficient time to applicants to submit a complete application on time due to the number of steps that must be completed.

*[Applicants must also pay their gTLD evaluation fee [timeframe] for their application to be considered, as described in [Fees and Payments]].*

After submitting their application, applicants will not be able to make any changes outside the processes described in [Application Change Request], which can only be submitted following the closing of the application submission period.

### 2.1.3 Application Questions and Strings

The application will consist of the following sections to be completed upon user registration:

1. Organization Information
2. gTLD Application Information

To complete the application, users will answer a series of questions listed in [Application Questions] and provide supporting documents as listed in [section x]; the system will validate that all mandatory fields include a response before applicants can submit their application. Applications must be submitted with a *bona fide* (“good faith”) intention to operate the gTLD.

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Applicants must affirmatively attest to a bona fide intention to operate the gTLD clause for all applications that they submit. ICANN reserves the right to disallow an application from moving forward if it determines that question responses were not submitted in good faith.

Each application is for one gTLD and may include one or more of its allocatable variants, as applicable, or for one or more allocatable variants of an existing gTLD.<sup>1</sup> In their application, applicants may also elect to submit a Replacement String. An applicant may submit as many applications as desired; however, it should be noted that the Organization Information will be locked after the first application is submitted and cannot be modified for any subsequent application submission. If applicants plan to submit more than one gTLD application, they should be aware that the Organization Information section will be the same for all applications.<sup>2</sup>

## 2.1.4 Replacement String Selection

To potentially reduce the instances of string contention, applicants may also elect to submit Replacement Strings, as described in [\[Replacement String\]](#).<sup>3</sup>

## 2.1.5 Closed Generics

[\[The language was already published for Public Comment\]](#)

## 2.1.6 DNS Stability Review

Certain tests aimed at determining whether an applied-for string will not adversely affect the security or stability of the Domain Name System (DNS) and comply with DNS and other relevant standards are incorporated into and implemented automatically via TAMS; should a string not pass one of these tests, the applicant will receive an error message explaining the detected problem(s), and the application will not be allowed to proceed and submit their application. It should be noted that this review does not include the Name Collision Initial Assessment, which is part of the String Review and is performed after the application is submitted. The results of the DNS Stability Review can be challenged. For more information, refer to [\[DNS Stability Review\]](#).

## 2.1.7 Blocked Name Identification

Certain strings, referred to as “Blocked Names”, are not available for delegation. During application drafting, the system will automatically verify whether the applicant’s entered string and variants (where applicable) are Blocked Names. Should this be the case, the applicant will

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to [\[IDNs\]](#) for information on variants.

<sup>2</sup> More information on the [Financial Capability](#) can be found in [\[section x\]](#).

<sup>3</sup> Information on the Replacement String can be found in [\[String Contention and Contention Resolution Procedures\]](#).

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not be able to move forward with their string selection and submit their application, unless a different string is selected. See [\[Blocked Names\]](#) for more details on what names are blocked. Please note that the TAMS will perform an automated check on blocked names, preventing anyone from submitting an application for an identical match of a blocked name.

## 2.1.8 Reserved Name Identification

Certain strings, known as “Reserved Names”, are available as gTLD strings at the top level only through a validation process. These names are designated for specific entities, which are the only ones eligible to apply for them. ICANN org maintains a list of Reserved Names, compiled from various sources, and requires relevant entities to provide appropriate documentation, as outlined in the [\[Blocked and Reserved Names\]](#) section. During application drafting, the system will automatically verify whether the selected string and allocatable variants (where applicable) are a Reserved Name. If there is a positive match, the applicant will be requested to upload supporting documentation proving they are the entity for which the name is reserved, as described in [\[Reserved Name Identification\]](#).

## 2.2 Pre Evaluation Processes

### 2.2.1 Administrative Check

***Expected duration:*** ≥ 8 weeks

Immediately following the close of the application submission period, ICANN will perform necessary administrative due diligence and verify whether the evaluation fees have been received. The administrative check is expected to be completed for all applications in a period of approximately [\[8\]](#) weeks, subject to the overall application volume. In the event of a high volume of applications resulting in ICANN not being able to process all applications within this period, ICANN will post an updated timeline as soon as feasible.

### 2.2.3 Reveal Day

As soon as feasible after the Administrative Check is completed for all applications, on ‘Reveal Day’, ICANN will post to the [\[Next Round website\]](#) the list of all applications that have passed the administrative check, including the relevant applied-for strings and allocatable variants (where applicable) and Replacement Strings (also where applicable). The public portions of each application will also be made available.

### 2.2.4 Replacement Period

***Expected duration:*** 2 weeks

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Once applicants have access to the full list of applied-for strings, allocatable variants, and Replacement Strings, they will have the opportunity to replace their applied-for string with their replacement string. Applicants that have selected an eligible replacement string will have [14] days - known as the Replacement Period - to notify ICANN via TAMS of their intention to replace their original applied-for string with the Replacement String identified in their application. Refer to [\[Replacement Strings\]](#) for more information.

## 2.2.5 String Confirmation Day

On String Confirmation Day, ICANN will post an updated list of applications and their chosen strings (whether original or replacement, as noted above). Although contention sets will not yet be published at this stage, applicants should note that identical strings will enter contention, as described in [\[Contention as a Result of Applications for Identical gTLD Strings\]](#).

## 2.2.6 Prioritization Draw

No later than [\[x\]](#) days after String Confirmation Day, a Prioritization Draw will be held to determine the Priority Number of an application and the general order in which it will be processed by ICANN, as described in [\[section x\]](#).

## 2.3 Community Input and Dispute Resolution

Starting on String Confirmation Day, the community will have the opportunity to provide input as described below.

### 2.3.1 Application Comments

The general public will be able to post Application Comments to the Application Comment Forum, as described in the [\[Application Comments section\]](#). ICANN will provide the evaluators with the comments and responses relating to the application(s) they will evaluate. Only the comments and responses received during the comment windows following String Confirmation Day and following applicable Application Change Requests will be considered by the evaluation panels. See [\[Application Change Requests\]](#) for more information.

### 2.3.2 GAC Member Early Warnings

ICANN's Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC) members may issue GAC Member Early Warnings in the [90] days following String Confirmation Day, per the [\[GAC Member Early Warnings\]](#).

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## 2.3.3 GAC Advice

The GAC can provide GAC Advice to the ICANN Board on any application, as outlined in the ICANN Bylaws and as described in the [\[GAC Advice\]](#).

## 2.3.4 Singular/Plural Notification

In the [30] days following String Confirmation Day, via the Singular/Plural Notification, the general public may notify ICANN that either two applied-for strings represent the singular and plural version of the same word in the same language or that an applied-for string represents the singular or plural version in the same language of the same word of a delegated string, strings being processed from a previous new gTLD round, or a Blocked Name. For more information, refer to the [\[Singular/Plural Notification\]](#).

## 2.3.5 Objections

Parties with standing may file Objections against specific applications and have them considered before a Panel of qualified experts, as described in the [\[Objections\]](#). The non-prevailing party may file an appeal against the determination.

## 2.4 String Evaluation

***Expected duration: 6 months***

String Evaluation focuses solely on the evaluation of the applied-for strings and their allocatable variants. It starts after the String Confirmation Day, and is expected to take [\[six months\]](#); it should be noted that it will partially run in parallel with the Community Input phase. String Evaluation comprises the four elements described below, whose evaluation will take place in parallel. It should be noted that String Evaluation, unlike Application and Applicant Evaluation, does not follow the priority order.

See [\[String Evaluation\]](#) for more information.

### 2.4.1 String Similarity Evaluation

The String Similarity Evaluation will be performed by an expert panel with the objective to prevent user confusion and loss of confidence in the DNS resulting from delegation of visually similar strings, as described in detail in [\[String Similarity Evaluation\]](#).

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## 2.4.2 Name Collision Initial Assessment

The Name Collision Initial Assessment aims to identify strings with a high risk of name collision, as described in [\[Name Collision\]](#). If a string is found to be high-risk, the applicant will have an opportunity to submit a Mitigation Plan for evaluation, which will allow the application to proceed. Otherwise, it will be added to the Collision String List. The section also includes information on Temporary Delegation, which is an additional process applicable for strings not initially identified as high-risk.

## 2.4.3 Safeguard Assessment

The Safeguard Assessment will determine if any applied-for strings should be required to have specific safeguards as it relates to consumer protection, sensitive strings, and regulated markets. More information is found in the [\[Safeguard Assessment\]](#) section.

## 2.4.4 Geographic Name Identification

As part of the Geographic Name Identification, a panel will review all of the applied-for strings and identify which strings may be considered a Geographic Name, as described in the [\[Geographic Names\]](#) section. Note that this is separate from the Geographic Name Verification evaluation that would take place as part of [\[Application and Applicant Evaluation\]](#).

*Note that [\[2.5\]](#) only applies to strings that were not identified as potentially high-risk in the Name Collision Initial Assessment.*

## 2.5 Temporary Delegation

Strings that were not identified as high-risk in the Name Collision Initial Assessment will undergo temporary delegation in priority order of the applications for that string. Temporary Delegation can start as soon as the Name Collision Initial Assessment has been concluded, even if other evaluations part of String Evaluation are still being performed, and will follow the priority order. The duration of Temporary Delegation will be defined as part of the Name Collision process and criteria. ICANN will evaluate the data collected during temporary delegation and determine whether the string is high-risk or is eligible to proceed. Should it be found that the string is high-risk, it will be removed from the root zone and the applicant will have an opportunity to submit a Mitigation Plan for evaluation, which will allow the application to proceed. Otherwise the string will be added to the Collision String List. See more information in [\[Name Collision\]](#). The conclusion of Temporary Delegation is not necessary for other processes, e.g. Application and Applicant Evaluation or contention set resolution, to

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start. However, an application will be able to proceed to contracting only when temporary delegation is concluded and the mitigation plan implemented (if applicable).

## 2.6 Publication of String Evaluation Reports and Contention Sets

Once the String Evaluation is completed, String Evaluation Reports for all applications, as well as a list of contention sets, will be posted to the [\[Next Round website\]](#).

## 2.7 String Confusion Objections and Identification of Potential New Contention Sets

As described in [\[Objections\]](#), following the publication of the initial list of contention sets, there will be a second 30-day submission window for String Confusion Objections only. Applications that received a String Confusion Objection may create additional contention sets, depending on the DRSP's determination. Should new contention sets be created, they will be published to the [\[Next Round website\]](#).

*Note that [\[2.12\]](#) and [\[2.13\]](#) only apply to applications that are part of a contention set.*

## 2.8 Community Priority Evaluation

Once all contention sets have been finalized and all applications in the contention set are eligible to proceed to contention resolution, Community applicants in contention may elect to go through Community Priority Evaluation (CPE). CPE is an independent analysis conducted by an expert panel which determines whether a community-based application fulfills the CPE criteria and should receive priority in the contention set. More information on the process and criteria can be found in [\[Community Priority Evaluation\]](#).

## 2.9 ICANN New gTLD Auction

ICANN will hold an auction with the objective to resolve string contention among applicants for new gTLDs. If an auction winner is ineligible to execute the Registry Agreement with ICANN, ICANN may at its option offer to the runner-up applicant of the applicable auction, if any, the opportunity to proceed with their application. More information can be found in [\[ICANN New gTLD Auction\]](#).

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## 2.10 Application and Applicant Evaluation

Application and Applicant Evaluation occur after the application either (a) has passed String Evaluation and the application is not part of a contention set, or (b) has passed String Evaluation and has prevailed in the contention set. These evaluations will be conducted in parallel based on the priority number of the application, unless other processes are preventing the application from proceeding. Evaluation panels may issue Clarifying Questions to the applicants, who will be notified via the system and will have to reply within a specified timeframe. See [\[Application and Applicant Evaluation\]](#) for more information.

### 2.10.1 Applicant Evaluation

Applicant evaluation comprises the two evaluations described below. Both evaluations are mandatory.

#### 2.10.1.1 Background Screening

→ *Mandatory*

Background Screening is a mechanism that facilitates registrant protection by ensuring only established corporations, organizations or institutions in good standing are permitted to operate a new gTLD. See [\[Background Screening\]](#) for more information.

#### 2.10.1.2 Financial and Operational Evaluation<sup>4</sup>

→ *Mandatory*

The Financial and Operational Evaluation assesses whether an applicant has the financial and operational capacity to fund the registry long-term and has reasonable safeguards in place to enable robust operations of the business and handling of abuse concerns. Refer to [\[Financial and Operational Evaluation\]](#) for more details.

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<sup>4</sup> All previous ICANN TLD application rounds included financial as well technical and operational evaluation. Based on experience and feedback from the 2012 round, most technical and operational evaluation and due diligence has been moved to the Registry Service Provider (RSP) Evaluation Program, as these functions are performed by one or more contracted RSPs. However, a very small number of technical and operational questions cover the Applicant's operations (i.e., not the operations of a contracted RSP) and therefore remain in the main round application under financial and operational evaluation.

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## 2.10.2 Application Evaluation

Application evaluation comprises the evaluations described below. Only the Registry Service Provider Selection is mandatory.

### 2.10.2.1 Registry Services Provider Selection

→ *Mandatory*

All new gTLD applicants are required to use one or more evaluated Registry Service Providers (RSPs), which are evaluated via the [RSP Evaluation Program](#). In the application, the gTLD applicant is strongly encouraged to identify the RSPs it intends to use and the Registry Services it intends to offer in the proposed gTLD(s). Alternatively, the gTLD applicant may submit an application without specifying RSP(s) during the submission window. Refer to [\[RSP selection in application\]](#) for more details.

### 2.10.2.1 Geographic Names Evaluation

→ *Optional/conditional*

A Geographic Names Panel will verify the relevance and authenticity of the supporting documentation for any application for a string determined to be a Geographic Name during the String Evaluation, as described in [\[Geographic Names Evaluation\]](#).

### 2.10.2.2 Reserved Names Evaluation

→ *Optional/conditional*

A Reserved Names Panel will determine whether the appropriate organization has applied for the reserved string and verify the supporting documentation, as described in [\[Reserved Names Evaluation\]](#).

### 2.10.2.3 Name Collision High Risk Mitigation Plan Evaluation

→ *Optional/conditional*

An applicant for a string that ICANN has determined presents high risk of Name Collision and has cleared contention may submit a High-Risk String Mitigation Plan for review. The Plan will be reviewed by technical experts. More information can be found in [\[High-Risk String Mitigation Plan Evaluation\]](#).

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## 2.10.2.4 Code of Conduct Exemption Evaluation

→ *Optional/conditional*

If a Registry Operator registers all domain names in the TLD exclusively for and to be used only by itself or its affiliates, and the Registry Operator would like to waive the protection for itself and its affiliates, ICANN may grant the Registry Operator an exemption to the Code of Conduct (Specification 9 of the Registry Agreement), provided the TLD is not a generic string and the Registry Operator can satisfy the exemption criteria. Please see [\[Code of Conduct Exemption Evaluation section\]](#) for more information regarding this evaluation.

## 2.10.2.5 Registry Commitments Evaluation

→ *Optional/conditional*

As described [\[PICs/RVCs/Community Registration Policies\]](#), each registry commitment proposed by the applicant for inclusion in the applicable Registry Agreement will be assessed by ICANN.

### 2.10.2.5.1 Registry Voluntary Commitments Evaluation

Each proposed Registry Voluntary Commitment (RVC) for each applied-for gTLD string and its applied-for allocatable variant strings, if applicable, will be subject to ICANN evaluation and approval, with the objective to determine whether it meets all the evaluation criteria as set out in [\[PICs/RVCs - Section 3.3\]](#) for inclusion in Specification 11 of the Registry Agreement.

### 2.10.2.5.2 Community Registration Policies Evaluation

Proposed Community Registration Policies are also subject to ICANN evaluation and approval before they can be included in Specification 12 of the Registry Agreement. More information can be found in [\[PICs/RVCs - Section 4\]](#).

## 2.10.2.6 Brand Eligibility Evaluation

→ *Optional/conditional*

The purpose of the Brand Eligibility Evaluation is to confirm that the applicant meets the criteria for a Brand designation. A successful Brand designation will result in a Specification 13 being added to the Applicant's Registry Agreement if the applicant successfully completes all phases of evaluation. Refer to [\[Brand Eligibility Evaluation\]](#) for the details.

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Applicants for Brand TLDs who are found in contention will be given the option to change their string and avoid further contention resolution procedures by completing a Brand String Change Request, subject to the requirements set out in [\[Brand String Change Request\]](#).

### 2.10.2.7 Variant Eligibility Evaluation

→ *Optional/conditional*

An applicant seeking one or more allocatable variant gTLDs of an applied-for primary IDN gTLD or existing IDN gTLD must provide the justification for the need of each variant gTLD being applied-for. This justification will be evaluated by a panel on a general standard of reasonableness. See [\[IDNs - Justification of Variant gTLDs and its Evaluation\]](#) for more information. Variants will be included in Specification 14 of the Registry Agreement.

## 2.10.3 Publication of Application and Applicant Evaluation Reports

Application and Applicant Evaluation reports will be published on a rolling basis, based on the priority number. It should be noted that certain processes, such as, e.g., Application Change Requests, string contention, objections, may affect the timing of the publication of the reports.

## 2.11 Contracting

An applicant successfully completing all the relevant stages outlined in this section must execute a Registry Agreement with ICANN before it is eligible for delegation of its applied-for gTLD (and variants, where applicable) into the DNS root zone. Successful applicants will be invited to provide additional contracting information, including their authorized signatory.

The Registry Agreement is the product of extensive community consultation. ICANN will only consider modification to the agreement in extraordinary circumstances, such as situations in which unique legal, jurisdictional, or regulatory issues would legally prevent an entity from executing the Registry Agreement as-is. Applicants who request to negotiate limited amendments to the Registry Agreement will be required to provide a rationale justifying the need for such changes, along with a redline of the requested changes. Applicants are strongly encouraged to inform ICANN as soon as possible in the process. In such cases, additional fees may apply, as described in the [\[Fees and Payments\]](#). The Registry Agreement will reflect the application responses and the evaluation results as follows:

- Public Interest Commitments, including Registry Voluntary Commitments and Safeguards, are included in Specification 11,
- Community Registration Policies are included in Specification 12,
- Information on Brand applications are included in Specification 13,

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- Information on variants are included in Specification 14,
  - Special Provision Relating to Intergovernmental Organizations or Governmental Entities in Article 7.

Absent extraordinary circumstances, applicants are required to execute the contract within **[90 days]** from the time they are invited to start the contracting process.

## 2.12 Post Contracting

[The [language](#) was already published for Public Comment]

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## 3. Processes Overview

[placeholder for visual with process overview]

## 4. Posted Materials

ICANN will post the following materials related to the submitted applications to the [Next Round website](#):

- Public portions of the applications
- Assigned Priority Number
- Application status and stages
- Applications with GAC Member Early Warnings and GAC Advice
- Statuses of objections and appeals
- Application Comments
- Any changes to the public portion of the application due to Application Change Requests
- Evaluation result reports (String, Application and Applicant, and CPE)
- Name Collision Initial Assessment report
- Temporary Delegation report
- High-Risk Mitigation Plans
- Extended Evaluation and Evaluation Challenge reports
- Clarifying Questions (CQs) and Applicant’s CQ Responses for the public portions of the applications
- List of contention sets
- CPE election status
- Auction status and results
- Registry Agreements

## 5. Lifecycle Timelines

The table below provides a high-level estimation of the duration of each process in months based on the number of applications submitted. It should be noted that the indicated durations refer to a simple and standard application part of the first priority batch, not subject to GAC Advice, objections, or conditional evaluations, not in contention, and not having any other issues. Applications in later priority batches may be held until their designated processing time.

Estimated duration in months						
# apps	Pre-Evaluation Processes	String Evaluations	Application and Applicant Evaluation	Contracting	Post Contracting to Delegation	Total
500	3	4	3	1	2	13
1,000	3	4.5				13.5

1,500	4	5				15
2,000	4	5.5				15.5
3,500	5	7.5				18.5

The table below provides an estimation of the duration of some of the conditional processes an application may be subject to.

Process	Estimated duration in months
Objection	4
Community Priority Evaluation	6
ICANN Auction	3
Other Evaluations	Varies depending on the evaluation element
Extended Evaluations and Evaluation Challenges	Varies depending on the nature of the challenge or the evaluation element

It should be noted that these tables do not cover all possible scenarios and that a number of factors may have an impact on the duration of each process. Metrics on the various processes will be posted to the [\[Next Round website\]](#) and regularly updated.

## 6. Application Statuses

An application will have one of the following statuses:

- **Active:** The application is progressing in the New gTLD Program process.
- **On hold:** The application has pending activities that may impact its progress, e.g. accountability mechanisms or objections.
- **Withdrawn:** The application is voluntarily terminated by the applicant. This process is irreversible.
- **Pending Termination:** Application did not meet the criteria set forth in the Applicant Guidebook and cannot proceed further in the Program. Applicant has not exhausted all

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avenues, such as such as but not limited to challenge of an evaluation or appeal to an expert determination.<sup>5</sup>

- **Terminated:** Applicant has exhausted further actions and will not continue in the New gTLD Program.
- **Contracted:** The Contracted status is assigned after the Registry Agreement is fully signed. The applicant then becomes a Registry Operator for the applied for string.
- **Delegated:** The TLD has been added to the DNS root zone.

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that this is limited to challenges and appeals and does not include Accountability Mechanisms.