ICANN | GAC
Governmental Advisory Committee

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Governmental Advisory Committee Comments Regarding Draft ICANN FY25-29 Operating & Financial Plan and Draft FY25 Operating Plan & Budget
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Introduction

The ICANN Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC) welcomes the opportunity to provide comments on the _Draft ICANN FY25 Plans_, including the _Draft ICANN FY25–29 Operating and Financial Plan_ and the _Draft ICANN FY25 Operating Plan and Draft ICANN FY25 Budget_ published on 12 December 2023 (see - https://www.icann.org/en/public-comment/proceeding/draft-icann-fy25-plans-12-12-2023). GAC members have reviewed ICANN org's draft planning documents and herein provide targeted comments regarding specific aspects of the draft proposals that are applicable to planned or recommended GAC activities.[1]

General Comments

The GAC thanks the ICANN org Finance Team for continuing to evolve and improve the detail and scope of information provided to the community in the draft operating plan and budget materials. Over the past few years, the GAC Leadership has observed ongoing improvements to the format and detail of the extensive materials made available for community review.

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[1] This comment was prepared by the Committee's leadership and is made on behalf of the entire GAC. It has been subjected to review of the GAC membership and is intended to complement, but not replace, any input that may be provided on the Draft FY25-29 Operating & Financial Plan and Draft FY25 Operating Plan & Budget by individual GAC members.

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Specific GAC Comments

The GAC is pleased to acknowledge the apparent careful coordination within and between both the *Draft ICANN FY25–29 Operating and Financial Plan* (hereinafter Draft FY25-29 O&FP - https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/files/draft-op-financial-fy25-29-opplan-fy25-2023-en.pdf) and the *Draft ICANN FY25 Operating Plan and Budget* (hereinafter Draft FY25 Budget - https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/files/draft-budget-fy25-2023-en.pdf). The draft documentation allows readers to see how the organization's strategic and operating initiatives are addressed over the course of both one-year and five-year operating plan periods. This coordination is important in providing assurances to governments that particular areas of GAC interest are preserved as important organizational operational priorities that will be adequately resourced over the next five years – particularly as work is underway for development of the next 5-year strategic plan.

A. Additional Budget Request Process Discontinued

As confirmed by the ICANN staff response to a community clarifying question (see *Draft FY25 Clarifying Questions and Responses – 29 January 2024*), "the Additional Budget Request process has come to an end for this current planning cycle, [and] ICANN encourages community groups to use the annual Operating Plan and Budget process … for all resource requests going forward." The GAC notes the ICANN staff 's belief that "[s]treamlining resource requests from the ICANN community into a single process is expected to result in more efficiencies," and will monitor this revised approach to evaluate that expected success.

As a consequence of this process change, this document identifies particular resource requests that the GAC would otherwise present in the ABR phase of the planning process.

B. Community Engagement and Services

In describing functional activities involving community engagement and service, the Draft FY25-29 O&FP continues to recognize the need for increased resources to address "[s]takeholder demand for engagement and capacity development through the GAC's Underserved Regions Working Group and Public Safety Working Group" (*see* Draft FY25-29 O&FP at page 80).

The GAC is pleased to see that those workshops are adequately resourced in the core organizational budget during FY25 (see Draft FY25-29 O&FP at page 24). The GAC expects to be

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able to use the available engagement resources to plan and implement intersessional activities and face-to-face workshops in conjunction with ICANN public meetings during FY25.

C. Constituency Travel

The GAC appreciates the resource commitment in the Draft FY25 Budget to maintain constituency travel support at the current budget levels. The GAC expects that in future budget years it may be needed to increase community travel support to encourage in-person attendance at ICANN public events - particularly given renewed emphasis by the committee to promote face-to-face engagement among government representatives to the GAC.

The GAC appreciates that the resources devoted to GAC travel in FY25 will offer flexibility for the committee leadership to organize strategic discussions and other activities that are important for committee planning and organizational efforts.

D. Operating Initiatives

GAC members generally support the 11 ICANN Operating Initiatives as described in the draft documentation (see Draft FY25-29 O&FP at page 13, 126 and 129) – particularly the initiative regarding "geopolitical monitoring, engagement, and mitigation" (see id. at pages 28-30 and 145-148). It is noted that this important operating initiative continues to be a key consideration across a number of the ICANN organization's functional activities in both the five-year and one-year time frames including in Government and Intergovernmental Engagement (id. at pages 78, 80 and 198), Policy Development and Implementation Support (id. at 181), and Community Engagement and Services (id. at 188).

Governmental regulatory attention related to Internet issues has become one of the key factors impacting the current Internet ecosystem, and in particular ICANN, in recent years. Noting that ICANN is committing resources in each of the mentioned functional activities above, the GAC reaffirms its commitment to ICANN's mission to ensure the stable and secure operation of the DNS.

E. Operational Tools and Resources

1. Identification and Investigation of Improved Policy Management System Tools

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As the expectations for contributions from community groups to both policy and operational aspects of the ICANN mission continue to expand, the GAC and other community groups find that organizational effectiveness and efficiencies become more and more necessary to help the community "work smarter" to address growing demands for their input. These expanding expectations are reinforced by the inexorable growth of ICANN staff resources (up to a total of 460 "average FTEs" by the end of FY25 (see *Draft FY25 Budget* at page 6). With past experience as a guide, it is evident that a highly competent and professional staff produces substantial workload demands on the community. GAC members believe that the organization and community leaders must explore additional project and system management tools at an enterprise level that could help groups maximize their policy and advice efforts.

The GAC Chair and Vice chairs have been informally researching some of these tools and would like to see the overall strategic plan include intentions for improved community efficiencies with the expectation that ICANN technical staff collaborate with the community to explore potential policy management tools and share their assessments with the community.

2. Increased Accessibility to ICANN's Work

As part of the final Additional Budget Request (ABR) process during the FY24 planning period (see
https://community.icann.org/display/projfinadhocws/FY24+Additional+Budget+Request+%28ABR%29+Process), resources were authorized for the ICANN organization to conduct initial testing and feasibility analysis of a potential sign language interpretation service pilot during ICANN Public Meetings. The ABR report released at the conclusion of the FY24 budgeting effort clearly stated the principle that ICANN, "welcomed the GAC proposal and is committed to inclusion of the deaf and hard of hearing communities during ICANN Public Meetings" (see ICANN Fiscal Year 2024 Additional Budget Request Process (April 2023) at pages 6-7).

According to the ABR report, the estimated support authorized by the ICANN Board was intended to allow for a feasibility assessment and made the point that the grant did not include funding for an initial sign language pilot, if any (see *id.* at page 7). Consequently, it was recognized in the ABR report that due to the complex resource implications of providing sign language interpretation, ICANN would evaluate this approved exploratory phase as part of its further consideration of launching a pilot phase.

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ICANN committed that the ICANN Language Services Team would work with the ICANN Meeting Technical Services Team to consider the required resourcing, training, and testing for such a potential interpretation service and develop a feasibility assessment implementing a pilot effort for such a potential service (see _id._).

GAC Members expect ICANN to follow through on these commitments. The assessment effort is off to a slow start in FY24 and the GAC expects a commitment from ICANN in the FY25 Budget to ensure that further resources are provided at a commensurate level for this work to be initiated and continued productively (assuming a prompt start during the remaining time in FY24) in the next fiscal year.

Closing

The GAC is grateful to ICANN org for this opportunity to share the committee's perspective on the Draft ICANN FY25–29 Operating and Financial Plan and the Draft ICANN FY25 Operating Plan and Budget. The GAC looks forward to contributing to future comment opportunities as they relate to ICANN's finances and other operations-related proceedings.

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