



# Comment on Draft Proposal of the New Fellowship Program Approach

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**Business Constituency Submission**

**GNSO//CSG//BC**

## **Background**

This document is the response of the ICANN Business Constituency (BC), from the perspective of business users and registrants, as defined in our Charter:

The mission of the Business Constituency is to ensure that ICANN policy positions are consistent with the development of an Internet that:

1. promotes end-user confidence because it is a safe place to conduct business
2. is competitive in the supply of registry and registrar and related services
3. is technically stable, secure and reliable.

## **Comments regarding the BC's experience with the Fellowship Program over its ten-year history<sup>1</sup>**

The BC has been engaged with the Fellowship Program over its ten years, so our comments reflect our longer-term and recent experience.

For a variety of reasons, the ICANN Fellowship Program has delivered limited *direct* contribution to identifying and bringing qualified business users into the BC. The BC has made numerous efforts to compensate for that, including developing and co-funding a senior leadership program that identifies highly qualified, senior executives from associations or businesses from developing countries; direct engagement with ICANN staff, etc. The BC has also conducted a number of outreach/awareness events, often collaboratively with ICANN, but also with groups affiliated with BC members.

A “rough” analysis of the listed Fellows was undertaken by the BC mentor/mentee in the Community Onboarding Pilot. This analysis indicates that of the roughly 600+ Fellows, between 2 and 3 percent have been qualified to join the BC. The BC successfully recruited those fellows that were qualified, and values the contribution that they are making to the BC. However, for the BC's overall recruitment of qualified business users, the Fellowship Program has brought very few qualified BC candidates.

Still, the BC values the broader contribution of the ICANN Fellowship Program to ICANN overall, and, with certain improvements, believes it can make a stronger and more direct contribution to ICANN as well as to the Business Constituency efforts to reach qualified business user candidates that can quickly integrate into ICANN and contribute to ICANN's core mission and activities. Thus, our comments provide some suggestions that can be undertaken in the short term, and then contribute to a longer term and more effective Fellowship Program that can serve ICANN for the next ten years.

## **On the objectives of the Fellowship program**

The objective of the program overall should be to bring in new and more diverse potential stakeholders into ICANN communities that would normally not be able to make the initial investment necessary to attend the global meetings and become more integrated into ICANN. In order to begin to be an informed and engaged contributor, first attending one or two ICANN face to face meetings fosters a

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<sup>1</sup> ICANN public comment page, at <https://www.icann.org/public-comments/fellowship-proposal-2018-06-11-en>

broader sense of community, allows for more intense and meaningful learning experiences, and also connects stakeholders with opportunities that, in turn, can help make their participation in ICANN sustainable.

However, we do note that it is critical that any Fellow take seriously from the beginning that they need to build their own credibility within their chosen “home” community, so that they can move from Fellow into full community participant, as Fellowship and other funding programs from ICANN are quite limited.

ICANN has both need for a wide community that understands who ICANN is and what it does, and what it does not do. Coordination of the unique identifiers of the Internet, and related policy development are key aspects of ICANN’s mission.

Increasing awareness and general support to ICANN and bringing in participants from developing countries is a worthwhile objective for an initial participant in the Fellowship Program, but for a returning Fellow, success should be measured in terms of overall engagement in ICANN activities – ranging from policy development to ICANN governance, security and stability.

From their first approval for ICANN funding as a Fellow, those funded as Fellows should be on a track to becoming community members.

In order to establish reasonable metrics, an assessment of how Fellows move into the various parts of ICANN and also engage in related activities where ICANN is discussed, and its role or activities are affected would be extremely useful. The materials and messages especially coming from ICANN staff at all levels used to “promote” the Fellowship Program should also be examined and changed to convey the expectation that the Fellowship Program is for onboarding into ICANN, even when it is not possible to attend all ICANN face to face meetings.

We note again the importance of the Fellows being encouraged to seek out, or even create localized opportunities, such as participating in their national IGF, perhaps supporting or collaborating with ICANN staff on a workshop that is relevant to the local community’s interest. However, we believe that the purpose has to remain a global focus, not devolving into sub regional activities only, or even primarily.

### **Effectiveness of the Fellowship Program**

The program is somewhat effective in bringing in people from countries located in underserved regions, but it is quite unclear how “balance” is achieved in the selection of Fellows. For example, after a highly successful event in one country, organized by the BC, which included several ICANN staff speakers – most of whom referenced and encouraged applying for the ICANN fellowship program, 19 applications from that country were submitted to the Fellowship Program, ranging from professors to business leaders, to NGOs – yet, not a single Fellow was selected. And none since.

The BC also notes, based on experience of outcomes that the Fellowship and NextGen programs have a strong bias towards civil society or potential At-Large members, with a decreased priority given to other stakeholder groups, particularly those of the business sector. This can be both due to issues in the

recruitment and selection process and due to issues in the marketing of the program. These issues need to be examined, and improved moving forward to enable the Fellowship Program to be the valued contributor to diversification of participants for the longer term of ICANN's future, and to demonstrate that the Fellowship Program is fit for purpose for the next ten years. The next ten years is a critical period for ICANN as it will continue to face challenges from various UN agencies and some continually under engaged parties.

In our experience, ICANN staff at all levels can benefit from better understanding of the various stakeholder groups, which is why we strongly value the role of the Business V.P. for Engagement which adds the kind of focused priority that the BC views as needed in outreach to the business user community in particular.

### **Contribution of Fellows to the BC**

Fellows who have joined the BC are active contributors to policy work and are central to the work of the BC Outreach Committee. Some have organized outreach/recruitment events or acted as the BC speaker at events that offer opportunity to do outreach to business users. One former Fellow is part of the Cross Community Working Group on Auction Proceeds as a participant and one as an Observer. A former Fellow is the key Business Constituency participant in a key GNSO Review WG. Another former fellow is part of the BC's focus on ICANN Budget and Strategic Plan. A former Fellow was a BC councilor to the GNSO for two years. Former Fellows who are members of the BC are on the BC Credentials Committee.

The BC had to create a senior leadership program to make up for the lack of recruitment of sufficient qualified candidates to the BC via the Fellowship Program. This initiative is partly funded by the BC funds and was previously funded by ICANN's Special Budget Requests. This allowed the BC to "jump start" recruiting of senior executives who can immediately engage in policy discussions. However, the very drastic reduction in the Special Budget Requests has negatively affected the BC's ability to fully use this program. ICANN staff "imposed" criteria, over the objections of the BC, have also affected the flexibility of the program.

An immediate improvement in the Fellowship Program would be to enable designation of a limited number of slots for such senior executive nominations from each of the participating Community groups – perhaps 1-2 per ICANN meeting, nominated and designated by the Commercial Stakeholder Constituencies themselves. It appears that sufficient incoming recruits are drawn in for civil society, government and At Large, but the gap lies with the CSG stakeholders.

### **How to progress with the Fellowship program**

An ongoing onboarding of newcomers into ICANN broadly is a key objective and remains so, especially given the role of the empowered community. Achieving global participation requires continued investment and outreach efforts, and this program is one of the initiatives that furthers such goals.

The BC believes that more targeted and "informed" recruitment needs to be undertaken, including changing the messaging used by ICANN staff. The message right now about the Fellowship [and

NextGen] programs are “try us/you’ll like us” approach. This creates an expectation of continued subsidy by ICANN, rather than the importance of identifying a purpose for engaging in ICANN and expecting to become a contributing participant.

Fellows are also misled by thinking that the only way to engage at ICANN is to become an elected or appointed “leader”. ICANN’s Fellowship Program should focus on creating informed participants. Selecting leaders is up to the community itself, based on self-achievements within the community, and will take time and built up experience.

In the BC budget comments, we proposed only a 20% cut for 2019 fiscal year in the Fellowship Program and also called for significant cuts in the NextGen program.

Some interim improvements can immediately be made, before the ICANN 64 meeting. For example, Fellowship recruitment materials can be updated, and 2-3 additional and senior [non-former fellow] evaluators can be added to the present group, bringing in more balance and perspective. Bios of all approved Fellows should be publicly available, and a required statement of interest in ICANN should be required from all fellowship applicants, initial and returning. Fellows can also propose how they can engage in ICANN at their national or regional level, as many will not have the time or financial resources to attend all ICANN meetings, but will find relevant events through the national or regional IGF, as only one example.

Coaches and mentors should come from Fellows and from the broader community, to bring in experience to support onboarding into various parts of ICANN. While the right balance needs to be found between how many slots should be allotted to each type of Coach, we see it as a worthwhile effort.

Overall, the BC supports that the Fellowship Program need to be prioritized toward recruiting potentially qualified participants in ICANN or related activities and continually improved, in order to assure the long-term sustainability of the ICANN community.

### **What might be changed**

The BC would like to be able to nominate SME candidates in particular that are pre-qualified to join the BC and expect that some of them will receive Fellowship funding. We also ask that all who are approved who self-designate as business are asked to agree to have their full bios/applications shared with the full BC Outreach Committee, so that the Outreach Committee, as a collaborative group, can pre-engage with said candidate(s) before the ICANN meeting, similar to what we do for our Senior Business executives. Note: we believe, strongly, that all bios of all approved Fellows [and Nextgen] need to be publicly posted and that should be a condition of application.

When the BC notes that someone who self-designates as business is not actually from business, we ask that the applicant be required to change their designation. The statistics are not factual when a government employee with a government agency that focuses on business engagement self identifies as business. There are other similar examples.

This may be caused partly by insufficient options in the “designation” category. The designations provided to the applicants should include sub designation: e.g. Intellectual Property Lawyer/Law firm; ISP/IXP; business user company. Similarly, designations for other groups may need more definition, such as for government applicants, technical community that focuses on cyber risks, for example.

### **Efforts geared towards involvement**

The BC has a standing approach in engagement with the Fellowship Program and Newcomers Day. We routinely engage the BC Chair, and usually at least the V.P. Finance and Operations and one to two former fellows in the Newcomers Session. In addition, a senior member of the Outreach Committee volunteers at each ICANN meeting to speak once or twice in the ICANN Information Newcomers Booth. Other members of the Outreach Committee also take advantage of the ICANN booth to speak with interested Fellows about the BC.

The BC also distributes its official newsletter and a fact sheet [with translation suited to the locale of the ICANN meeting] at the ICANN Newcomer booth. When ICANN staff organize outreach events for business, the BC collaborates in co organizing, and speaking and invites any Fellows that are identified as “business” in such events. When possible, localized outreach is undertaken, as was the case in ICANN62.

When we identify a Fellow that is self-designated as business, we reach out to them and encourage their engagement with the BC during the ICANN meeting. We also invite informally, as we do not have access to contact information, participation in any outreach events/social events that the BC organizes.

Those that have the most useful experiences as Fellows are those who are not completely uninformed. Having some prior experience or engagement in an associated activity that interacts with Internet Governance can be a foundation for engagement in ICANN as a first-time attendee. An interested Fellow self-nominee can develop their own experience/expertise by self-study and engagement as an observer of ICANN activities. Some examples might be:

- Experience in the ICT field; engagement with a related organization or event – attending a related program/course or event that included a focus on ICANN or Internet Governance issues; engagement with an NRI or RIR, ISOC event at a national level, etc.
- Willingness to engage in some personal research/online engagement ahead of time. Understanding of the importance of the Internet to business overall is also a positive element for BC potential candidates.

### **Final thoughts**

The BC may have further comments as we review comments from others who have experience with the Fellowship Program. So far, what has been said mostly is that Fellows would not have known about ICANN or had resources to attend ICANN without Fellowship funding, and this cannot be ignored as a key element and benefit of the program to broaden the diversity and engagement from participants especially from SMEs and from developing countries. We are taking note that the balance of women

attendees versus men is not where we would expect, given that ICANN is approving applicants. We hope for both broader diversity of attendees from different developing countries, and also prioritization of those from SMEs from developing countries to add balance in recruitment.

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This comment was drafted by Marilyn Cade and Mark Datysgeld, with input by Tola Sogbesan and Omar Mansoor Anasari, and was reviewed by the BC Outreach Committee.

It was approved in accord with the BC charter.