GNSO Working Groups: Operations

Executive Summary

Introduction

- An ICANN Working Group (WG) is a group of volunteers formed to accomplish a specific assignment. The entity that creates a WG is its Chartering Organization (CO).
- Within the Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO), the GNSO Council creates WGs for various purposes, including the development of policies regarding generic top-level domains (gTLDs) for proposal to the ICANN Board.
- The GNSO Working Group Guidelines outline "best practices" for the formation, chartering and operation of GNSO WGs. *It is recommended that Council members and anyone interested in joining a GNSO WG read these guidelines in their entirety.*
- This document summarizes only the guidelines regarding the ongoing operation of GSNO WGs. Separate documents summarize the formation and chartering of GNSO WGs and a guide for new WG Chairs.

Purpose of a GNSO Working Group

- The general purpose of a GNSO WG is to accomplish a chartered task by enlisting broad participation from throughout the Internet community.

Role of GNSO Council and Council Members Regarding GNSO Working Groups

- The Council develops and approves a GNSO WG's Charter. The Charter is expected to provide the WG with clear direction, including a specific objective and proposed timeline.
- The Council must confirm the WG Chair or Co-Chairs selected by the WG members.
- Each Council member is encouraged to solicit WG volunteers from his/her Stakeholder Group or Constituency.
- A Council member may serve on a WG, serve as a WG's officer or serve as the GNSO Council Liaison to the WG.

Prospective GNSO Working Group Members

- A GNSO WG typically welcomes anyone as a member who is interested in productively contributing, whether from the GNSO, elsewhere in the ICANN or outside of ICANN.
- The only requirement for a prospective WG member is the submission of a Statement of Interest (SOI). (Please see the GNSO Statements of Interest main wiki page.)

Early in a Working Group's Life

- The first meeting of a WG typically includes the selection of WG officers; a review of the WG's Charter, transparency policy, and other relevant documents; and the assignment of the drafting of the WG's work plan.

> ***Working Group Member Roles and Responsibilities***
> - A GNSO WG should have a Chair or Co-Chairs; it may also select a Vice-Chair or Vice-Chairs and/or Secretary.
> - The GNSO Council usually selects a Council member as a Liaison to the WG.
> - All WG members, assisted by Staff, are responsible for drafting WG documents in a way that represents the diversity of views within the WG and within any input received during consultations, including any ICANN public comment periods.
> - A WG member from the GNSO is also encouraged to act as a WG liaison to his/her Stakeholder Group or Constituency.
>
> ***Working Group Norms***
> - GNSO WG members can actively participate via a WG's meetings and/or mailing list.
> - The membership of a GNSO WG is ideally expected to mirror the diversity of the GNSO Council and the GNSO, as well as include representatives from other ICANN Supporting Organizations (SOs) and Advisory Committees (ACs), as appropriate.
> - In its formal reports, a GNSO WG should include an indication of the level of agreement behind each of its recommendations with a standardized designation, such as "full consensus" or "divergence." Any WG member can contest any of these chosen designations. (For details, see Section 3.6 of the GNSO Working Group Guidelines).
> - An appeals process is available for any WG member with a serious complaint (for example, if a member believes his/her contributions are being systematically ignored or discounted). (For details, see Section 3.7 of the GNSO Working Group Guidelines).

Introduction

Within ICANN, a Working Group (WG) is a group of volunteers formed to accomplish a specific task or assignment. WGs can be created by various entities within the ICANN community, such as the Supporting Organizations (SOs) and Advisory Committees (ACs).

The entity that creates a WG is called the WG's "Chartering Organization" (CO). This is because it is among the entity's responsibilities to develop and approve the WG's Charter, which sets out the scope, mission and expected deliverables for the WG.

Within the Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO), it is the GNSO Council that creates WGs for the specific purpose of developing Internet policies related to generic top-level domains (gTLDs) for proposal to the ICANN Board. The Council also creates WGs for numerous other purposes.

"Best Practices" of GNSO Working Groups
WGs created by the GNSO Council (GNSO WGs) are expected to follow the GNSO Working Group Guidelines (found in Annex 1 of the GNSO Operating Procedures), unless there is a compelling reason not to do so. These guidelines are a set of "best practices" pertaining to

the formation, chartering and ongoing operation of GNSO WGs. The objective of these guidelines is to optimize a WG's productivity and effectiveness.

It is highly recommended that both Council members and anyone interested in joining a GNSO WG read the [GNSO Working Group Guidelines](#) in their entirety.

The guidelines were created as part of the [GNSO Improvements](#) project, resulting from an independent review, launched in 2006, of the GNSO's performance and operation. The GNSO Council approved the initial version of the WG Guidelines on 16 March 2011.

Although the GNSO developed and adopted the [GNSO Working Group Guidelines](#) for use within WGs created by the GNSO Council, the guidelines were intentionally written broadly enough to be applicable to and useful for WGs created by other ICANN entities.

This Document
The document is a summary of only the [GNSO Working Group Guidelines](#) that *pertain to the ongoing operation of GNSO WGs.* The guidelines pertaining to the formation and Charters of GNSO WGs are summarized in a separate document.

The primary audience of this document is GNSO Council members and anyone interested in joining a GNSO WG. Other members of the ICANN community might also find this document useful, since the [GNSO Working Group Guidelines](#) can often be applied to WGs created by COs other than the GNSO Council.

Purpose of a GNSO Working Group

According to the [GNSO Working Group Guidelines](#), the *general* purpose of a GNSO WG is to enlist community-wide participation to accomplish a task, resolve an issue or develop recommendations. "Community" here refers to the broadest Internet-using and Internet-interested community worldwide.

Of course, the *specific* purposes for which the GNSO Council creates WGs vary widely and include both substantive (policy) and administrative (process) goals.

How Working Groups Accomplish their Goals
The [GNSO Working Group Guidelines](#) allow a WG much freedom regarding how it goes about accomplishing its goal. Note, however, that a GNSO WG assigned to develop a substantive Internet policy known as a "consensus policy" for recommendation to the ICANN Board is to follow the ICANN Bylaws, and specifically, the steps of the GNSO PDP as described in [Annex A of the ICANN Bylaws](#) and the [PDP Manual](#).

Role of GNSO Council and Council Members Regarding GNSO Working Groups

Chartering the Working Group

The GNSO Council creates and approves a Charter for each WG it forms. The Charter is expected to provide the WG with clear direction, including a specific objective and proposed timeline. (Please see the separate training module document pertaining to the formation and chartering of GNSO WGs.)

Confirming the Working Group Chair or Co-Chairs
The GNSO Council is responsible for confirming the Chair or Co-Chairs of a WG once selected by the WG members.

Recruiting GNSO Working Group Members
GNSO Council members are encouraged to recruit volunteers to serve on WGs that the Council forms. In this way, Council members assist in ensuring that each GNSO WG contains the needed pool of talents, knowledge and diversity.

Usually, a Council member focuses on recruiting WG members from his/her own Stakeholder Group or Constituency within the GNSO. However, a Council member may recruit any GNSO member, any member of another ICANN SO or AC and any individual from outside of ICANN to serve on a GNSO WG.

Joining GNSO Working Groups
GNSO Council members are also encouraged to join GNSO WGs. As part of a WG, a Council member may serve in any of its managerial positions, including that of WG Chair or Liaison. (Please see the section of this document entitled "Working Group member roles and responsibilities" below.)

Prospective Working Group Members

Since the overall purpose of a GNSO WG is to bring participation from throughout the Internet community to bear on an issue or problem, such a WG typically welcomes as a member anyone who is interested in contributing productively. This includes people from the GNSO, from elsewhere in the ICANN community and from outside of ICANN.

Indeed, the GNSO Council, when creating a WG, may recruit from groups outside of ICANN for members. Usually these should be groups that have a particular interest or expertise in the problem to be tackled by the WG.

The only requirement of a prospective WG member is the submission of a Statement of Interest (SOI). A full description of SOIs and SOI procedures can be found in Chapter 5.0 of the GNSO Operating Procedures. In addition, WG candidates should refer to:
- The WG's Charter, in which the GNSO Council usually includes guidelines regarding the SOI information it expects; and
- The GNSO Statements of Interest (SOI) main wiki page on the ICANN Web site, which includes an online SOI template, instructions and a video tutorial. This wiki page is also the official repository for all GNSO SOIs.

Early in a Working Group's Life

It is useful for certain tasks to be handled as early as possible in the life of a WG, preferably during its first meeting. These tasks include:
- Selection of WG officers;
- Review of the WG Charter, other relevant documents and the WG's transparency policy; and
- Assignment of the drafting of the WG's work plan to one or more WG members (the work plan is an outline of the steps and expected timeline needed to achieve the WG's goals).

It is important that all members of a WG are familiar with its policies regarding transparency and openness. WGs are normally expected to exercise rigorous principles of both. This means that, unless compelling reasons exist to the contrary, the following are made publicly available: the archive of the WG's mailing list, recordings and/or transcripts of each meeting and the SOI submitted by each member.

Working Group Member Roles and Responsibilities

A GNSO WG can have a number of officers or management positions:
- A Chair or Co-Chairs to manage the WG;
- A Vice-Chair or Vice-Chairs;
- A WG Secretary; and
- The GNSO Council usually chooses one of its members as a neutral Liaison to the WG.

Following is a description of each of these roles and the standard responsibilities it carries.

Chair or Co-Chairs
The WG's Chair or Co-Chairs are typically chosen by the WG members and are confirmed by the GNSO Council. In rare cases, however, the GNSO Council may decide to appoint the WG Chair or Co-Chairs itself.

The responsibilities of the Chair or Co-Chairs include:
- Calling WG meetings and setting the agendas;
- Presiding over WG meetings in a substantively neutral manner;
- Ensuring that all participants have the opportunity to contribute; and
- With the assistance of Staff, monitoring whether the WG has sufficiently broad representation.

The reasons a WG might choose to select two equal Co-Chairs, rather than a single Chair, is because the former can:
- Help ensure that meetings can be held even if one Co-Chair is absent;
- Split the workload of chairing; and/or
- Allow one Co-Chair to participate substantively (that is, to advocate for a point of view) in a WG discussion, while the other acts as a neutral meeting manager.

Vice-Chair or Vice-Chairs
A WG may select a Vice-Chair or Vice-Chairs to assist the Chair (or Co-Chairs). The reasons for doing so are similar to the reasons that a WG may choose to select two Co-Chairs instead of a single Chair.

Secretary
A Secretary is sometimes appointed to serve as a note taker. (This role can also be fulfilled by an ICANN Staff member).

Note: Do not confuse the position of WG Secretary with that of GNSO Secretariat or WG Secretariat. The Secretariat is an ICANN Staff team providing logistical support.

Liaison to the Working Group
The GNSO Council may appoint one of its members as a neutral Liaison to the WG. The Liaison's responsibilities include regularly reporting to the Council on the WG's progress.

Working Group Members
GNSO Working Group members are expected not only to participate in but also to drive the WG's efforts. Examples of the responsibilities of WG members include:
- Developing and drafting, assisted by Staff, WG documents (WG documents should represent the diversity of views both within the WG and within input received by the WG during various consultations, including any ICANN public comment period dedicated to the WG's efforts); and
- Constructively participating in the WG's process of consensus decision making.

Each GNSO member working in a GNSO WG is also encouraged to:
- Act as a liaison between the WG and his/her Stakeholder Group, Constituency or community; and
- Ensure that any Stakeholder Group or Constituency statements are produced in a timely way. (These statements are often requested as input at the start of a WG.)

Working Group Staff Roles and Responsibilities

ICANN Staff regularly performs two types of support functions for a GNSO WG:
- Secretariat support (logistical tasks); and
- Policy support (policy/substantive tasks, including the drafting of WG documents for WG approval).

ICANN Staff may also provide other types of support for a GNSO WG, assuming that resources are available. These include, for example, providing expert advice (technical, legal, economic, etc.) and liaising with other ICANN Staff members or experts.

Working Group Norms

Participation
WG members are expected to be active participants. This can be done in WG meetings and/or on the WG mailing list.

Representation
The membership of a GNSO WG is ideally expected to mirror the diversity of the GNSO Council and GNSO, as well as include representatives from other ICANN SOs and ACs, as appropriate. No subgroup within the Council or GSNO should be under- or over-represented within the WG.

The WG Chair, with the assistance of ICANN Staff, is responsible for continually monitoring the representational balance of the WG.

Process Integrity
The integrity of the WG process can be maintained by adherence to certain measures, including the following:
- Once a WG has closed discussion on a decision, members typically should not attempt to reopen it, unless a consensus agrees to do so.
- If a member can no longer consistently and faithfully participate in a WG (during meetings or via the mailing list), he/she should formally withdraw from the WG.
- A WG should carefully consider all comments it receives during an ICANN public comment period dedicated to its work. The WG is further encouraged to explain its rationale for agreeing with – and, hence, incorporating in its final report – or disagreeing with substantive comments received.

Individual/Group Behavior
WG members are expected to abide by the ICANN Expected Standards of Behavior.

Examples of these standards state that participants in ICANN's multi-stakeholder process should:
- Treat all ICANN community members equally, regardless of nationality, gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or beliefs, disability, age or sexual orientation; and
- Listen to the views of all stakeholders when considering policy issues.

Any WG member who feels these standards are being violated should appeal first to the WG Chair and Liaison and, if necessary, next to the Chair of GNSO Council. (Please see Section 3.4 of the GNSO Working Group Guidelines for further details.)

Classifying a Working Groups' Decisions
In its formal reporting, a GNSO WG must indicate what level of agreement it has reached regarding each of its reported positions or recommendations. In doing so, the WG is expected to choose from the following designations to classify each of its positions:
- "Full consensus" (or "unanimous consensus") indicates that no WG member spoke against a position in its final consideration.
- "Consensus" indicates that only a small minority disagreed with a position, but most agreed with it.

- "Strong support but significant opposition" indicates that most of the WG supported the position, but a significant number did not.
- "Divergence" (or "no consensus") indicates that there was no strong support for any position on an issue but, instead, many different points of view.
- "Minority view" indicates that only a small number of WG members supported a position. Such a position can coexist with another position that has a full consensus, strong support but significant opposition, or a divergence. It also can occur if a position proposed by a small number of WG members is met with neither broader support nor opposition.

It is ultimately the responsibility of the WG Chair (or Co-Chairs) to decide which of these designations accurately applies to a WG decision. To do so, it is recommended that the Chair usually propose a designation to the WG, allow the WG to discuss the proposed designation and then, if necessary, revise the designation accordingly. This process can be repeated until a designation is accepted by the WG members.

Any WG member may challenge a chosen designation of the Chair. (Please see Section 3.6 of the [GNSO Working Group Guidelines](#) for the details regarding how WG members may contest a Chair's decision in such cases.)

Appeals Process

An explicit appeals process has been established for dealing with certain GNSO WG situations that might occur. The following situations are in this category:

- A WG member believes his/her contributions are being systematically ignored or discounted;
- A WG member wants to appeal a decision of the WG or of the GNSO Council acting as the WG's Chartering Organization; and
- A WG member believes that another member is not performing his/her role as required (see Section 2.2 of the [GNSO Working Group Guidelines](#)).

In any of these situations, the WG member should first discuss the situation with the WG Chair. If that does not satisfactorily resolve the matter, the WG member should next request the opportunity to discuss the matter with the Chair of the GNSO Council or designated representative. (Please see Section 3.7 of the [GNSO Working Group Guidelines](#) for further details.)

Logistics and Requirements

Communication/Collaboration Tools

Each Working Group typically uses:

- A toll-free telephone number and Adobe Connect (a Web-based meeting tool through which documents can be shared) in order to conduct meetings;
- A WG-specific, publicly archived mailing list; and
- A collaborative "wiki" workspace on the ICANN Web site (see the [Dashboard for ICANN wikis](#)).

Briefings and Subject Matter Experts

A GNSO WG should inform the GNSO Council of any expert briefing it decides is needed. If a briefing is expected to incur costs, prior approval is required from the Council before submitting a formal request to ICANN Staff. Upon such request, Staff will follow its standard procedures in determining whether to retain any such expert, including, evaluating whether there is any available funding for such request.

Date: October 2017