
Policy Development Process: Next-Generation Registration Directory Service to Replace WHOIS

WHAT CAN I EXPECT AT ICANN59 IN RELATION TO THIS TOPIC?

In addition to a [face-to-face](#) meeting of the Policy Development Process (PDP) Working Group (WG) on Tuesday, 27 June (Day 2 of ICANN59), the WG will also hold a 3-hour [cross-community discussion](#) on Monday, 26 June (Day 1) to obtain community feedback on key concepts related to the purposes of generic top-level domain (gTLD) registration data and directory services, data elements required by those purposes, and related data protection and privacy requirements. The WG is currently deliberating on these concepts and hopes to solicit community feedback on these rough consensus agreements.

WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?

In April 2015, the ICANN Board reaffirmed ‘its request for a Board-initiated GNSO policy development process to define the purpose of collecting, maintaining and providing access to generic top-level domain (gTLD) registration data, and consider safeguards for protecting data, using the recommendations in the Expert Working Group (EWG) Final Report as an input to, and, if appropriate, as the foundation for a new gTLD policy.’

Following the publication of the PDP Final Issue Report, the GNSO Council adopted the charter for the PDP WG, which commenced its deliberations at the end of January 2016. During the first phase its work, the WG has been tasked with providing the GNSO Council with recommendations on the following two questions: 1) What are the fundamental requirements for gTLD registration data? And 2) Is a new policy framework and next-generation registration directory services (RDS) needed to address these requirements?

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Comprehensive ‘WHOIS’ policy reform remains the source of long-running discussions within ICANN. Any discussion of the ‘WHOIS’ system for gTLD domain name registration data – hereafter called gTLD registration directory services (RDS) – typically includes topics such as purpose, accuracy, availability, privacy, data protection, cost, policing, intellectual property protection, security, and malicious use and abuse. ICANN’s requirements for gTLD domain name registration data collection, maintenance, and provision have undergone some important changes. Nevertheless, after almost 15 years of GNSO task forces, working groups, workshops, surveys, and studies, the policy is still in need of comprehensive reforms that address the significant number of contentious issues attached to it.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATUS OF THIS PROJECT?

The WG for gTLD registration directory services has been working to answer this question: *What are the fundamental requirements for gTLD registration data and directory services?* Following initial deliberations on individual possible requirements, the WG concluded that it may be more productive and efficient if the WG first deliberates on key concepts to provide a common foundation.

Accordingly, the WG started identifying and continued to deliberate [on key concepts related to the WG’s charter questions](#) concerning RDS users/purposes, data elements, privacy, and access, specifically on “thin data.” The WG uses weekly calls and polls to facilitate development of tentative rough consensus conclusions on key concepts. While the WG plans to expand to “thick” data soon, it determined that it might be helpful to determine access to “thin” data elements before finishing deliberation on key concepts and requirements for “thick data.” The WG is using principles on public and gated access from the Expert Working Group on gTLD Directory Services final report as a starting point of discussion.

As of the end of May 2017, 20 initial points of rough consensus have been reached during iterative and ongoing deliberation on RDS users/purposes, data elements, privacy, and access, all in a “thin data” context (see the [latest information on key concepts](#)). All initial agreements have been guided by an overall [statement of purpose](#).

WHAT ARE THE EXPECTED NEXT STEPS?

After reaching rough consensus on principles for “thin data” access, the WG will revisit key concepts on users/purposes, data elements, and privacy considerations for collection and processing of “thin” and “thick” data. It will move on to also develop key concepts on data accuracy. These key concepts will be used to establish a foundation for completing deliberations on possible requirements, as required in Phase 1 of the PDP charter. The WG will systematically consider possible requirements with the goal of trying to reach as strong a consensus as possible. Due to interdependencies, WG deliberation will likely continue to be iterative, especially on fundamental questions pertaining to purpose, data, and privacy.

The WG aims to begin drafting the first of two initial reports planned for Phase 1 at ICANN60. That first initial report will include responses to the first five of eleven questions in Phase 1. Further formal and informal input opportunities will occur

throughout the WG’s Phase 1 deliberations, as well as during Phases 2-3 should the GNSO decide a next-generation directory service is needed to meet Phase 1 requirements.

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

Anyone interested can join this effort at any time. Complete the registration form at goo.gl/forms/bb65ilznLv or contact the GNSO Secretariat gns0-secs@icann.org.

MORE INFORMATION

- PDP Webpage: gns0.icann.org/en/group-activities/active/rds
- WG Workspace: community.icann.org/x/rjJ-Ag
- WG Charter: gns0.icann.org/en/drafts/whois-ng-gtld-rds-charter-07oct15
- Final Issue Report: goo.gl/0ZrpVK
- Board-GNSO Process Framework for this PDP: goo.gl/zq3edl

BACKGROUND

Pursuant to its Resolution on 8 November 2012, the ICANN Board directed the ICANN CEO to launch a new effort to redefine the purpose of collecting, maintaining and providing access to gTLD registration data, and consider safeguards for protecting data. This effort would serve as a foundation for new gTLD policy and contractual negotiations. Moreover, the Board directed the preparation of an Issue Report on the purpose of collecting and maintaining gTLD registration data, and on solutions to improve accuracy and access to gTLD registration data, as part of a Board-initiated GNSO PDP. The Board then went on to pass a resolution that led to the creation of the [EWG](#). The Board referred to this as a ‘two-pronged approach’ that is based on ‘broad and responsive action’ in relation to the reform of gTLD Registration Data.

To enable effective consideration of the many significant and interdependent policy areas that the GNSO must address, the Board approved a Process Framework, collaboratively developed by GNSO Councilors and Board members, to structure this complex and challenging PDP for success. This phased process includes:

- Phase 1: Establishing requirements to determine if and why a next-generation RDS is needed to replace today’s WHOIS system;
- Phase 2: If so, designing a new policy framework that details functions that must be provided by a next-generation RDS to support those requirements; and
- Phase 3: Providing guidance for how a next-generation RDS should implement those policies, coexisting with and eventually replacing the legacy WHOIS system.

Throughout this three-phase process, the many inter-related questions that must (at minimum) be addressed by the PDP include:

- **Users/Purposes:** Who should have access to gTLD registration data and why (i.e., for what purposes)?
- **Gated Access:** What steps should be taken to control data access for each user/purpose?
- **Data Accuracy:** What steps should be taken to improve data accuracy?
- **Data Elements:** What data should be collected, stored, and disclosed?
- **Privacy:** What steps are needed to protect data and privacy?
- **Coexistence:** What steps should be taken to enable next-generation RDS coexistence with and replacement of the legacy WHOIS system?
- **Compliance:** What steps are needed to enforce these policies?
- **System Model:** What system requirements must be satisfied by any next-generation RDS implementation?
- **Cost:** What costs will be incurred and how must they be covered?
- **Benefits:** What benefits will be achieved and how will they be measured?
- **Risks:** What risks do stakeholders face and how will they be reconciled?

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