Request for Proposals for WHOIS Misuse Studies

* Deadline for applications 27 November, 2009*

1. Introduction

1.1. The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is an internationally organized, non-profit corporation responsible for coordinating critical Internet resources. These include Internet Protocol (IP) address space allocation, protocol identifier assignment, generic (gTLD) and country code (ccTLD) Top-Level Domain Name System (DNS) management, and root server system management. As a private-public partnership, ICANN is dedicated to preserving the operational stability of the Internet; to promoting competition; to achieving broad representation of global Internet communities; and to developing policy appropriate to its mission through bottom-up, consensus-based processes.

As part of its work, ICANN develops policy for WHOIS services that provide public access to data about registered domain names. The extent of data collected at the time of domain name registration, and the ways such data can be accessed, are specified in agreements established by ICANN for domain names registered in gTLDs.

For example, ICANN requires accredited registrars to collect and provide free public access to the name of the registered domain name and its name servers and registrar, the date the domain was created and when its expires, and the contact information for the domain name's Registered Name Holder, technical contact, and administrative contact. Anyone can obtain this data by using a WHOIS client to send an RFC 3912-formatted query to TCP port 43, or by submitting a web form query to a WHOIS server. Data is returned in an unspecified human-readable form, predominately but not exclusively represented in US-ASCII.

The Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO) is responsible for developing and recommending to the ICANN Board substantive policies relating to gTLDs. The GNSO Council is now exploring several extensive studies of WHOIS and has asked ICANN to estimate the cost of conducting several studies proposed by members of the ICANN community and Government Advisory Committee.

1.2. Pursuant to the above request, ICANN seeks to engage independent research organizations to undertake one or more proposed WHOIS Misuse studies. The information outlined below illustrates the scope of work and the criteria for selection.

1.3. This document should be read in conjunction with the Terms of Reference for WHOIS Misuse Studies document (also found in the WHOIS Studies announcement along with this document). Read together, these two documents provide the materials necessary to respond to this Request for Proposals ("RFP") for WHOIS Misuse Studies.

2. Objectives

2.1. WHOIS Misuse studies are designed to determine the extent, nature, and impact of WHOIS data misuse (i.e., harmful actions taken using WHOIS contact information) by (1) surveying Registrants about misuse incidents they may have experienced, and (2) conducting experiments to measure misuse and the effectiveness of WHOIS anti-harvesting measures applied by Registrars. Two complementary studies have been defined to compensate for the challenges and limitations of each methodology. Applicants responding to this RFP may submit proposals for conducting one or both studies.

2.2. ICANN will provide the successful candidate with background documentation and reports pertaining to these and other WHOIS studies. Applicants are encouraged to enumerate any assumptions or dependencies they may have with respect to support required from ICANN. In particular, these Misuse studies will include surveys and research based upon a representative sample of registered domain names to be supplied by ICANN. Domain samples are to be designed, cleaned, and coded using methods developed during the WHOIS Accuracy study conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago (http://www.icann.org/en/compliance/norc-whois-accuracy-study-design-04jun09-en.pdf).

2.3. If ICANN elects to conduct the WHOIS Misuse studies, they will be due to begin in the first half of 2010. A full project timeline will be developed, but it is anticipated that a key milestone will include presentation of preliminary study findings at an upcoming ICANN public meeting (June or December 2010, depending on when the studies are initiated). Final study findings will be posted for public review and comment.

2.4. Research organization(s) that conduct these studies are expected to have detailed knowledge of and experience with conducting conceptually similar large, geographically-diverse user surveys and/or Internet threat experiments. Some familiarity with DNS and WHOIS is also required, including policies associated with access to and permissible use of domain name registration data.

3. Tender Scope and Conditions

3.1. Taking note of the Terms of Reference, applicants should provide the following:

3.1.1. Statement of Suitability. The Statement of Suitability must include a detailed outline of the applicant's ability to perform this work, including references and examples of past research projects, publications, and other relevant information. Preference will be given applicants who can demonstrate experience conducting Internet research surveys and/or experiments in general and DNS or WHOIS services in particular.

3.1.2. Work Approach. The Work Approach needs to detail the way in which the applicant would respond to the Terms of Reference, providing details about the way in which the specified study would be conducted. Applicants are encouraged to elaborate upon the study definitions summarized in the Terms of Reference as needed to quantify effort, enumerate assumptions, and identify dependencies.

The successful candidate will be expected to interact with ICANN via email, conference calls, and video conference to refine proposed study methodologies, obtain an appropriate domain sample, and review study progress. Contact with third parties is also required by mail and telephone, including Registrars (both studies) and Registrants and cyber-research organizations (survey study only). The successful candidate will be expected to present draft study findings in person at one of ICANN's public meetings.

3.1.3. Team Curriculum Vitae. The response must include Curriculum Vitae for key personnel who will lead and conduct each study, showing each individual's suitability for the proposed work. Given the nature of these studies, the successful candidate will need to apply staff with specific skills to certain tasks (e.g., a survey team with the ability to interview non-English-speaking Registrants).

3.1.4. ICANN Contract Compliance. Applicants should warrant that they are willing to operate under a non-disclosure agreement.

3.1.5. Schedule and Fees. The proposal should include a work schedule, including key milestone dates and a statement of proposed fees. Fees should be inclusive of related project expenses, including (but not limited to) electronic, postal, and telephone communication; computer hardware, software, and services; test domain registration; and travel costs.

3.2. **Deadline / Requirements:** By 27 November, 2009, interested applicants should submit proposals by email to rfpwhois@icann.org to the attention of Liz Gasster, Senior Policy Counselor, ICANN Policy Department. A confirmation email will be sent for each proposal received.