

Candidate Statement for GNSO Council Chair

3 October 2026

Candidate: Samantha Demetriou (Registries Stakeholder Group, North America)

Citizenship/Residence: USA

Dear GNSO Councilors,

I am honored to accept the nomination for the role of GNSO Council Chair from the Contracted Parties House. Serving on the Council for the past two years has been a privilege. I have learned a great deal from working with you all and have consistently been impressed by the dedication you bring to the Council's work, as well as the camaraderie we share. If elected Chair, I will be a leader that you can depend on to build on the recent progress we have achieved, seek ways to continue to improve our processes, and foster consensus in our decisions and actions. This statement provides some information about my background and qualifications for this important role and lays out my vision for Council for the next year.

Background

I have spent my entire career working with and around domain names and have developed expertise in understanding how ICANN policies are developed and how the implementation of those policies impacts contracted parties, businesses, and internet users. Prior to joining Verisign, I worked for FairWinds Partners, a consulting company that specializes in domain name strategy, brand protection, and digital asset management. At FairWinds, I gained important insights into the intersection of intellectual property rights and the Domain Name System, as well as firsthand experience working with companies across a variety of industries. I became actively involved in the ICANN community when FairWinds supported new gTLD applicants in the 2012 application round, first joining the Registries Stakeholder Group (RySG) through the New gTLD Applicant Group (NTAG).

In 2017, I joined Verisign's policy and government relations team, where I have had the benefit of working closely with and learning from Keith Drazek, who served as GNSO Council Chair from 2018 to 2020. My work at Verisign has made me an expert in the contracts that govern ICANN's relationship with registry operators and registrars and has afforded me the opportunity to work alongside technical and operational experts in the Domain Name System. In my current role as Senior Director, I am responsible for overseeing Verisign's engagement in ICANN and I work closely with Verisign's Platform team and distribution channel management to develop and execute on our strategy around ICANN policy. I am incredibly fortunate to work for a company that understands the important role ICANN plays in the DNS and internet governance, as well as the value of bottom-up, consensus-driven policy development. Verisign supports a single global, authoritative root, ICANN and the multistakeholder model, and is committed to

helping make ICANN strong and successful within its remit, which includes supporting me, as well as my colleagues, in taking on important leadership roles within the community.

ICANN Community Experience and Leadership

I have over a decade of experience participating in and holding leadership roles within the ICANN community, which has included working on policy development, drafting and contributing to countless public comments, participating in negotiations with ICANN Org, and working on and leading small groups in the RySG and Small Teams on Council. In 2015, I was elected to the RySG Executive Committee as Vice Chair, Administration, a role I held until I was elected as Vice Chair, Policy in 2018. After two years serving in that position, I was elected as Chair of the RySG and held that role for four years, prior to being elected to the GNSO Council in 2024.

Serving as Chair and in other leadership positions provided me with extensive experience in creating productive agendas and managing meetings effectively, facilitating discussions, and representing the views of the RySG to the broader ICANN community. A critical skill that I developed in these roles was the ability to build consensus among members of the RySG, who represent registries with different business models and, often, different policy priorities, and among the broader CPH. I understand the needs of diverse participants and how they interact with, contribute to, and rely on the results of our policymaking process. I also understand the context against which our policy debates take place, which enables me to help stakeholders agree on common goals and to create and execute on plans to achieve those goals. An example that illustrates these skills and experience was how I lead the CPH in developing and executing on the vision for DNS Abuse mitigation, starting with global amendments to the Registry Agreement and Registrar Accreditation Agreement and eventually advocating for targeted policy development, which the Council is currently overseeing.

During my tenure as RySG Chair, I also collaborated closely with the other members of the Executive Committee, approaching decisions as a team and leveraging the experience and expertise of my colleagues. As a GNSO Councilor, I have observed the success that past Council Chairs have had in taking a similar approach with their Vice Chairs. If elected, I plan to continue this tradition of working in close coordination with the Vice Chairs. I strongly believe that understanding each other's perspectives and sharing our knowledge allows for more cohesive and effective management of the Council's important work.

My Vision for the GNSO Council

The GNSO Council has made significant improvements to the way it manages its work over the past several years and, if elected Chair, I view it as my responsibility to build on this progress and identify ways to enhance the GNSO's ability to deliver timely and effective policy recommendations. The environment in which the GNSO (and the ICANN Community more broadly) operates is increasingly complex and the Council has many important projects in its pipeline. I believe I have the deep knowledge of the GNSO

processes and procedures, the direct experience with and dedication to finding efficiencies, and the consensus-building skills necessary to lead the GNSO Council during this important moment. With the support of my fellow Councilors, I will focus my leadership on the following specific areas over the next year if elected Chair:

1. **Prioritization:** During our Strategic Planning Session this year, the Council discussed our future work and noted the need to prioritize the projects that have not yet been started. We have been working on a prioritization process over the course of this year. This process has shown certain benefits, such as fostering closer collaboration between the GNSO Councilors and the members of their respective Stakeholder Groups and Constituencies, but some shortcomings as well. I firmly believe that the Council needs to manage its workload in such a way that enables the GNSO to produce high-quality policy recommendations at a reasonable pace, and that prioritizing projects is a key aspect of that management. If elected Chair, I plan to build upon the strides we've made so far and work with my fellow Councilors and Staff to continue to improve our methodology, with the goal of creating a tool that the Council can use well into the future.
2. **The GNSO's Relationship with the GAC:** The relationship between the GNSO and the GAC has improved tremendously since I first began participating in the ICANN Community, but recent exchanges have demonstrated that there is still room to enhance the communication and understanding between our two groups. I plan to work closely with our liaison to the GAC, Sebastien Ducos, to support his good work and strengthen the relationship between our two groups. My goal is to facilitate the identification of common objectives that the GNSO Council and the GAC share and find ways to work collaboratively within our respective roles toward achieving those objectives.
3. **Board Readiness:** The work of the Board Readiness Small Team and the PDP 3.0 efforts that proceeded it have yielded many positive changes to the way the GNSO community develops policy recommendations. It is incumbent on the GNSO Council, as the manager of ICANN's policy development process, to consistently review its processes and working methods to make sure that the GNSO is able to develop timely and effective policy recommendations. I believe that scoping and chartering PDP working groups is a vital opportunity for Council to exercise effective management and I plan to be closely involved in chartering efforts and seek out improvements wherever possible as Chair.
4. **SPIRT:** We are currently in the midst of the 2026 round of the New gTLD Program and the GNSO Council has the responsibility of overseeing the Standing Predictability Implementation Review Team (SPIRT). As Chair, I will ensure that the Council follows our processes and procedures to refer issues to the SPIRT, when needed, in an efficient manner and fully executes on our responsibilities to support the timely resolution of issues that require changes to the New gTLD Program.

5. SSAD SRT: The Standardized System for Access and Disclosure Supplemental Recommendations Team (SSAD SRT) is undertaking a significant task that has the potential to set precedent for how the GNSO handles policy recommendations that the ICANN Board does not accept. As Chair, I will work to ensure that this SRT reaches a successful conclusion.
6. My Fellow Councilors: Last, but certainly not least, as Chair I will work with all GNSO Councilors to understand their views and perspectives. One of my personal goals is to foster participation, break down obstacles, and empower each Councilor to positively contribute to our work and our discussions, ensuring that the Council functions as a cohesive team of dedicated contributors.

My Commitment

To close, I want to reiterate what an honor it is to be nominated for Council Chair. If elected, you will have my undivided focus on the responsibilities of the role and my commitment to work with each of you to represent the full Council. I truly appreciate your consideration of my candidacy and look forward to the opportunity to serve you, the GNSO, and the ICANN Community.