

Candidate Statement GNSO Chair

October 2016

Candidate: James Bladel (RrSG - North America)

Citizenship / Residence: USA

Dear Glen, Marika, and Fellow Councilors -

I am honored to accept the nomination to serve as Council Chair for a second and final term.

My personal background and relevant experience remains unchanged from last year's Candidate Statement, and can be viewed at <https://gns0.icann.org/en/elections/bladel-statement-01oct15-en.pdf>. For this year's statement I'd like to highlighting some of our achievements over the past year, and look ahead at work that is incomplete, and would enhance the Council.

A Council that is Effective

Working together, the Council has recorded several key accomplishments this year. At our meeting in Marrakech, we approved the recommendations of the CCWG-Accountability working group. This was no small undertaking, given the complexity of the material and the diversity of opinions. GNSO approval was necessary to adopt the entire CCWG-ACCT package, and was therefore on the critical path for the IANA Transition. During its meeting at ICANN55, the Council adopted a modified voting format that accommodated individual votes in opposition to some recommendations, while still permitting adoption of the overall CCWG package. In my opinion, this is a case study in how the Council can balance the need to uphold the integrity (and legitimacy) of its decision making processes, without tripping over its own rules and becoming ineffective and marginalized.

Preserve the Council's Remit

This year the Council has also held the line on initiatives that, intentional or otherwise, would have undermined the GNSO's exclusive remit to create gTLD policy. A clear example of this is the ongoing effort to protect IGO/INGO acronyms. When compared against the GNSO-approved PDP recommendations, advice from the GAC and the proposed "small group" do not seem materially significant. However, the Council has correctly recognized the hazards of negotiating with the Board over approved recommendations, the chilling effect this could have on future participating in PDP working groups, and using GAC advice as a measuring stick to gauge whether or not a community-led PDP resulted in a successful outcome.

Similarly, we've identified that efforts in other standards-setting bodies, like the IETF, can have policy implications that either predetermine or "box out" proposals that might otherwise be addressed via PDP. Early in the year, we identified a few such issues underway in the IETF, and have made overtures to enhance the visibility, communication and coordination with the work of that group. But rather than burden either organization with maintaining formal liaisons,

we've opted for a light-weight approach that leverages the high degree of common membership between our groups.

The proliferation of Cross-Community Working Groups (CCWGs) is also noteworthy, particularly if the subject matter under review collides with active policy development. The recently-adopted framework for CCWGs will help to preserve these scope distinctions, and prevent CCWGs from becoming an alternative mechanism to the PDP. Finally, we must acknowledge that the Council itself poses a threat to multi-stakeholder policy development. During the course of our work, it is inevitable that we will encounter gaps or omissions in a PDP, requiring the Council to resist any temptation to "fix". Like a trickle of water under a dam, we must remain vigilant against actions by other groups, or ourselves, that erode confidence in this model.

Team Based Leadership

Last year I observed that our previous Chair seemed to take on a substantial portion of the workload by himself. This wasn't a criticism, but rather an acknowledgement that this approach to Council leadership doesn't scale to keep pace the growing project list, and a new strategy was needed. I made the commitment then to work more closely with the Vice Chairs, and to seek volunteers from the Council and broader GNSO community to lead on specific tasks. I'm pleased to report that these changes have been adopted, with observable results.

As an alumnus of the Meetings Strategy Working Group, Donna Austin took the lead representing the GNSO in planning for the ICANN56 Policy Forum in Helsinki. We all owe her our gratitude for successfully striking the balance between the needs of the community and the vision that was outlined for "Meeting B" by the MSWG.

Similarly, Heather Forrest has contributed to the planning for ICANN57, and took the wheel as Chair for our May meeting, including many follow-up administrative actions. I rely on Donna and Heather almost daily for their advice and leadership, and no major decisions are taken without agreement (or at worse, non-objection) from all of us. The Council is fortunate to have them both.

And aside from the Vice Chairs, other Councilors and GNSO volunteers have also made significant contributions to the work of the Council. Whether it is taking the lead on a specific issue or motion, managing the drafting of a letter, document, or presenting on the work of a CCWG, these individuals have all stepped forward to lend their expertise and their time to advancing our work, and deserve our gratitude.

Work in Progress

Alongside these accomplishments, the Council owns several incomplete initiatives as well. Clearly, we must continue to preserve the GNSO's unique role in developing gTLD policy, as outlined above. But an important component of this is GNSO education and outreach to other SOs and ACs. At the root of most contentious issues, I believe, is a general misunderstanding of the GNSO, our processes, and how to engage in our work. Keeping the channels of communication open to other organizations, and creating new channels, is an important first step to preventing friction between groups.

The GNSO will also need to continuously evaluate and evolve its role in the new ICANN. We'll consider the report of the Bylaws Drafting Team (and associated minority report(s)) at ICANN57, but generally I believe that the GNSO's participation in the Empowered Community will be more challenging than other SOs and ACs, primarily due to our size, complexity, and diversity. We'll have to find a way to effectively contribute the voices of our stakeholders to these new accountability processes, or run the risk of becoming a passive observer in the new model.

On the subject of reforming the GNSO, the next year will also require us to execute on the implementation plan currently under development by the group working on GNSO Improvements. This plan is expected by the end of the year, and will presumably be adopted by the Board early in 2017. The subsequent group will also stand in for the Standing Committee for Improvements, which was folded in to this effort as well.

Additionally, there are several operational improvements still necessary for the GNSO to optimize its effectiveness. We need a way to measure the capacity of the volunteer community, and gauge the level of utilization. This is fundamental to sound project management practices, and yet it is a capability that the GNSO lacks (although Berry Cobb has modeled some ideas worth considering). Information sharing and issue tracking presents another challenge, as many Councilors and GNSO volunteers can easily lose track of singular efforts, which only compounds the burden of our support staff.

Making the most efficient use of our limited meeting time is also key, as the GNSO Council is only in session for 2 hours each month, and a few hours during our in-person meetings. Most of us probably spend more time at our day job in a typical work week than we do on Council work in a calendar year, so it is important that our meetings and calls stay focused, and we use the mailing list as a default wherever possible.

Finally, I'd like to continuously examine the tools and technologies we employ in the conduct of Council work. Many of the individuals and companies represented in the GNSO are leading technology innovation around the globe, and this could be leveraged by expanding our toolkit beyond email, teleconference and Adobe Connect. Collaboration and document authoring platforms would be helpful, and even the GNSO website (which I'm betting most use only for the calendar) could benefit from a refresh.

Summary

I've thoroughly enjoyed the previous year, and am proud to serve my colleagues on Council and in the broader GNSO community. I'd particularly like to thank the GNSO support staff: Glen, who handles all logistics with an ever-cheerful demeanor; Mary, for her encyclopedic knowledge of issues and GNSO processes, and of course Marika who makes the impossible look easy. Without them, and the Vice Chairs, leaders on Council, and GNSO volunteers, I don't believe I (or anyone else) could be effective in this role. I ask for your support in this election, and over the coming year in service to the GNSO Council and broader ICANN community.

Thank you,

J.

James Bladel