

Chapter 4.0: Voting

4.1 Quorum

In order for the GNSO Council to initiate a vote, a quorum must be present. A quorum is a majority of voting members in each House, which must include at least one member of each Stakeholder Group.

4.2 Voting Thresholds

Unless otherwise specified in these procedures or in the ICANN Bylaws, to pass a motion or other action, greater than 50% of the eligible voters in each House must cast affirmative votes. For all votes taken, the number of eligible voters in each House shall be fixed to the number of seats allocated in the Bylaws (a.k.a. the denominator) and is not affected by the number of members present or absent at the meeting in which the motion or other action is initiated. For rules and procedures concerning abstentions and their impact on voting thresholds, refer to [Section 4.5-Abstentions](#)).

4.3 Motions and Votes

4.3.1 Eligibility: All actions of, or votes by, the GNSO Council are taken or cast only by the members of the GNSO Council. Except as otherwise provided in these procedures, persons who are not Council members may not vote. Acts by the GNSO Council members present at any meeting at which there is a quorum shall be acts of the GNSO Council unless otherwise provided herein.

4.3.2 For each motion or action of the GNSO Council requiring a vote, Councilors may enter either a “No”, “Yes, or “Abstain.” For a vote of “Abstain,” a reason or explanation is required. For votes of “No” or “Yes”, at the discretion of the Councilor, an explanation or reason may be provided which will be recorded in the meeting minutes.

4.3.3 Resubmission of a Motion: If a motion has been voted on by the GNSO Council and not adopted, that motion may be resubmitted to the Council for consideration at a subsequent meeting of the Council, subject to the following criteria:

1. Explanation: The Councilor submitting the motion must also submit an explanation for the resubmission of the motion. The explanation need not accompany the motion when it is resubmitted; however, the explanation must be submitted no later than the deadline for submitting the motion (i.e., no later than 23h59 Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) on the day 10 calendar days before the Council meeting at which the motion is to be reconsidered). The explanation does not need to meet any requirements other than being submitted in a timely manner.
2. Publication: The text and explanation of the resubmitted motion must be published (i.e., circulated to the Council mailing list) no later than the deadline for submitting the motion.
3. Second: Upon the second resubmission of a motion (i.e., the third time the same motion comes before the Council), the motion must be seconded by a Councilor

from each house as a prerequisite for placing the resubmitted motion on the consent agenda.

4.3.4 Limitations and Exceptions to Resubmission of a Motion: The above procedure on resubmission of a motion is subject to the following limitations and exceptions:

1. Same Meeting: A motion may not be resubmitted at the same meeting at which the motion was voted upon but not adopted.
2. Material Changes: If material changes have been made to the text of a motion, the revised motion will not be considered a resubmitted motion. The revised motion will instead be considered a new motion. Whether or not a change in the text of a motion is material will be determined at the discretion of the GNSO Council Chair.
3. Timing: A motion will no longer be considered a resubmitted motion once two Council meetings have passed after the meeting at which the motion was voted upon but not adopted. The motion will thereafter be considered a new motion. For example, if a motion has been voted upon but not adopted at a meeting in January, it would be considered a resubmitted motion if submitted for a meeting in February or March, but would be considered a new motion if submitted for a meeting in April.
4. Motions Not Voted Upon: A motion that has been submitted to the Council but not voted upon (e.g., because the motion was tabled or withdrawn) will not be considered a resubmitted motion if it is submitted again to the Council. Instead, such a motion will still be considered a new motion.
5. ICANN Meetings: For purposes of this procedure, all Council sessions at an ICANN Meeting will be considered to be part of a single meeting.

4.4 Absentee Voting

4.4.1 Applicability

Absentee voting is permitted for the following limited number of Council motions or measures.

- a. Initiate a Policy Development Process (PDP);
- b. Approve a PDP recommendation;
- c. Recommend amendments to the GNSO Operating Procedures (GOP) or ICANN Bylaws;
- d. Fill a Council position open for election.

4.4.2 Absentee ballots, when permitted, must be submitted within the announced time limit, which shall be 72 hours from the meeting's adjournment. In exceptional circumstances, announced at the time of the vote, the Chair may reduce this time to 24 hours or extend the time to 7 calendar days, provided such amendment is verbally confirmed by all Vice-Chairs present.

4.4.3 The GNSO Secretariat will administer, record, and tabulate absentee votes according to these procedures and will provide reasonable means for transmitting and authenticating absentee ballots, which could include voting by telephone, e-mail, web-based interface, or other technologies as may become available.

4.4.4 Absentee balloting does not affect quorum requirements.

4.5 Abstentions

4.5.1 Duty of Councilors, Constituencies, and Stakeholder Groups

The GNSO Council is, by design, a small number of members organized into two voting Houses comprised of 7 and 13 members respectively, representing Stakeholder Groups as prescribed in the ICANN Bylaws (see <http://www.icann.org/en/general/bylaws.htm#X>). If approved within a particular Stakeholder Group Charter, a GNSO Council member may be a representative of a Constituency within that Stakeholder Group. Given the Council's size and the voting thresholds that have been defined, it is important that each Stakeholder Group (or Constituency, where applicable) vote decisively, through its appointed or elected Councilors, on every matter that is before the Council for action.

When exercising his/her voting responsibilities on Council matters, a GNSO Councilor is expected to comply with any obligations prescribed within the applicable Stakeholder Group or Constituency Charter governing Councilor's appointment to the Council. If such Charter procedures are silent with respect to voting guidance, directions, or restrictions, the Councilor may use his/her best-informed judgment, unless specifically directed as described in [Paragraph 4.5.3](#) below.

When circumstances regarding a potential voting abstention occur that would otherwise prevent a Councilor from discharging his/her responsibilities (see [Paragraph 4.5.2](#)), the Councilor's appointing organization is provided a remedy (see [Paragraph 4.5.3](#)) designed to enable its vote to be exercised. For a Nominating Committee Appointee (NCA) assigned to a House (hereinafter House NCA), certain remedies are available and prescribed based upon a set of specific criteria, conditions, and implementation rules without requiring formal action by the Nominating Committee.

Specific Councilor obligations include:

- a. Active participation: a Councilor is expected to actively participate in the regular affairs of the GNSO Council including, *inter alia*, attending its scheduled meetings, staying abreast of the technical and administrative agenda, engaging in relevant email and live discussions, reading minutes, evaluating reports, listening to meeting recordings (in the event of absence), asking questions that foster learning, voting responsibly on all matters before the Council, and periodically reviewing the performance of the Chair and Vice-Chairs.
- b. Reasonable inquiry: Councilors should request and receive sufficient information, including support from their Constituencies or Stakeholder Groups, as appropriate, so Councilors may carry out their responsibilities. When a problem manifests itself or some issue does not make sense, a Councilor has a duty to inquire into the surrounding facts and circumstances and seek guidance.

4.5.2 Abstention Categories

Circumstances leading to a potential voting abstention can arise when a Council member perceives a set of conditions, relative to some action or motion before the Council that warrants his/her recusal from participating and/or voting. For purposes of the Council's operating procedures, abstentions will be grouped into two categories varying by severity and recommended action: "volitional" abstentions and "obligational" abstentions.

a. Volitional Abstentions

Circumstances may occur when a Council member elects to refrain from participating and voting for reasons that may include, but are not limited to:

- Perception of being inadequately informed
- Has not participated in relevant discussions or studied available materials
- Lacks sufficient understanding, expertise, or technical knowledge

The above list itemizes several potential reasons for a volitional abstention; however, as described in [Paragraph 4.5.1](#) above, it is the duty of Council members to remain informed, to exercise their responsibilities to vote, and to take whatever reasonable measures are available so that this category of abstentions is minimized to the greatest extent possible. Appointing organizations are encouraged to provide sufficient guidance, assistance, education, and direction, where applicable, to avoid circumstances that might otherwise result in a volitional abstention.

b. Obligational Abstentions

This category of abstentions results from conditions in which a Councilor may find that he/she is unable to vote on a measure due to a competing personal (e.g. religious), professional, or political interest that interferes with his/her ability to participate in the matter or where participation raises ethical questions.

Disclaimer concerning the term "Conflict of Interest": There are certain financial interests and, possibly, incentives associated with GNSO actions that affect Internet domain name policies. As they pertain to GNSO Council voting actions, such interests are expected to be documented in a Councilor's required Statement of Interest (see [Chapter 5.0](#)) and do not require that the Councilor abstain from participating and voting. GNSO Councilors do not have a fiduciary responsibility to act in the best interests of ICANN in discharging their responsibilities on the Council. While the deliberations and decisions of ICANN are made in the interests of the global Internet community as a whole, GNSO Councilors are understood, in some cases, to represent the views of organizations and interest groups that would materially benefit from policies recommended by the GNSO. It is understood that Councilors are often employed by or represent those affected parties and such relationships could engender subsequent benefit to Councilors as individuals. As a result of these special circumstances and to avoid confusion with ICANN's Conflict of Interest Policy, which does not pertain to GNSO Council matters, the term "Conflict of Interest" will not pertain when a GNSO Councilor argues for and votes "Yes" or "No" on a matter which, by virtue of that action, directly or indirectly benefits that individual financially or

economically; however, that interpretation does not imply that circumstances cannot occur in which a Councilor may perceive his/her situation as obligating a formal abstention.

A Councilor who believes that proceeding to vote on a motion or action before the Council not only warrants, but requires, his/her abstention and, thereby, recusal from deliberations, is considered to be facing an obligational abstention. Although it is not possible to draft a set of exhaustive conditions under which obligational abstentions can arise, two examples are provided by way of illustration:

Case 1: a Councilor (attorney by profession) is representing a client in legal action relating to a matter before the Council and, as required by his/her professional code, must abstain and, furthermore, such abstention should not be counted as a negative vote. *[Note: this type of situation requires the remedy specified in [Paragraph 4.5.3](#) below].*

Case 2: a Councilor is a paid consultant for a national political body that has a vested interest in a particular motion before the Council. The Councilor is concerned that his/her future income potential and ability to retain a consulting engagement with the national body may be affected if he/she votes on the measure. In such a case, the Councilor believes that the ethical course of action is to abstain.

In the two examples above, personal or professional obligations interfere with the Council member's ability to participate ethically; thus, requiring recusal from deliberations on the matter and abstention from voting.

4.5.3 Remedy To Avoid Abstaining on a Vote

According to existing rules, any abstention would not contribute to the passing of a motion; therefore, by default, an abstention functions as a "No" vote. The purpose of the remedial procedures in this section is to minimize this effect.

Voting Direction¹

The preferred remedy, if applicable for the appointing organization, is to request a “Yes” or “No” voting instruction from the Council member’s appointing organization (if applicable). The Council member is obligated to follow the instruction.

If a Voting Direction is not obtained then the Council member may opt for [Section 4.6](#) (Proxy Voting).

4.6 Proxy Voting

An abstaining or absent Council member as defined above (the Proxy Giver) may transfer his or her vote to any other Council member (the Proxy Holder).

The Proxy Holder must vote in order of precedence according to one of three types:

1. An instruction from the Proxy Giver’s appointing organization (if applicable), or if none;
2. An instruction from the Proxy Giver, or in the absence of either;
3. The Proxy Holder’s own conscience.

a. Multiple Proxies

A GNSO Council member is not permitted to be a Proxy Holder for more than one Proxy Giver.

b. Quorum

An absent Council member does not count toward quorum even if a proxy has been established. A Temporary Alternate (see [Section 4.7-Temporary Alternate](#) below) if present, would count toward quorum.

c. Proxy Notification

A proxy notification must be sent to the GNSO Secretariat and should indicate which type it is. The notification should, where applicable, be sent by the Proxy Giver's appointing organization. Ordinarily a proxy notification must be received by the GNSO Secretariat before the start of the relevant meeting.

Exceptionally, a proxy notification may be given during a meeting by a Council member who is present but needs to leave before a vote. In all cases the most recent notification takes precedence.

¹ The term “appointing organization” (see [Section 1.3.1](#)) does not comprise the Nominating Committee; therefore, the Voting Direction remedy does not apply to House NCAs.

4.7 Temporary Alternate

Another remedy that may be exercised in avoiding the consequences of an abstention is the naming by the appointing organization of a Temporary Alternate who is empowered to “stand in” for the abstaining Councilor according to the provisions below. For a House NCA, the Temporary Alternate remedy is defined only for certain conditions of absence and vacancy as provided in [Section 3.8](#) (Absences and Vacancies).

In selecting a Temporary Alternate, the appointing organization shall choose, from within its membership ranks, a responsible individual who is not a current voting GNSO Council member, but is otherwise knowledgeable on the matter at issue and qualified to represent the appointing organization’s interests. The Temporary Alternate must meet all criteria (e.g. Term Limits) for GNSO Council membership.

- i. The GNSO Secretariat will arrange for the named Temporary Alternate to participate in GNSO Council meetings, teleconferences, email list discussions, as appropriate, and will cause such arrangements to be deactivated upon conclusion of the Temporary Alternate’s tenure.
- ii. The Temporary Alternate is entitled to participate in Council deliberations and voting only upon the specific matter(s) outlined in the communication submitted to the GNSO Secretariat (see [Section 4.8](#) (Procedures)). In all other matters, the regular Councilor is expected to function in Councilor’s normal capacity. A Temporary Alternate may not be selected to register a proxy vote, as described in [Section 4.6](#) (Proxy Voting).
- iii. The presence of a duly recognized Temporary Alternate at a Council meeting is counted in quorum calculations; however, the regular Councilor, if present, and any Temporary Alternate only contribute a count of one to the meeting quorum.
- iv. Only one Temporary Alternate may be named to act for a GNSO Councilor at a time.
- v. If the Temporary Alternate is named for a Council member who is an elected officer of the GNSO Council, the Temporary Alternate does not assume those officer duties and responsibilities; the Council’s leadership succession shall take effect as provided elsewhere in these procedures.

The above remedies are available for the purposes of ensuring that, to the maximum extent possible, each and every GNSO Council vote can be exercised and that conditions otherwise resulting in an abstention can be mitigated. The GNSO Council has not established any provision that would permit the voting thresholds and calculations to be altered, for example, by reducing the denominator due to an abstention.

4.8 Procedures

This paragraph outlines the notification and communication steps required when an abstention condition is identified as well as the procedures that must be followed in remedying the abstention.

For the purposes of these procedures, the term “written” or “in writing” shall mean via postal mail or electronic mail (e-mail).

In order for an abstention remedy to be implemented, all required procedures must be completed prior to the start of the GNSO Council meeting in which the vote will be taken; otherwise, the abstention will not be remedied and the provisions of [Section 4.8](#), Paragraph c will apply.

a. Notification by Councilor

A Councilor who believes that he/she should abstain from participation/voting on a measure before the Council is required to provide, at the earliest opportunity, a brief written notification documenting the circumstances to the appointing organization with a copy forwarded to the GNSO Secretariat. For a House NCA, the notification should be sent to the GNSO Secretariat with a copy to the Council NCA who is required to acknowledge receipt to both parties that an automatic proxy is confirmed. If the situation is perceived to be confidential in nature and cannot be disclosed in the notification, a statement to that effect should be included by the Councilor.

b. Communication by Appointing Organization or NCA

To effectuate a remedy described in [Paragraph 4.5.3](#) the appointing organization or, when applicable, the House or Council NCA must provide a written statement to the GNSO Secretariat, as early as possible prior to any discussion/voting on the matter at issue, containing the following information:

- Name of the abstaining Councilor.
- Remedy selected (from [Paragraph 4.5.3](#)).
- Reason(s) for or condition(s) leading to the remedy.
- Specific subject(s)/measure(s)/motion(s)/action(s) of the Council for which the remedy is being exercised.
- Date upon which the remedy will expire or terminate. No remedy may initially or subsequently extend beyond three (3) months at a time. If the period needs to be extended, a written notice can be provided to the GNSO Secretariat indicating the reason for extension (e.g. Council vote postponed) and a new expiration date. While there is no limit to the number of extensions; “standing” remedies are not allowed under any circumstances.
- For the specific remedies of Voting Direction and Proxy Voting, the communication must include an affirmation that the appointing organization has established a voting position, subject to provisions contained in its Charter or Bylaws, on the matter at issue. For Voting Direction, a statement from the appointing organization shall indicate that the affected Councilor has been instructed how to vote on the matter. Exclusion: these statements are not applicable or required in a remedy applied for a House NCA.
- For Proxy Voting, identification of the GNSO Councilor who will register the vote for the abstaining Councilor.
- For a Temporary Alternate, identification of the individual who will serve as a substitute for the abstaining Councilor. If not already published and available, a short bio and Statement of Interest should be prepared by the Temporary Alternate and delivered to the GNSO Secretariat in advance of any discussion or voting scheduled to take place.

c. Effect and Recording of an Abstention Not Otherwise Remedied

If an abstention cannot be avoided after pursuing the remedy provided in [Paragraph 4.5.3](#), then the Councilor may abstain from voting and an “Abstention” will be entered into the record along with a reason. If the reason for the abstention warrants such action (e.g. obligatory abstention), the Councilor shall be recused and not participate in discussions on the affected topic(s) or otherwise attempt to influence other Council members nor shall he/she vote on any action attendant to the matter for which the abstention conditions are present. An abstention shall not affect quorum requirements or calculations nor will it reduce the denominator in any vote tabulations for the affected House.

4.9 Consent Agenda

When preparing the meeting agenda, the Council Chair in consultation with the Council Vice-Chairs determines whether an item belongs on the consent agenda. All items that are subject to a different voting threshold than a simple majority vote (see ICANN Bylaws, Article X, section 3-9) or are subject to absentee voting (see section 4.4 – Absentee Voting) are not eligible for inclusion in the consent agenda. A numbered list of consent items is included as part of the meeting agenda. The list and supporting documents are included in the Council agenda in sufficient time to be read by all Council members prior to the meeting in accordance with section 3.3 – Notice of Meetings of these Operating Procedures.

At the beginning of the meeting, the Chair asks members what items they wish to have removed from the consent agenda and discussed individually. If any Council member requests that an item be removed from the consent agenda, it must be removed. Council members may request that an item be removed for any reason. They may wish, for example, to discuss the item, to query the item, or to register a vote against the item. If an item is removed from the consent agenda, it is added to the meeting agenda for that meeting, unless the Council Chair in consultation with the Council Vice-Chairs determines differently.

When there are no more items to be removed, the Chair reads out the number of the remaining consent items. Then the Chair calls for a vote.

When preparing the minutes, the full text of (or links to) the resolutions, reports or recommendations that were adopted as part of the consent agenda are included. In addition the minutes should include a statement regarding the composition/threshold that approved the consent agenda.

