

19 August 2025

GNSO Council Strategic Planning Session Report

To: the ICANN Board

Dear Tripti,

On behalf of the Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO) Council, we would like to share the Council's 2025 Strategic Planning Session (SPS) Report with the ICANN Board. The GNSO Council met in January 2025 in Washington, DC for this recurring strategic meeting, which focused on the following objectives:

1. Review the GNSO's portfolio of work for the coming year,
2. Align on the GNSO's work priorities for the coming year,
3. Consider whether the Council has the correct resources and tools to conduct its work as manager of the PDP efficiently, effectively, and comprehensively, and
4. Discuss how to best prepare for emerging and upcoming challenges the Council could face in the coming year and beyond, including a thorough discussion of recent policy-related challenges that the Council has been presented with or will soon be presented with.

In the interest of comprehensiveness, we have included the agreed outcomes below; however, we would like to draw your particular attention to Outcome 1, which references the ongoing cooperation between the Board and the GNSO Council with respect to developing a process to "un-adopt" a previously adopted GNSO PDP policy recommendation(s).

This report provides further details on the discussions, agreements, and action items that were developed, discussed, and agreed to during the 2025 GNSO Council Strategic Planning Session.

Here is a list of the main outcomes:

1. The Council discussed ideas for a proposed process for the ICANN Board to "un-adopt" a previously adopted GNSO PDP policy recommendation.
2. The Council agreed to revisit the concept of an aspirational statement, or a statement designed to reinforce the Council's role as manager of the PDP and help Councilors socialize the unique role of Councilors to their respective Stakeholder Groups and Constituencies.
3. The Council reviewed its portfolio of tools and agreed that the tools are important in helping it manage and plan its current and upcoming work, and accordingly, the current tools should be maintained.
4. The Council discussed improving its communication with the GAC by encouraging the Council Liaison to the GAC to connect GNSO subject matter experts with GAC topic leads.
5. The Council discussed the upcoming portfolio of work of the new Standing Committee on Continuous Improvements "SCCI" in an effort to better understand the GNSO's commitment to continuous improvement, as well as how this work fits into the Council's overall portfolio of work.

We hope you find this helpful in understanding the GNSO Council's focus, priorities, and commitments for the upcoming year. We wanted to extend the Council's appreciation for the participation of the GNSO-appointed Board members to the ICANN Board, Becky Burr and Chris Buckridge. We also wanted to extend the Council's appreciation for the dedicated time with Kurtis Lundquist, particularly since Kurtis had just started in his new role

at ICANN at the time of the SPS. The Council welcomed the opportunity to engage with the three of you during this meeting and greatly benefitted from your input and suggestions.

The Council continues to appreciate the informal communications with the Board and wishes to continue this momentum of effective two-way communication. Should you have any questions or would like to discuss any aspects of the report further, please do not hesitate to let us know. The Council anticipates discussing some of the topics identified in the report, particularly around the “un-adoption” of recommendations, further during our bilateral session at ICANN84.

Thank you very much, and we look forward to our continued discussions.

Sincerely,

Nacho Amadoz and Tomslin Samme-Nlar
Interim Co-Chairs of the GNSO

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Generic Names Supporting Organization

Status of This Document

This is the outcome document from the eighth Generic Names Supporting Organization's Council Strategic Planning Session that took place in Washington, DC on 14-15 January 2025.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	<u>3</u>
<u>Detailed Outcomes and Associated Action Items</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>Wrap-Up and Confirmation of Outcomes and Action Items</u>	<u>12</u>

Executive Summary

Background

Beginning in 2018, the GNSO Council has held an annual Strategic Planning Session (SPS). The SPS is the Council's dedicated meeting designed to (i) understand and review the GNSO's portfolio of work for the coming year, (ii) align on the GNSO's work priorities for the coming year, (iii) consider whether the GNSO Council has the correct resources and tools to conduct its work as manager of the PDP efficiently, effectively, and comprehensively, and (iv) discuss how to best prepare for emerging and upcoming challenges the Council could face in the coming year and beyond. This year's SPS was held in Washington, D.C. on 14-15 January 2025.

The GNSO Council used its 2025 SPS to continue the discussion of what it means to be an effective “Manager of the PDP” and why it is important for the group to align on its understanding of its core role. Following this discussion, Council Leadership led a discussion of real-world examples of recent policy-related challenges that the Council has been presented with or will soon be presented with. Understanding the options available to the Council in these scenarios allowed Councilors to work together to navigate these challenges with mutual understanding and a shared vision.

Nearly all GNSO Councilors attended the meeting, with active and vocal participation from all GNSO Stakeholder Groups and Constituencies. Both GNSO-appointed board members also actively participated in the discussions.

Terminology

Where there are references to the “Council” in this document, please note this refers to the GNSO Council. Similarly, references to “Working Groups” refer to Policy Development Process (PDP) working groups that have either been chartered by, or fall within the management of, the GNSO Council.

Focus

The SPS took place over 2 days, and the proposed themes and objectives were as follows:

- Welcome and integration of new Councilors;
- Based on a shared understanding of what it means to be “Manager of the PDP,” create an environment of collegiality, predictability, and trust;
- Ensure that Councilors are familiar with existing tools and information concerning the GNSO Council’s role and responsibilities, and determine if improvements or changes are needed; and
- Ensure that Councilors are familiar with upcoming challenges and openly discuss the best way to proceed in potentially uncharted PDP and IRT territory.

Outcomes

This report provides further details on the discussions, agreements, and action items that were developed, discussed, and agreed to during the 2025 GNSO Council Strategic Planning Session.

Here is a list of the main outcomes:

1. The Council discussed ideas for a proposed process for the ICANN Board to “un-adopt” a previously adopted GNSO PDP policy recommendation.

2. The Council agreed to revisit the concept of an aspirational statement, or a statement designed to reinforce the Council's role as manager of the PDP and help Councilors socialize the unique role of Councilors to their respective Stakeholder Groups and Constituencies.
3. The Council reviewed its portfolio of tools and agreed that the tools are important in helping it manage and plan its current and upcoming work, and accordingly, the current tools should be maintained.
4. The Council discussed improving its communication and understanding with the GAC by encouraging the Council Liaison to the GAC to assist with identifying and connecting GNSO subject matter experts with GAC topic leads.
5. The Council discussed the upcoming portfolio of work of the new Standing Committee on Continuous Improvements "SCCI" in an effort to better understand how this work fits into the Council's other work.

This SPS report provides more details on the outcomes, including how the Council arrived at these outcomes and importantly, the accompanying action items they agreed to in order to address the identified concerns and opportunities.

To check on the progress of the implementation of these action items and allow for updates to be made, GNSO Support Staff will work with Council Leadership to schedule a post-SPS meeting in approximately six (6) months.

Detailed Outcomes and Associated Action Items

The Council dedicated time to discussing its role as Manager of the PDP with the goal of (i) gaining a common understanding of the role and responsibility of a Council as the Manager of the PDP at specifically identified parts of the policy process and (ii) identifying if further improvements or changes need to be made in relation to information that is reviewed by Council when considering PDP recommendations for approval.

The Council noted the following in its discussion of the various steps of the PDP:

I. Council's Role as Manager of the PDP

Scoping the work

The current Council recently went through scoping a PDP when it reviewed the Issue Report for Latin Diacritics. Within this step, Councilors discussed the importance of ensuring assignments are narrowly scoped with a goal of creating lean, efficient PDPs, which will reinforce the effectiveness of the multi-stakeholder model and reduce frustration and volunteer burnout.

Additionally, in its discussion of scoping PDPs appropriately, the Council discussed the meaning of the picket fence. One of the GNSO board members in attendance, provided additional context on the origins and importance of the picket fence. Specifically, Councilors discussed that ICANN has no authority as a regulator; all of its authority comes from the contracts it executes with contracted parties (the registry operators and registrars). ICANN's contracts are unique in that a typical contract has very certain terms that cannot be amended unless both parties agree, but ICANN can modify its contracts with registries and registrars without the individual consent of the contracted party in certain circumstances. In terms of GNSO policy development, contracts can be modified only with respect to a policy that is reasonably necessary for security and stability (as defined in the Bylaws annexes), and the policy must be developed through the multistakeholder process as defined in the Bylaws.

To improve understanding, the Council requested clarity on Annex G-1 and G-2 of the Bylaws.

ACTION: Support Staff to consolidate the relevant Bylaws language related to the picket fence and circulate it to the Council to ensure the Council has a shared understanding of the relevant language.

Managing the PDP

In managing the PDP prior to consideration of the Final Report, experienced Councilors noted that the critical tool in this phase is the Council liaison. For that reason, Councilors encouraged liaisons to communicate regularly and ensure Councilors are aware of any potential issues early. Additionally, Support Staff circulated the [guidelines for GNSO Council liaisons to Working Groups](#) so that those who are unfamiliar with the role or guidelines could review.

Considering the Final Report

In considering a PDP Working Group's Final Report, Councilors discussed the importance of differentiating the Council as the *manager* of the PDP, not the *developer* of the PDP recommendations. Accordingly, Councilors discussed showing deference to the work of the PDP working group as the recommendations represent policy recommendations developed through the multistakeholder model. Some Councilors expressed the importance of voting "yes" to policy recommendations that receive the consensus support of the working group, as this could enhance the PDP Chair's ability to reach compromises. Additionally, some Councilors noted that if individual groups direct their Councilors to vote "no" to recommendations they do not like but still achieved consensus support of the working group, this could corrupt the system and lead to mistrust of the multi-stakeholder model. In discussing this topic, the idea of an aspirational statement to assist Councilors in educating constituents on the unique role of GNSO councilor reemerged. Following a discussion on the benefits of an aspirational statement, the Council agreed to reconsider this idea.

ACTION: GNSO Council to reconsider an aspirational statement, which is a statement designed (i) to reinforce the Council’s role as manager of the PDP and (ii) to help Councilors socialize the unique role of Councilors to their respective Stakeholder Groups and Constituencies. The Council agreed the aspirational statement is NOT binding, a voting directive, or intended to limit the actions of Councilors.

Within this discussion, Councilors also discussed the treatment of non-consensus recommendations.

In its discussion of non-consensus recommendations in a Final Report, the Council discussed how, generally speaking, the Council would not approve recommendations that did not receive the consensus support of the Working Group. For example, recommendations from the Subsequent Procedures PDP that received strong support but significant opposition were not voted on and were not sent to the Board. Some Councilors felt that not sending these recommendations along with explanatory text to the Board was a missed opportunity because it led to a rehashing of old discussions that had already occurred within the Working Group.

In contrast, the Council took a different approach on the EPDP Phase 2 on the Standardized System for Access/Disclosure Final Report and voted to approve all 18 recommendations related to the SSAD, including the recommendations that did not achieve consensus support. This was because the EPDP Team requested that the 18 SSAD recommendations be considered and voted on as one package. Accordingly, the Council voted on the 18 recommendations together, which resulted in the Council approving recommendations that did not achieve the consensus of the EPDP Team.

Councilors noted that it may be helpful for the Council to prepare a scorecard to send to the Board regarding its treatment of the recommendations, including explanatory text as to why certain recommendations were not voted on. Councilors also noted that this idea could be discussed with the current Board Readiness Small Team as it prepares its recommendations and ideas on how to make policy recommendations more “board ready”.

ACTION: GNSO Council to communicate the ideas identified during the SPS for how the Council could potentially handle non-consensus recommendations (e.g., scorecard, remanding, reengaging when circumstances change) with the Board Readiness team.

Additionally, the Council asked for metrics on the Council’s approval/rejection of the non-consensus recommendations in order to better understand how these have been treated in the recent past.

ACTION: Support Staff to collect metrics from at least the last five years regarding consensus designations and Council voting outcomes to inform the current Council on how non-consensus recommendations have been treated in the most recent PDPs.

Board Consideration and Beyond

The Council spent a significant portion of the SPS discussing hypothetical scenarios that may soon come to the Council for a decision. Both hypothetical scenarios involved Board-approved recommendations that the Board, for articulated reasons, now considers problematic.

There is currently no specific mechanism contemplated by the ICANN Bylaws that permits the Board to reconsider or reverse its previous adoption of a GNSO PDP recommendation. This potential procedural gap was identified when the Board noted emerging concerns with Recommendation 18 from the Phase 1 of the Temporary Specification for gTLD Registration Data EPDP. After discussing this potential procedural gap in a philosophical manner, the Board was confronted with a more urgent need to reverse course on a previously-adopted recommendation. Specifically, the Board was confronted with changing circumstances and new information that led it to conclude that Recommendation 20.6 on joint ventures from the New gTLD Subsequent Procedures (SubPro) PDP was no longer in the best interest of ICANN and the ICANN community. Because there is no current mechanism for the Board to reverse its previous adoption, the Board [communicated](#) its intention to do so and the Council [responded](#) and informed the Board that it would not seek to intervene in the reversal of the adoption of the Recommendation 20.6. The Council, however, did indicate the need to develop and document the mechanism by which the Board can reverse its adoption of a GNSO PDP recommendation.

In light of this recent scenario, the Council discussed the development of a reversal process. At the outset of this discussion, the Council noted that regardless of whether or not a defined process exists for any particular Board action, the Board is always bound to act in the global public interest and to make decisions that are in the best interest of ICANN and the ICANN community. With this critical point noted, the Council discussed the importance of a defined process and necessary guardrails, to avoid a situation where the Board acts in a unilateral manner, which could risk the trust in the multi-stakeholder model.

To begin, the Council noted that it anticipates the Board's reversal of adopted policy recommendations will be rare and only used out of utmost necessity. If, however, the Board has received new information or is confronted with changing circumstances which necessitate the need to revisit a previously adopted policy recommendation(s), the Council discussed how the Board should endeavor to make all reasonable efforts to engage in dialogue with the GNSO Council to, at a minimum:

- communicate its intentions to reverse its adoption;
- detail the issue(s) and provide rationale for the intended action;
- seek input from the Council as to alternative remedies prior to taking action; and,
- explain why reversal is the only or best option prior to taking action.

The Council also noted that this process does not appear proper or relevant for recommendations that have already been implemented, but only for recommendations that are yet to be implemented. (For recommendations that are already implemented and are incorporated into a consensus policy, there are a number of existing remedies available if action is warranted. For instance, the Board could use a temporary specification, contractual compliance enforcement could be deferred, or new policy could be developed.)

The Council also discussed how the standards for reversal of adoption should mirror the requirements and current voting thresholds for non-adoption. In other words, the standard should be that the policy is not in the best interest of ICANN or the ICANN Community, and the voting threshold should be 2/3 of Board for recommendations with GNSO Supermajority support and majority of Board for recommendations without GNSO Supermajority support. Additionally, similar to a non-adoption, the Board should communicate its rationale for non-adoption via a Board Statement to the Council, and the Council should be afforded the opportunity to develop a Supplemental Recommendation if it so wishes.

While the Council seemed comfortable with the above proposed procedure, it did note that further discussion would be needed, particularly around how to properly memorialize the process and confirm the Board agrees with this approach. One option the Council considered is to provide interim guidance (in the short term) and then memorialize the process more formally (possibly via a Bylaws amendment) in the longer term.

ACTION: Support staff and Council leadership to begin the process of proposing questions to ICANN org (and possibly others) regarding the preferred method to capture the process for the Board to un-adopt a GNSO recommendation. Council to review the outcome and provide additional input prior to dialogue with the Board.

II. Council's Management of its Work Portfolio

Council Tools

Support Staff provided an overview of the current tool set the Council uses to manage its work with the goal of educating new Councilors on the tools it has at its disposal and confirming with returning Councilors that the tools still assist the Council in managing its work, and, if they do not, what amendments or additions may be needed.

Councilors confirmed that the tool suite is valuable and should continue to be maintained. The Council did discuss how to best utilize the Projects List and Action-Decision Radar, and requested some updates related to (i) comprehensive presentations of the Projects List at a predictable cadence and (ii) how the Project List could better show interrelated projects and known dependencies.

ACTION: GNSO Council agreed to participate in two comprehensive reviews of the Projects List, the first to occur prior to the Community Forum (ICANN82) and second to occur prior to the Annual General Meeting (ICANN84). The first comprehensive review will occur during the Pre-ICANN82 GNSO Council webinar.

ACTION: GNSO Support Staff to consider how to best show interrelated projects and dependencies within the Projects List.

Council Teams

Informal Team on Internet Governance

The Council discussed the importance of both ICANN and the GNSO Council within Internet Governance more broadly. Some Councilors noted the importance of engaging and monitoring the internet governance related work of UN-led or intergovernmental organizations, particularly the issues that may impact the DNS landscape. Within the various fora, it is important to communicate the effectiveness of the multistakeholder model. Councilors noted two things that would be particularly helpful to Councilors who are not closely following these discussions: (i) curate the WSIS email list, as there is a lot of traffic, and (ii) assist the Council in interpreting the latest developments and why it is important to the Council.

ACTION: Council to form an informal team to track the progress of internet governance work and provide ad hoc updates to the Council as needed.

GNSO Standing Committee on Continuous Improvement

The Council is tackling continuous improvement primarily through its newly minted Standing Committee on Continuous Improvement (SCCI), and it discussed some of the continuous improvement initiatives that are within the context of SCCI, including the work that is required from the Accountability and Transparency Review Team 3 (ATRT3) and what is likely to be included in the FY26-FY30 strategic plan in terms of evolving the PDP. Additionally, the SCCI is anticipated to work on working group assessments, PDP 3.0 review, Policy and Implementation Policy Status Report, Review of the Operational Design Phase, and any recommendations coming out of the Council's Board Readiness Small Team.

ACTION: GNSO Council Standing Committee on Continuous Improvements ("SCCI"): In an effort for the GNSO Council to better understand the portfolio of upcoming work for the SCCI, GNSO Support Staff to provide a detailed presentation during a future Council meeting.

GNSO Liaison to the GAC

The new GNSO Liaison to the GAC proposed facilitating more open dialogue and broadening the contact between the GNSO and GAC by identifying GNSO subject matter experts and pairing them with the relevant GAC topic lead(s). If the GNSO subject matter expert is outside of Council, the liaison would flag this to the Council. The Council was very receptive to this idea and noted the proposal is not inconsistent

with the job description of the GNSO Liaison to the GAC. The Council also requested a progress update in six months.

ACTION: GNSO Council Liaison to the GAC to perform a review of topics of interest to both the GAC and GNSO and identify potential subject matter expert volunteers to work with subgroups in the GAC for capacity building, knowledge sharing, and improved communication between the GNSO and GAC. GNSO Council Liaison to the GAC to share any identified subject matter experts with the GNSO Council for transparency.

ACTION: GNSO Council Liaison to the GAC to provide a progress report to the Council on the enhanced communication efforts in six months.

III. Council's Meeting with New ICANN CEO, Kurtis Lundquist

The Council appreciated the opportunity to meet with the new ICANN CEO, Kurtis Lunquist. As Kurtis had just started in his role of ICANN CEO, this session was primarily an introduction for both the Councilors and Kurtis. Councilors used the opportunity to explain the unique role of the Council to Kurtis. Kurtis noted that he was very new to the role, but he believes that a high level of collaboration between ICANN org and the ICANN Community is valuable for the organization.

The GNSO Council wishes to express its gratitude that Kurtis took time out of his busy schedule to meet with the GNSO Council, and the Council looks forward to collaborating in the future.

Wrap-Up and Confirmation of Outcomes and Action Items

Council Leadership presented the following outcomes during the Wrap-Up, and the Council agreed to proceed with these action items. (Note: these have been included within the relevant section of the report; however, they are catalogued here for ease of use.)

1. GNSO Council's Role as Manager of the PDP vis-a-vis previously-adopted GNSO PDP recommendations that the Board may "un-adopt": GNSO Council discussed and crystallized their ideas for a proposed process for ICANN Board to "un-adopt" a previously-adopted GNSO PDP policy recommendation.
 - a. Action: Support staff and Council leadership to propose questions to ICANN org (and possibly others) regarding the preferred method to capture the process for the Board to un-adopt a GNSO recommendation.

2. GNSO Council's Role as Manager of the PDP: GNSO Council to reconsider an aspirational statement, or a statement designed to reinforce the Council's role as manager of the PDP and help Councilors socialize the unique role of Councilors to their respective Stakeholder Groups and Constituencies.
3. GNSO Council's Project Management:
 - a. GNSO Council agreed to participate in two comprehensive reviews of the Projects List, the first to occur prior to the Community Forum (ICANN82) and second to occur prior to the Annual General Meeting (ICANN84).
 - b. The first comprehensive review, led by Paul McGrady, will occur during the Pre-ICANN82 GNSO Council webinar.
 - c. GNSO Councilors expressed an interest in understanding how the Projects List could better show interrelated projects.
- i. GNSO Support Staff to consider how to best show interrelated projects and dependencies within the Projects List.
4. Role of GNSO Council Liaison to the GAC:
 - a. GNSO Council Liaison to the GAC to perform a review of topics of interest to both the GAC and GNSO and identify potential subject matter expert volunteers to work with subgroups in the GAC for capacity building, knowledge sharing, and improved communication between the GNSO and GAC. GNSO Council Liaison to the GAC to share any identified subject matter experts with the GNSO Council for transparency.
 - b. GNSO Council Liaison to the GAC to provide a progress report to the Council on the enhanced communication efforts in six months.
5. WSIS + 20: GNSO Council to form an informal small team to track the progress of this work and provide ad hoc updates to the Council as needed.
6. GNSO Council Standing Committee on Continuous Improvements ("SCCI"): In an effort for the GNSO Council to better understand the portfolio of upcoming work for the SCCI, GNSO Support Staff to provide a detailed presentation during a future Council meeting.