GNSO Council Prioritization

Background

The GNSO Council has relied on its Action Decision Radar (ADR) to help determine which actions or decisions should be addressed next. The ADR can best be described as a sequencing tool which takes into account a number of factors such as past Council decisions, ICANN Bylaws/GNSO Operating Procedures requirements, external dependencies (e.g., Reviews), etc. While it has served the Council well in allowing the Council to understand the action or decision points ahead, including the ability to escalate certain work as necessary (e.g., Latin Diacritics PDP, DNS Abuse Mitigation PDPs), what it has never been is a prioritization tool. The Council decided during its most recent Strategic Planning Session (SPS) in January 2026 that the ADR should continue to be maintained, but the ADR and a, yet to be created, prioritization tool can coexist. On 2 April, a Councilor provided an additional option (Option 0) for consideration which is included below.

Executive Summary:

- The Council discussed the below options during its February and March meetings. The Council recognized that no option can fulfill all expectations. However, as noted during ICANN85 the Council has communicated to the community that a prioritization approach will be agreed upon soon.
- The below options can be divided into three categories:
    - **Simple ranking approaches:** They are easy to set up, easy to complete and easy to explain. But they might flatten everything into preference, ignoring the reasons behind those preferences. That can lead to shallow or inconsistent outcomes, especially when different people/groups are thinking about completely different factors.
    - **Scoring models with criteria and weights**: These bring more structure and make trade-offs explicit. They help groups articulate what matters (e.g. urgency, cost, complexity) and compare options more systematically. But before one can even start, agreement on what the criteria are is needed, and sometimes how important each one is. That setup can be surprisingly difficult.
    - **Hybrid approaches,** like the **bucketed ranking model**, which try to balance simplicity and nuance. By separating “what matters now” from “what doesn’t,” they reduce noise and make ranking more meaningful. But they also introduce additional steps, which can make the process feel heavier.
- The urgency/importance model (2x2) stands slightly apart. It doesn’t try to rank everything at all. Instead, it reframes the question into categories of attention. This makes it powerful for clarity, but less useful when you need a precise ordering of priorities.

Simple Conclusion:

- The more structured the model, the better it is at revealing *why* something should be prioritized, but the harder it is to set up.
- The simpler the model, the easier it is to use, but the more it might risk oversimplifying reality.

Proposed Way Forward:

What the GNSO Council seems to need is a method that is structured but not heavy, informative but not prescriptive. The Multi-Criteria model (Option 1) might land in a sweet spot. It introduces just enough discipline to make comparisons meaningful, without overcomplicating the process.

However, if you take that model and run it as a one-off exercise (everyone scores, numbers come out, ranking is produced) it might risk falling back into the same trap as traditional systems: treating the output as if it were the answer. That's where Option 0 becomes important. If you imagine combining the two, the scoring model produces an initial picture; i.e. structured, comparable, easy to read. But instead of stopping there, the group treats it as a starting point for discussion. People can see where they differ, question each other's assumptions, and even adjust their inputs if needed.

Next Steps:

- Council to agree on approach (yes/no)
- If yes, Council leadership to propose criteria; Council agreement on criteria
- Council with support from Staff to set up document/procedure

Options to Consider

Caveat: Staff provided the following options for the Council's consideration but staff are most definitely not experts in the area. Different ideas, suggested changes, and outright criticism are therefore all equally welcome! There are of course any number of other prioritization models that can be considered. Staff suggested the requirements and assumptions below, to help provide some structure to the selection process.

Requirements and Assumptions:

- The outcome of the prioritization exercise should be advisory in nature to the Council.
- The process should be simple to administer.
- The process should be flexible and easily modified as necessary.
- The process should be conducted on a periodic basis (e.g., around the SPS and around 6 months afterwards) and should not be an ongoing process or otherwise overly burdensome.

Option 0: Ranked Discussion Model

The idea is simple: have something like a spreadsheet, where people can enter their rankings and that computes the averages or whatever automatically. (Google Docs should work.) It might

not matter much exactly how the averages would be calculated, but in general the simpler the better.

Key points:

(1) Votes are not secret, everybody can see what others have done.
(2) Ranking is not a one-off, but people can change their choices after seeing what others have done, as often as they like.

It is critical that there is no hard, predetermined cut-off point: that would bring all the problems back. Consequently there's no final outcome either, unless and until everyone agrees. So this would not be a method for making final decisions, only a tool to facilitate discussion.

Pros/Cons: What might make this approach work is that it changes the tone of decision-making. Instead of competing to push one option over the top, people are invited to explain themselves and react to others. It may also reduce the urge to play games. In a normal vote, you might rank something higher or lower strategically. But this strength is also where the model can struggle. Because nothing forces a conclusion, the process depends heavily on the group's willingness to engage constructively. If people stop participating, or if disagreements run deep and no one budges, the system doesn't resolve that for you. It can simply linger.

Option 1: Multi Criteria Scoring Model
This model requires the identification of criteria. Purely as an ***example***, the Council could identify the following criteria:

- **[Importance:** The fact or condition of being regarded or treated as more important. A score of 5 being the most important.
- **Urgency:** Importance requiring swift action. A score of 5 being the most swift.
- **Demand:** Level of community attention to the issue. A score of 5 being the highest level of demand.
- **Complexity:** Level of difficulty or challenge to address the policy issue. A score of 5 being the least complex.
- **Resources:** Estimate level of community, staff and financial resources to complete the project. A score of 5 being the least resource intensive.
- **Duration:** Indicator on the length the project may require from initial scoping to Council consideration. A score of 1 would represent 5 or more years. A score of 5 would represent 6 months or less.]

How it works: For a potential project, each of the SG/C & NCAs would each assign a score from 1-5 for every criteria. Those scores would then be added up to reach a total score for each of the groups; an average score could then be easily calculated. This process would be the same for each of the available potential projects. After all average scores for all potential projects are identified, they can then be ranked.

Pros/Cons: This option is customizable to fit the needs of the Council (e.g., identifying different Criteria) and introduces an element of data to the process. The process is relatively easy to administer and the outputs should be easily understood. However, it requires agreement on criteria, which may prove challenging. While it provides an element of data, responses are ultimately still subjective in nature.

Option 2: Weighted Scoring Model

This model is very similar to *Option 1* but it introduces a weighted score element to each of the criteria. Continuing from the example above, see below an ***example*** of what the weighted scoring could look like:

- **[Importance:** 20%
- **Urgency:** 25%
- **Demand:** 10%
- **Complexity:** 25%
- **Resources:** 20%
- **Duration:** 5%]

The rationale for adding a weighted score per criteria is that it allows the Council to emphasize the importance of certain criteria. For example, and as an example only, the Council could determine that priority and urgency are more important Criteria than duration, and assign weighted scores accordingly.

How it works: Essentially the same as for Option 1. The key difference is in respect of the up-front agreements on the weighted scoring, which then has a downstream effect of requiring slightly more complicated calculations for determining totals.

Pros/Cons: This option is even more customizable than Option 1, since it allows the Council to determine which of the Criteria should be emphasized/deemphasized. The process, once set up, is still relatively easy to administer and it also provides an element of data. However, it now requires agreement on both criteria and weighted scoring levels, making initial setup that much more difficult. Lastly, it has the same limitation as Option 1 in that it provides an element of data, but that data remains subjective in nature.

Option 3: Ranked Choice Voting by SGs/Cs & NCAs

This option is as simple as it can get. All of the SG/Cs/NCAs assign a ranking to the available projects (i.e., projects that the Council has not already committed to), from 1 - xx, indicating most important to least important. The numbers would then be compiled and a result produced, which would inform the Council's decision-making.

Pros/Cons: This option is simple to understand and administer, but it seems to lack any sense of nuance; it merely takes account of preferences from the SG/Cs and does not take into account any factors that would influence those preferences (i.e. the individual SG/Cs may have taken factors such as urgency or demand into account in allocating their ranking, but those choices will not be uniform). Past attempts using this mechanism have not worked for past Councils.

Option 4: "Prioritized" Ranked Choice Voting by SG/Cs & NCAs

This option is a variation of Option 3. The same mechanism of ranking would apply (i.e., ranked choice voting), but an intermediary step would be introduced - the available projects could be put into buckets (e.g., green indicates immediate need, yellow means important but not immediate, and red means not a priority at this time) based upon a survey to the SG/Cs. The ranked choice voting could then apply to only the projects in the green bucket. The bucketing exercise would require the development of definitions for the different buckets and pertinent details so that the groups can make informed decisions on their bucketing choices.

Pros/Cons: This option is still relatively simple to understand and administer, but it does add a level of nuance that appears lacking in Option 3. However, it requires more initial setup (e.g., defining the buckets and determining what constitutes pertinent information) and the process now requires multiple steps to administer.

Additional Options and Considerations

- Urgent/Important technique, which is used by ICANN Org's Planning team. The model relies upon a 2x2 grid to consider each potential project based upon its Importance and Urgency, which are briefly described below. The model can be reviewed in further detail in the *Planning Prioritization Process Document - Version June 2025* here. In brief, the model is understood to be flexible and applicable to a broad range of circumstances, and is relatively simple to understand and administer.
    - **Importance** of the task to the overall success of the mission
    - **Urgency** with which the task needs to be carried out
- As noted above in the Caveat, there are countless options for prioritization, but not all of them may be suitable for the Council. For instance, many are intended to be used in a corporate environment where profits and losses are key considerations, which does not seem applicable to the Council's work. At the risk of creating choice paralysis for the Council, additional models can be considered!
- The Council came to the general agreement that it wishes to establish a prioritization mechanism to complement the ADR. If the Council is unable to agree on a mechanism, the assumption is that the Council would return to the ADR-only model to guide its action and decision-making.