

25 August 2025

RE: GAC and ALAC Joint Letter “Urgent Review of Next Round Applicant Support Program”

Nicolas G. Caballero
Chair, Government Advisory Committee (GAC)

Jonathan Zuck
Chair, At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC)

Dear Nico and Jonathan,

Thank you for your 15 August letter expressing your commitment to ensuring the success of the Applicant Support Program (ASP) and enabling diverse representation from underserved regions. The Board hears the concerns you’ve stated about the Program’s current trajectory and the timeline urgency. I want to assure you that the Board shares a strong commitment to the success of the ASP, and the Board would find benefit in having a meeting with the ALAC and GAC to discuss more fully your concerns. We will work to coordinate a mutually beneficial meeting date and time.

So that our discussion will be productive, I think it would be helpful to share with you what the Board has planned in the coming weeks regarding the Program, and to also highlight the breadth of the work that has been done and is ongoing to maintain our commitment to the Program.

Where we are going - Efforts to Help ASP Applicants in the Application Pipeline

As you may be aware, ICANN announced a few days ago that the first three ASP candidates have conditionally qualified for support. As well, staff is continuing to ramp up its efforts to help other ASP applicants in the application pipeline. This work is in response to the GAC’s request in the Prague Communiqué. Based on the work underway and in light of both the Prague Communiqué and this more recent correspondence, the Board expects to receive a comprehensive report from ICANN staff on its efforts to raise awareness of the Program and to assist current ASP applicants. The Board will discuss this report during its September workshop and would like the benefit of this analysis to be part of the proposed exchange with you as the report will likely provide relevant data to the questions you presented in your letter regarding the “Proposed Review Framework”.

In addition to the proposed discussion with the Board, I understand that staff made an offer to have a discussion with the GAC following the ICANN83 Prague Communiqué. Staff continue to stand ready to have this discussion at the earliest convenience if the GAC and ALAC believe this would be helpful.

Where we've been – Continuing Commitment to Program

The Board is aware that staff has conducted significant global communications, outreach and engagement efforts to create awareness of the ASP, which began in May 2024. This work is aligned with the Board-adopted SubPro Final Report recommendations and the GNSO Guidance Process (GGP) recommendations provided the basis for implementing the ASP. To the extent that GAC and ALAC members see opportunities or wish to create opportunities for raising awareness in their respective region, I am confident that our regional Global Stakeholder Engagement colleagues are keen to work collaboratively on such efforts. Updates on Outreach, Engagement & Communications are shared monthly with the SubPro Implementation Review Team (IRT).

As a reminder, our work to implement the ASP is guided by the Board-adopted outputs of the multistakeholder policy development process. I would like to take this opportunity to address some specific points raised in your letter that seem to differ from these outputs. The Board understands the impetus to want to do the most to make the ASP successful and wants to make sure that doing so is aligned with the community-developed outputs.

With respect to geographic balance or targets, the ASP is "...open to applicants regardless of their location as long as they meet other program criteria...", per SubPro Recommendation 17.1; and the GGP provided implementation guidance to:

Target potential applicants from the not-for-profit sector, social enterprises and/or community organizations from under-served and developing regions and countries. This should not exclude any entities from outreach efforts, such as private sector entities from underserved and developing regions and countries, recognizing the goal is to get as many qualifying applicants as possible.

With respect to a targeted number of applicants, the GNSO Guidance Process was tasked with defining ASP metrics for success as a follow-on to the SubPro Final Report outputs on the topic of Applicant Support. In terms of targets, the GGP Guidance Recommendation 5 states:

Of all successfully delegated gTLD applications, the goal is that a certain percentage of them should be from supported applicants. No fewer than 10, or 0.5 percent (.005), of all successfully delegated gTLD applications were from supported applicants.*

The Board ensured adequate funding for up to 45 applicants. This was done in recognition of the fact that applicants may withdraw from the application process, be deemed ineligible, or find themselves in contention.

It is important to distinguish between the ICANN org budget allocation and the GGP recommendation that articulates the success metric. The Board, the organization, and the community are aligned in a collective desire to see the maximum number of qualified ASP applications. The Board approved cap on supported applicant funding is

distinct from the Board-adopted GGP guidance that defined ASP success metrics. The budget for up to 45 applicants is a Board approved cap on supported funding rather than a target for applications.

Please rest assured that the Board and ICANN org share a strong commitment to fostering diversity, encouraging competition, and enhancing the utility of the DNS through the New gTLD Program: Next Round, including the ASP. At the same time, we must recognize that although the ASP is an important factor to progressing on these goals, it is not the only factor, and it is not a one-time effort. Whether these objectives have been achieved will require looking at the results of the New gTLD Program in its totality, while also looking critically at what we can do better or differently in the future.

Sincerely,



Tripti Sinha

Chair, ICANN Board of Directors