
New gTLD Program: 2026 Round

GAC Policy Background - Last Updated October 2026

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Background

ICANN's previous application round for new generic top-level domains (gTLDs) opened in 2012 and resulted in more than 1,200 new gTLDs being delegated into the Domain Name System (DNS), including Internationalized Domain Name (IDN) gTLDs in a range of languages and scripts. The GAC participated throughout the development and implementation of the 2012 Round, including through public policy principles, GAC Advice and GAC Early Warnings. Experience from the 2012 Round informed subsequent ICANN community review and policy development work.

In December 2015, the GNSO initiated the New gTLD Subsequent Procedures Policy Development Process (SubPro PDP) to determine whether changes or additions to the existing policy recommendations were needed for subsequent application rounds. The SubPro PDP concluded in 2021 and its recommendations provided the principal policy basis for development of the New gTLD Program: 2026 Round.

Following completion of the SubPro PDP and subsequent Operational Design work, the ICANN Board directed ICANN org in March 2023 to begin implementation of the approved SubPro outputs and preparations for the next application round. Implementation proceeded with the support of the

Subsequent Procedures Implementation Review Team (IRT), including development of the Applicant Guidebook and the operational processes required for the 2026 Round.

Key Policy and Implementation Milestones

The GNSO's New gTLD Subsequent Procedures PDP was initiated on 17 December 2015 to consider whether changes or additions to the policy recommendations developed for the 2012 Round were needed for subsequent application rounds. Key milestones since then have included:

- **2016–2020:** community consultations and publication of the SubPro PDP Initial Report, Supplemental Initial Report, Work Track 5 report on Geographic Names at the Top Level, and Draft Final Report.
- **18 January 2021:** publication of the [New gTLD Subsequent Procedures PDP Final Report](#), subsequently adopted by the GNSO Council and transmitted to the ICANN Board.
- **12 December 2022:** delivery of the [Subsequent Procedures Operational Design Assessment \(ODA\)](#) to the ICANN Board.
- **16 March 2023:** [ICANN Board adoption of 98 SubPro recommendations](#) and direction to ICANN org to begin implementation and preparations for the next round.
- **May 2023:** commencement of the [Subsequent Procedures Implementation Review Team \(IRT\)](#), whose first meeting took place on 16 May 2023.
- **19 November 2024:** launch of the [Applicant Support Program application period](#) and the [Registry Service Provider Evaluation Program](#).
- **30 May 2025:** publication of the [complete draft Applicant Guidebook for final Public Comment](#).
- **30 October 2025:** ICANN Board adoption of the New gTLD Program: 2026 Round Applicant Guidebook; the first authoritative version was published on **16 December 2025**.
- **12 March 2026:** ICANN Board approval of the [2026 Base Registry Agreement](#).
- **24 April 2026:** publication of the updated authoritative [Applicant Guidebook \(V2-2026.04.24\)](#).
- **30 April–12 August 2026:** [application submission period](#) for the 2026 Round.
- **22 September 2026:** [ICANN confirmed](#) that **1,616 applications will proceed**, from 1,663 applications submitted by the close of the application window.
- **29 September 2026:** ICANN confirmed [Reveal Day and the subsequent 2026 Round milestones](#).

Overview of Current Status

The New gTLD Program: 2026 Round has moved from application submission into application processing and preparation for community review. The application submission period closed on 12 August 2026 with 1,663 submitted applications. On 22 September, ICANN confirmed that 1,616 applications will proceed in the Round, representing applications for which the required evaluation fee has been received.

- **Reveal Day will take place on 7 October 2026.** ICANN will publish the applications proceeding through the Program, including applicant information, applied-for primary strings and any applicable variant or replacement strings, a list of contention sets, and the public portions of applications.
- **The Replacement Period will run from 8–21 October 2026.** Eligible applicants that included a replacement string in their application may elect to proceed with that string instead of their primary applied-for string during this period. ICANN87 (17–22 October) will overlap with the final days of the Replacement Period.
- **String Confirmation Day will take place on 17 November 2026,** when ICANN will publish the final list of applied-for strings and updated contention sets. This will also open the Community Input and Objections Period. The initial Application Comment period, GAC Member Early Warning period, and objection window for all grounds will run for 104 days, through 16 March 2027; Singular/Plural Notifications may be submitted for 30 days following String Confirmation Day. Application Comments may continue to be submitted subsequently, although only comments received during the applicable formal comment periods may be considered by evaluators.
- **The Prioritization Draw** will take place on a date to be determined in the first half of 2027, following completion of the String Evaluation Stage.

For the GAC, the immediate focus has therefore shifted from preparation for the opening of the Round to operational readiness for reviewing published applications and using the mechanisms available to GAC Members and Observers and to the GAC collectively. GAC Leadership, Topic Leads and GAC Support have developed an Operational Readiness Framework and supporting materials addressing GAC Member Early Warnings and the consideration of possible GAC Advice.

Current GAC Focus and Key Positions Relative to the 2026 Round

The GAC has provided Advice and other input throughout the policy development and implementation of the 2026 Round. The sections below summarize current GAC operational work and previously stated GAC positions concerning issues addressed by the 2026 Round. The Key References section provides access to the relevant GAC record and underlying policy and implementation materials.

Operational Readiness and Application Review

Following the close of the application submission period, the GAC's current Next Round work is focused on operational readiness for application review and community input. This includes supporting Members in reviewing published applications and identifying potential public policy concerns; understanding the mechanisms available to individual governments and the GAC to provide input; coordinating and sharing information where appropriate; and preparing for the possible use of GAC Member Early Warnings and possible development of GAC Advice.

In its ICANN85 Mumbai Communiqué, the GAC asked for the tools used to access publicly available application information to provide search and download options that would increase the efficiency of application reviews by GAC Members.

GAC Early Warnings and GAC Advice

GAC Member Early Warnings and GAC Consensus Advice are GAC mechanisms available under the 2026 Round for raising public policy concerns relating to applications. GAC Members and Observers may issue Early Warnings during the 104 days following String Confirmation Day; GAC consensus is not required. An Early Warning provides notice to an applicant that an application may be regarded as potentially sensitive or problematic by one or more governments.

GAC Consensus Advice is provided collectively by the GAC to the ICANN Board in accordance with the ICANN Bylaws and the Applicant Guidebook. The GAC is encouraged to submit Consensus Advice within the 104 days following String Confirmation Day so that it can be considered during the evaluation stages, but may provide Consensus Advice on an application or aspect of the Program at any time.

Applicant Support

The GAC has repeatedly supported measures to increase participation by applicants from underserved and underrepresented regions, including financial and non-financial assistance through the Applicant Support Program (ASP). For the 2026 Round, 78 ASP applications were received and 56 applicants qualified for support. By comparison, the 2012 Round received three ASP applications, of which one qualified.

In the ICANN85 Mumbai Communiqué, the GAC recommended that expanded ASP funding preserve the ability to apply the maximum base-fee reduction of 85% to all qualified ASP applicants. After seeking community input on increasing the reduction from 75% to 85%, the ICANN Board decided in May 2026 not to take further action on that proposal at that time.

Public Interest Commitments and Registry Voluntary Commitments

In its ICANN77 Washington, D.C. Communiqué, the GAC advised the Board to ensure that future Registry Voluntary Commitments (RVCs) and Public Interest Commitments (PICs) are enforceable

through clear contractual obligations and that consequences for failure to meet those obligations are specified in the relevant agreements.

The 2026 Round retains Mandatory and Safeguard PICs and permits applicants to propose RVCs. Proposed RVCs intended for inclusion in a Registry Agreement are subject to Registry Commitments Evaluation and must meet specified criteria, including being clear, detailed, objective and measurable, and compatible with the ICANN Bylaws.

On 8 June 2024, the ICANN Board determined that RVCs and other comparable registry commitments that restrict content in gTLDs should be excluded from Next Round Registry Agreements.

String Contention and Private Resolution

In its ICANN80 Kigali Communiqué, the GAC advised the Board to prohibit private auctions in the 2026 Round. The Board accepted that Advice. More broadly, the 2026 Round rules prohibit private auctions, joint ventures and other arrangements intended to resolve contention privately. Community Priority Evaluation, where applicable, and an ICANN New gTLD Auction are the permissible contention-resolution mechanisms.

During the 8–21 October Replacement Period, eligible applicants that submitted a replacement string may elect to switch from their primary applied-for string to that replacement string.

Community Applications and Community Priority Evaluation

At ICANN85, the GAC stated that it would follow CPE implementation closely and noted the importance of its successful implementation for community participation in the DNS. GAC Members also reiterated concerns arising from the 2012 CPE process and stressed the importance of robust and transparent evaluation processes. Under the 2026 Round rules, CPE is a contention-resolution mechanism available to eligible Community Applications.

Closed Generic gTLDs

In its ICANN78 Hamburg Communiqué, the GAC advised the Board to ensure that the Applicant Guidebook clearly states that Closed Generic gTLD applications will not be considered. In January 2024, the Board determined that Closed Generic applications would not be permitted until there is an approved methodology and criteria for evaluating whether a proposed closed domain is in the public interest. The 2026 Round therefore does not permit Closed Generic applications under the current rules.

Geographic Names

The 2026 Round Applicant Guidebook provides for Geographic Names Review. Where applicable, applicants must submit documentation of support or non-objection from the relevant government(s) or public authority(ies). Applied-for strings that qualify as country or territory names under the Applicant Guidebook cannot be delegated.

Key References

Current Program and GAC Materials

- [New gTLD Program: 2026 Round Applicant Guidebook \(V2-2026.04.24\)](#)
- [New gTLD Program: 2026 Round website](#)
- [New gTLD Program: 2026 Round Resources](#)
- [New gTLD Program: 2026 Base Registry Agreement](#)
- [ICANN Confirms Number of Applications Proceeding in the 2026 Round – 22 September 2026](#)
- [ICANN Announces Date for Reveal Day and Other 2026 Round Milestones – 29 September 2026](#)
- [GAC New gTLD Program Next Round Activity Page](#)
- [2026 Round: Key Milestones for GAC Planning – October 2026](#)
- [GAC Workbook: New gTLD Application Community Input Actions and Timeline – March 2026](#)
- [GAC Member Early Warning Template Form – 2026 Round](#)
- [Community Input, Objections, and Appeals](#)
- [GAC Member Early Warnings and GAC Consensus Advice – Topic Overview](#)

Selected Relevant GAC Communiqués

- [ICANN86 Seville Communiqué – 15 June 2026](#)
- [ICANN85 Mumbai Communiqué – 16 March 2026](#)
- [ICANN84 Dublin Communiqué – 3 November 2025](#)
- [ICANN83 Prague Communiqué – 16 June 2025](#)
- [ICANN80 Kigali Communiqué – 17 June 2024](#)
- [ICANN78 Hamburg Communiqué – 30 October 2023](#)
- [ICANN77 Washington, D.C. Communiqué – 20 June 2023](#)

Historical Policy and Implementation References

- [Board Scorecard: Subsequent Procedures \(SubPro PDP\) – 16 March 2023](#)
- [New gTLD Subsequent Procedures Operational Design Assessment – December 2022](#)
- [GAC Comment on the SubPro Final Outputs for ICANN Board Consideration – 1 June 2021](#)
- [GAC Scorecard: Status of Substantive Areas of Interest to the GAC for Subsequent Rounds of New gTLDs – January 2021](#)
- [New gTLD Subsequent Procedures PDP Final Report – January 2021](#)
- [ICANN66 Montréal Communiqué – 6 November 2019](#)