
GAC Operational Matters

Block 3 - GAC Governance and Accountability Processes

Session 3.2 GAC Standards and Work Processes

Session 3.3 GAC Advice Discussions

Purpose and Background

Changes in the ICANN community prompted by the IANA transition, the recent transition of staff support functions, the limited time GAC participants have available to devote to support GAC work efforts and continuing turnover among GAC participants have, in combination, created the need for the GAC to consider updates to its operation principles and practices.

Improvement effort are taking place in two ways.

Formal Organizational Efforts

First, formal efforts are now under way to evolve the GAC Operation Principles (see new working group effort - <https://gac.icann.org/working-group/gac-operating-principles-evolution-working-group-gope-wg>) (see Session 17.1 Briefing). The work of the recently formed GAC Operating Principle Evolution Working Group will address some of the overall GAC operational issues.

Operational Process Efforts

Second, GAC Support staff, with GAC Leadership oversight and collaboration is working to identify ways to improve specific communications and advice development processes to help GAC participants contribute to GAC work efforts in an efficient and effective manner.

Set forth in this document are brief descriptions of a number of initiatives being pursued by the GAC leadership and the GAC Support Staff to address these matters.

Standards and Work Process Improvements

1. Public Comment Tracking – Pilot Approach in Development

To improve work planning efforts and to provide timely information to GAC Leadership and membership on currently open and upcoming public comment proceedings in a single location, the GAC Support Staff is developing a Public Comment Tracking Space on the GAC web site. This new web space will reference open public comment proceedings and upcoming public comment proceedings.

It is hoped that this new resource will help the GAC to:

- More effectively assess GAC interest in particular public comment opportunities;
- Track the status and priority level of public comments to be filed;
- Identify and track GAC decisions regarding filing vs not filing comments and drafting responsibilities and deadlines, with reminders as relevant by GAC Support Staff; and
- link to public comments filed by the GAC.

The staff is interested in GAC member feedback on this pilot effort which will begin after the Kobe meeting.

2. Standards/Processes for Production of GAC Public Input

GAC Support Staff has identified a number of challenges that are regularly experienced when formulating GAC input or advice on ICANN operational matters or Public Comment opportunities. These challenges include:

- Draft documents may be delayed or come late in the submission window
- GAC Members may not be provided enough time for considering draft comments
- Contributions on drafts submitted for review may be submitted past internal deadlines
- Late contributions may be very substantial and material (prompting the need for substantial editing) and require further interactions not achievable in timeframe allowed
- Ambiguous objections may be expressed at the last-minute

It has been suggested that a level of process standardization in various areas could help. There are several considerations to consider in developing a standardized process including:

- Drafting of GAC Positions/Comments
 - Who should hold the pen when no volunteer is identified or emerging?
 - What is the general timeframe to be expected for the drafting of a comment?
 - Should there be two phases to drafting (initial and subsequent, after review by GAC)?
- Timeframe for review by the GAC Membership
 - How long should the GAC Membership be provided for reviewing a Draft Comment?
 - How long should a revised Draft (after GAC review) be circulated before publication?

- Should there be an absolute minimum timeline even when production of a GAC Comment needs to be expedited?
- Format of contributions from GAC Membership
 - Should it be formally clarified that input on drafts is expected in track changes?
- Consensus requirements
 - Should consensus be expected on GAC operational input or Public Comment? if so, what standard?
 - If not, should there be a standard way of conveying the full range of views?
- Role of GAC Leadership
 - In Drafting or coordinating the Drafting of a GAC Comment?
 - In Authorizing the initiation of a GAC Comment?
 - In dealing with escalation of situations not meeting the expected standards?

The GAC leadership and support staff hope to gather feedback from GAC members on these concepts at ICANN64. Feedback will assist in the development of a consistent “input” drafting process.

3. GAC Participation Improvements - Enabling Effective GAC Participation

It has been observed that a number of factors impact the ability of GAC members to participate effectively in the GAC, including:

- Participants in GAC Delegations have very limited time to deal with ICANN matters (ICANN is usually only one of many topics in Internet Governance, Tech Policy or even wider portfolios)
- Some ICANN subject matter may generally require greater than average attention because of factors such as:
 - inherent complexity of issues (e.g., GDPR)
 - need to coordinate contributions from several departments of governments in countries before offering contributions and positions,
 - intricacies of past developments and depth of background information needed to understand issues
- Average ICANN topical issues may not generate a high level of attention because participants may not be alerted to the need for urgency associated with policy issues that are likely to have impact (especially in the face of competing priorities).
- GAC mailing list (in addition to other ICANN mailing lists), may be perceived as indiscriminate, not providing the right level of information needed (too little/too much), being too active (average of 100+ messages per month, up to 260/month over the last 2 years).
- Turnover of GAC participants may compound and multiply the effects of the above factors for officials that have limited background or experience with ICANN

Despite these challenges, there are several potential “enablers” that could facilitate improved effectiveness and participation. The following factors have been employed sporadically and could benefit from focused attention:

- On some issues, a core group of GAC participants (of varying size depending on the issue) act as de facto topic leaders and find themselves actively contributing to the formation of GAC views, positions and key outcomes.
 - To the extent possible, these individuals could be regularly identified and receive the specific support they need for their efforts to be sustainable
 - Regular attempts could be made at growing this pool of thought leaders and pen holders
- Advance and close coordination between topic leaders and GAC Leadership has been effective in dealing with complex subject matters and difficult situations
- The “Alternate” role in PDP Working Groups has allowed continuity of GAC Participation in non-GAC activities
- Proactive GAC Briefings via webinars on specific topics have proved conducive to effective engagement (this was the case in the early phase of GDPR for example)
- Some tools available to the GAC may be under-utilized (staff ability to track these precisely has been limited):
 - Features of the GAC Mailing list such as *digests*, or *archives* (improvement could possibly sought as part of ITI such as the searchability of mailing list archives)
 - Leveraging the New GAC Website (still in of content building and features improvement)

GAC Leadership and support staff are interested in GAC member feedback and ideas in this area. Some potential areas for improvements testing (areas to be explored) might include:

Communication Improvements

- Focus communication to entire GAC list on:
 - Regular (e.g., bi-weekly or monthly executive summaries from GAC Leadership (+ support staff) regarding substantive developments (tied to groups of Interests) and meetings announcements (label updates accordingly)
 - Chair’s announcements
 - Strategic considerations (such as ICANN Board Engagement)
 - GAC Internal Procedures such as Leadership Elections, call for participation in Groups of Interest etc.
- Leverage website Activity Spaces for “pull” information on specific topics
- Leaders of groups of Interests (where most of the day-to-day traffic would be expected) could also provide specific updates when warranted (e.g., public comments drafting?)

Ideas to fine-tune and improve ICANN Meetings Preparation including:

- Reinforce briefing regimes (e.g., webinars and packaging of written reports)
- In addition to overall GAC Leadership coordination/decision making, consider specific contributions from organizational and thought/topic leaders

The concept of “groups of interest” has also been raised - organizing interested GAC Members in pre-identified topics/policy areas:

- In complement to, and including GAC working groups, small group, formal/informal leadership groups, etc.
- Flexible degree of intensity/formality, mailing list (if needed) and CVC Calls discussion as needed
- Possible Examples:
 - WHOIS Policy (in fact today's GAC EPDP Small Group)
 - New gTLD Policy (sorely needed in light of expected future developments)

The GAC leadership and support staff will also seek GAC member feedback on these various operational ideas at ICANN64. Feedback may result in specific pilot efforts to be developed before ICANN65.

GAC Advice Discussion

The GAC Chair will lead a discussion of the Communique development process, seeking GAC member input on potential improvements to help clarify and improve the drafting process and providing input and direction to GAC Support Staff as appropriate.

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