

GAC Discussion on New gTLD Program Next Round

Sessions 4, 6, 11

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Session Objective

GAC Members will continue preparations for engagement in the New gTLD Program: 2026 Round, building on the Capacity Development Sessions taking place at ICANN87 immediately preceding these plenary sessions and on intersessional work undertaken by GAC Leadership, Topic Leads and GAC Support to support GAC readiness for the 2026 Round.

The sessions will focus on the applications published on Reveal Day and the confirmed upcoming milestones in the New gTLD Program: 2026 Round, including the Replacement Period and String Confirmation Day, and developments related to the Applicant Support Program (ASP).

A particular focus will be placed on GAC operational readiness for the forthcoming stages of the 2026 Round. GAC Members will review the Operational Readiness Framework updated to reflect the confirmed 2026 Round milestones, together with the operational approaches and supporting materials prepared for specific GAC mechanisms, including GAC Early Warnings and the consideration of possible GAC Advice concerning applied-for strings.

The sessions will also provide an opportunity for GAC Members to exchange initial observations on the applications published on Reveal Day, including any applicable replacement strings, identify potential public policy issues that may warrant further consideration, and consider any additional coordination, guidance or support that may be required.

Leadership Proposal for GAC Action

1. GAC Members to receive updates from ICANN org regarding the applications published on Reveal Day, the Replacement Period, confirmed upcoming milestones, and developments related to the Applicant Support Program (ASP).

2. GAC Members to review the Operational Readiness Framework and related operational approaches and supporting materials developed to support timely and effective GAC engagement throughout the forthcoming stages of the 2026 Round, building on the ICANN87 Capacity Development Sessions.
3. GAC Members to consider practical arrangements for engagement in upcoming processes, including GAC Early Warnings and the consideration of possible GAC Advice concerning applied-for strings, and identify any additional coordination, guidance or support needs.
4. GAC Members to exchange initial observations on the published applications, including any applicable replacement strings, identify potential public policy issues that may warrant further consideration, and identify matters that may benefit from further GAC discussion, coordination or other follow-up.

Current Status and Recent Developments

New gTLD Program: 2026 Round – Status Update

The application submission period for the New gTLD Program: 2026 Round closed on 12 August 2026 with 1,663 submitted applications. At the close of the application window, ICANN reported that more than 1,100 applications included replacement strings. On 22 September, ICANN confirmed that 1,616 applications will proceed in the 2026 Round, representing applications for which the required evaluation fee has been received.

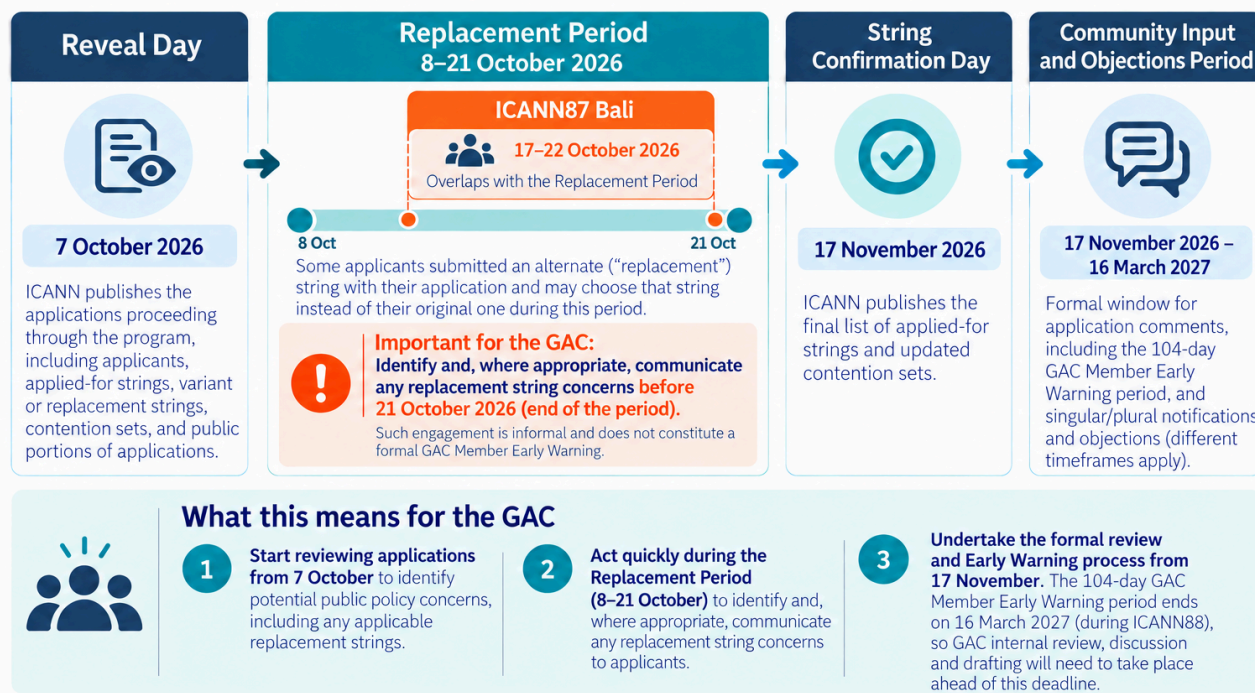
Reveal Day will take place on 7 October 2026. ICANN will publish the applications proceeding through the Program, including applicant information, applied-for primary strings and any applicable variant or replacement strings, initial contention sets, and the public portions of applications. The information will be made available through the 2026 Round Application Publication and Statistics website.

Forthcoming Stages of Relevance to GAC Members

The next stages of the 2026 Round include several processes of particular relevance to governments and GAC Members and Observers.

2026 Next Round: Key Milestones for GAC Planning

Based on ICANN's 29 September 2026 announcement | Dates shown in UTC



Source: ICANN announcement 'ICANN Announces Date for Reveal Day and Other 2026 Round Milestones' (29 September 2026).

Following Reveal Day on 7 October 2026, GAC Members and Observers will be able to begin reviewing the published applications, including applied-for strings, any applicable replacement strings, initial contention sets and the public portions of applications.

The Replacement Period (8–21 October) will overlap with ICANN87, providing an opportunity for preliminary review and discussion while eligible applicants may still elect to use a replacement string. The final list of applied-for strings and updated contention sets will be published on String Confirmation Day, 17 November 2026.

String Confirmation Day will also open the Community Input and Objections Period, running through 16 March 2027, including the 104-day GAC Member Early Warning period. Other available mechanisms include application comments, Singular/Plural Notifications, objections under the Applicant Guidebook, and GAC Consensus Advice.

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.

These forthcoming processes are reflected in the GAC's operational readiness work described below.

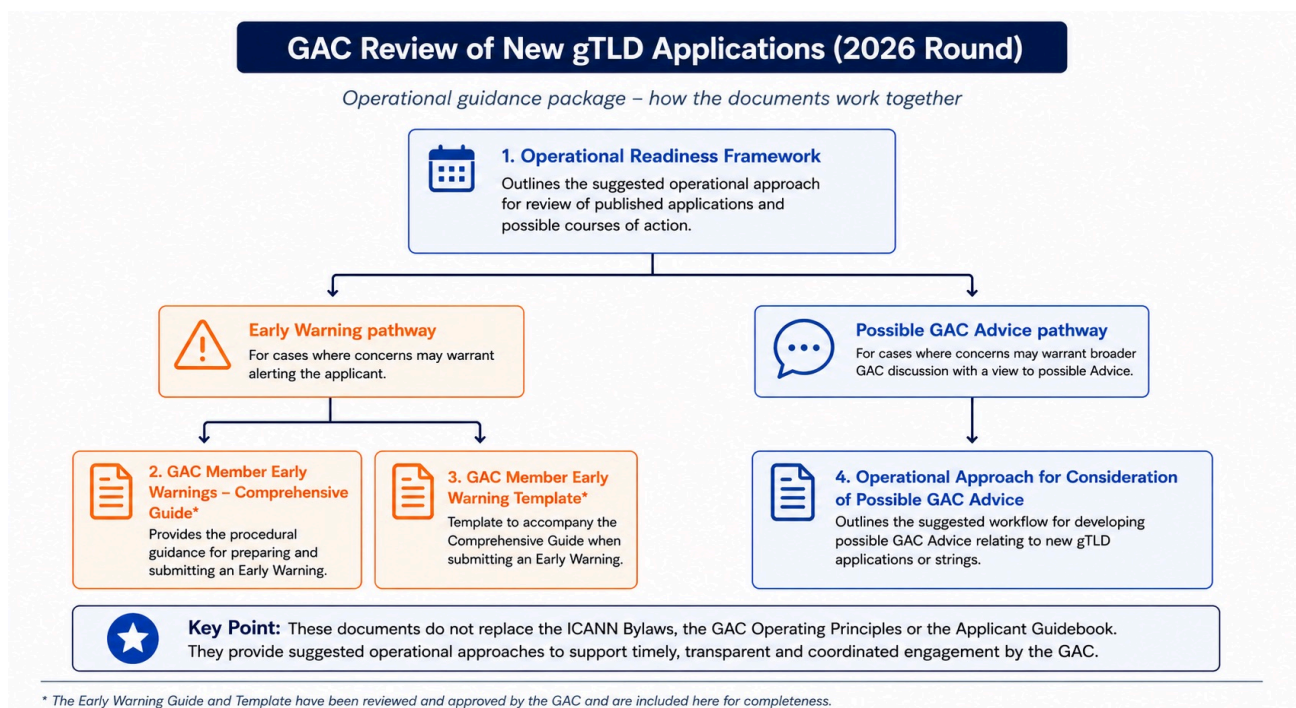
GAC Operational Readiness for the 2026 Round

Building on GAC discussions at ICANN86 and subsequent intersessional work, GAC Leadership, Topic Leads and GAC Support have developed an [Operational Readiness Framework](#) to support timely, coordinated and effective GAC engagement throughout the forthcoming stages of the New gTLD Program: 2026 Round.

The Framework provides an overarching structure for GAC preparedness across the stages of the application process in which individual GAC Members and Observers or the GAC collectively may need to engage. It is intended to anticipate operational requirements, clarify relevant roles and processes, and ensure that appropriate arrangements and supporting materials are in place as each stage of the Round is reached.

Following confirmation of the 2026 Round milestones, the Framework has been updated to distinguish between the initial review of published applications following Reveal Day and the review of confirmed strings following String Confirmation Day. It also reflects the specific operational implications of the 8–21 October Replacement Period and the 17 November 2026–16 March 2027 GAC Member Early Warning period.

The operational guidance package, illustrated below, brings together the [overarching Framework](#) and supporting materials developed for [GAC Early Warnings](#) and the [consideration of possible GAC Advice](#) concerning new gTLD applications or strings.



Operational Approaches and Supporting Materials

The [Operational Readiness Framework](#) is supported by materials addressing GAC Early Warnings and the consideration of possible GAC Advice concerning applied-for strings, reflecting the different roles of individual GAC Members and Observers and of the GAC collectively.

For GAC Early Warnings, the package includes the [GAC Member Early Warnings – Comprehensive Guide](#) and [Early Warning Template](#), which have been reviewed and approved by the GAC. These materials provide procedural guidance to support Members and Observers in preparing and submitting Early Warnings.

For possible GAC Advice, the [Operational Approach for Consideration of Possible GAC Advice](#) outlines a suggested workflow to support the identification and collective consideration of issues relating to new gTLD applications or strings that may warrant broader GAC discussion.

The operational guidance package is intended to support timely, transparent and coordinated GAC engagement while preserving the GAC's established procedures and the member-driven nature of GAC processes.

Consideration of Applied-for Strings and Public Policy Issues

Reveal Day on 7 October will allow GAC Members and Observers to begin reviewing the published applications ahead of ICANN87, including any applicable replacement strings.

ICANN87 will overlap with the final days of the Replacement Period, which closes on 21 October. The plenary sessions will therefore provide an opportunity for Members to exchange preliminary observations on the published applications, identify potential public policy concerns, and highlight applications or strings that may warrant further consideration.

Where a concern relates to a replacement string, a GAC Member or Observer may, where appropriate, communicate that concern directly to the relevant applicant before the Replacement Period closes. Such engagement is informal and does not constitute a GAC Member Early Warning.

Discussions during ICANN87 should be understood as preliminary, as the final list of applied-for strings will not be published until String Confirmation Day on 17 November. Such discussions will not prejudice the use of any particular community input mechanism or the development of possible GAC Consensus Advice.

Following String Confirmation Day, Members and Observers will be able to confirm whether issues identified during their preliminary review remain applicable to the final applications and strings and continue their substantive review during the formal Community Input and Objections Period.

The 104-day GAC Member Early Warning period will run through 16 March 2027, during ICANN88 in Lisbon (13–18 March 2027). The opening days of ICANN88 may therefore provide an additional

opportunity for review and discussion where useful, although Members considering an Early Warning should undertake the necessary internal review and drafting sufficiently in advance of the deadline.

The sessions will also provide an opportunity to identify cross-cutting issues emerging from the applications and consider whether further GAC discussion, coordination or operational support may be beneficial.

Applicant Support Program

The Applicant Support Program (ASP) was established to reduce financial and non-financial barriers for eligible applicants from underserved regions and communities seeking to participate in the New gTLD Program: 2026 Round.

The ASP evaluation phase concluded in August 2026. ICANN reported that, of 78 ASP applications received, 56 applicants qualified for support. Three applicants did not qualify, four applications were withdrawn, and 15 applications were terminated because they remained incomplete when the ASP application system closed.

The 56 qualified supported applicants represent a substantial increase in participation compared with the 2012 Round, and exceeded ICANN's original planning assumption of 40–45 supported applicants. Qualified supported applicants have access to financial and non-financial assistance intended to facilitate participation in the 2026 Round.

The GAC has closely followed the development and implementation of the ASP and has previously expressed interest regarding its effectiveness and accessibility, including through exchanges with the ICANN Board and collaboration with ALAC. This interest was reflected in the ICANN86 briefing and discussions.

At ICANN86, the GAC discussed the level of financial support available to qualified supported applicants. Following consideration of a potential increase in the evaluation fee reduction from 75% to 85%, the ICANN Board decided in May 2026 not to take further action on the proposal. The evaluation fee reduction for qualified supported applicants therefore remains 75%.

ICANN87 provides an opportunity for GAC Members to receive an update from ICANN org on the outcome of the ASP and implementation of support for qualified applicants.

Applicant Guidebook and Supporting Materials

The New gTLD Program: 2026 Round Applicant Guidebook remains the authoritative source for the requirements and processes governing applications in the Round. Following the ICANN Board's adoption of the Applicant Guidebook at ICANN84 and publication of Version 1 on 16 December

2025, ICANN published an updated version on 24 April 2026 (V2-2026.04.24) incorporating minor revisions. The latest English version is the authoritative version of the Applicant Guidebook.

ICANN org continues to maintain complementary resources, including Key Topic Overviews, Frequently Asked Questions and other materials intended to assist applicants and the wider community in navigating the application and evaluation processes. The ICANN86 briefing identified these resources, including those concerning geographic names, objections and appeals, and GAC Early Warnings and Advice.

Resources of particular relevance to GAC Members as the Round progresses include materials addressing GAC Early Warnings and GAC Consensus Advice, geographic names, application comments, objections and appeals, and other mechanisms for community input.

GAC-specific materials developed to support engagement in the 2026 Round include the GAC Workbook: 2026 Round Community Input Actions, the Projected Timeline for GAC Community Input Actions, and the operational readiness materials developed in preparation for the forthcoming stages of the Round.

Key Reference Documents

- [New gTLD Program: 2026 Round Applicant Guidebook](#)
- [2026 Round: Key Milestones for GAC Planning](#) (October 2026)
- [GAC Review of New gTLD Applications \(2026 Round\): Operational Readiness Framework](#)
- [GAC Member Early Warnings – Comprehensive Guide](#)
- [GAC Member Early Warning Template](#)
- [Operational Approach for Consideration of Possible GAC Advice](#)
- [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 Member Early Warnings and GAC Consensus Advice Topic Overview](#)
- [New gTLD Program: 2026 Round Resources Page](#)
- [GAC Workbook: 2026 Round Community Input Actions \(March 2026\)](#)

Further Information

- [GAC Policy Background Document on Subsequent Rounds of New gTLDs](#)

Document Administration

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