

GAC Capacity Development Sessions

Session 2 and 3

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Session Objective

As part of ongoing efforts to support the GAC's preparedness for the New gTLD Program: 2026 Round, the Capacity Development Sessions (CDS) at ICANN87 will build on previous GAC capacity development activities and provide members with updated information on the application and evaluation processes, key program milestones, and the mechanisms available for community and GAC input.

The sessions will also introduce GAC members to the operational arrangements being developed to support GAC engagement in the 2026 Round. Following Reveal Day on 7 October, Members will receive an overview of the GAC's approach to reviewing published application information and the supporting readiness materials, ahead of their more detailed consideration during the subsequent GAC plenary sessions. Through informational updates and interactive discussion, the sessions aim to strengthen Members' preparedness for future stages of the process, including GAC Early Warnings, possible GAC Advice, and other opportunities for GAC engagement.

The sessions are also intended to facilitate experience-sharing among GAC members regarding their perspectives and experiences with the new gTLD application process, while bringing in an applicant perspective to help members better understand why an organization may decide to apply for a new gTLD and the considerations involved in preparing an application.

Leadership Proposal for GAC Action

1. GAC Members to receive an updated overview of the New gTLD Program: 2026 Round, building on the capacity development provided at ICANN86, including the current program status and timeline, the outcome of Reveal Day and subsequent milestones, application

procedures and evaluations, and mechanisms for community and GAC input.

2. GAC Members to exchange experiences and gain practical insight into preparing for and engaging in the 2026 Round, including perspectives on the new gTLD application process.
3. GAC Members to gain an overview of the GAC's operational readiness for the 2026 Round, including the proposed application review process and timeline, the Operational Readiness Framework, the different pathways available to GAC Members, and how the various readiness materials fit together.

Current Status and Recent Developments

GAC capacity development sessions (CDS) provide an opportunity for GAC members to learn the basics or deepen their knowledge of aspects of the ICANN multistakeholder model, its structure, and operations. They also provide an opportunity for GAC attendees to become acquainted with different ICANN community groups in order to facilitate future dialogue, and to share experiences and best practices to enhance GAC internal collaboration on various ICANN matters.

Since 2025, GAC capacity development activities have primarily focused on the New gTLD Program: 2026 Round, with the aim of strengthening members' understanding of the relevant processes and supporting their preparedness for GAC engagement in the Round. As the Round now moves into the application processing phase, several key milestones are taking place in the lead-up to and following ICANN87.

On 22 September, ICANN confirmed that 1,616 applications will proceed in the 2026 Round. Reveal Day will take place on 7 October 2026, when ICANN will publish applicant information, applied-for primary strings and any applicable variant or replacement strings, initial contention sets, and the public portions of applications through the 2026 Round Application Publication and Statistics website. This will be followed by the Replacement Period from 8 to 21 October, during which applicants may switch to an eligible replacement string included in their application. String Confirmation Day is scheduled for 17 November 2026, when final applied-for strings and updated contention sets will be published by ICANN and Community Input and Objections Period will begin, running through 16 March 2027.

In preparation for ICANN87, GAC Support coordinated with the GAC Capacity Development Working Group, GAC Topic Leads, and the ICANN org Next Round team to develop a progressive approach in which the capacity development and GAC plenary sessions complement one another:

- **Capacity Development Session 1 (CDS1):** focused on the status of the 2026 Round following Reveal Day, application processing, key upcoming milestones, and opportunities for community and GAC input; and
- **Capacity Development Session 2 (CDS2):** focused on the GAC's operational readiness for the review of applications and the supporting readiness materials.

This approach reflects input received from GAC Leadership, the GAC Capacity Development Working Group, and Topic Leads regarding the value of practical discussions and opportunities to explore differing perspectives and levels of preparedness among GAC members.

ICANN87 Capacity Development Sessions

Capacity Development Session 1

New gTLD Program Next Round: Understanding the 2026 Round

This session will begin with an updated status overview of the 2026 Round of the New gTLD Program, building on the capacity development provided at ICANN86 and reflecting developments following Reveal Day on 7 October, including application publication, the ongoing Replacement Period, and key milestones leading to String Confirmation Day.

It will then review the key stages of the application and evaluation processes and the opportunities available for community and GAC input, including Application Comments, GAC Early Warnings, possible GAC Advice, objections, and appeals.

The session will also highlight relevant ICANN resources and systems and include interactive elements, such as polls and examples, to support understanding of the practical implications for governments and GAC members and allow ample time for discussion and questions.

The session will also include an applicant perspective on the new gTLD application process.

Capacity Development Session 2

2026 New gTLD Program Next Round: GAC Role and Operational Readiness

This session will introduce the GAC's operational readiness approach for the 2026 Round and provide an overview of how the GAC is preparing to review application information published on Reveal Day and engage in the subsequent stages of the process.

GAC Topic Leads, Leadership, and Support will introduce the Operational Readiness Framework, its overall purpose and structure, and the supporting readiness materials developed to assist GAC Members and Observers in preparing for their engagement in the application review process.

More detailed consideration of the operational approaches and supporting materials, including GAC Early Warnings and possible GAC Advice, will take place during the subsequent plenary sessions.

Key Reference Documents

- [ICANN87 Plenary Session on New gTLDs Next Round](#)
[note: Until the session has taken place, the briefing will be published for GAC members' access only]
- [New gTLD Program website](#)
- ICANN Policy Development Accelerator workspace

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