

GAC Review of New gTLD Applications (2026 Round)

Operational Readiness Framework

Status: Draft for Discussion

GAC Review of New gTLD Applications (2026 Round)	1
Operational Readiness Framework	1
1. Purpose	2
2. Guiding Principles	2
3. Operational Timeline	3
Phase 1 – Initial Review and Operational Readiness (7 October - 16 November 2026) Publication of Applications (String Reveal Day)	4
Phase 2 – Member and Observer Review	5
Phase 3 – GAC Application Discussion Sessions	7
Phase 4 – Possible Courses of Action	8
4. Suggested Meeting Cadence	9

1. Purpose

This document outlines a proposed operational framework to support GAC Members and Observers in reviewing new gTLD applications following Reveal Day.

It is intended to facilitate operational coordination during the application review period and to support GAC Members and Observers in considering the possible courses of action available under the New gTLD Program: 2026 Round.

The framework does not establish additional procedural requirements and does not replace the ICANN Bylaws, the GAC Operating Principles or the Applicant Guidebook.

2. Guiding Principles

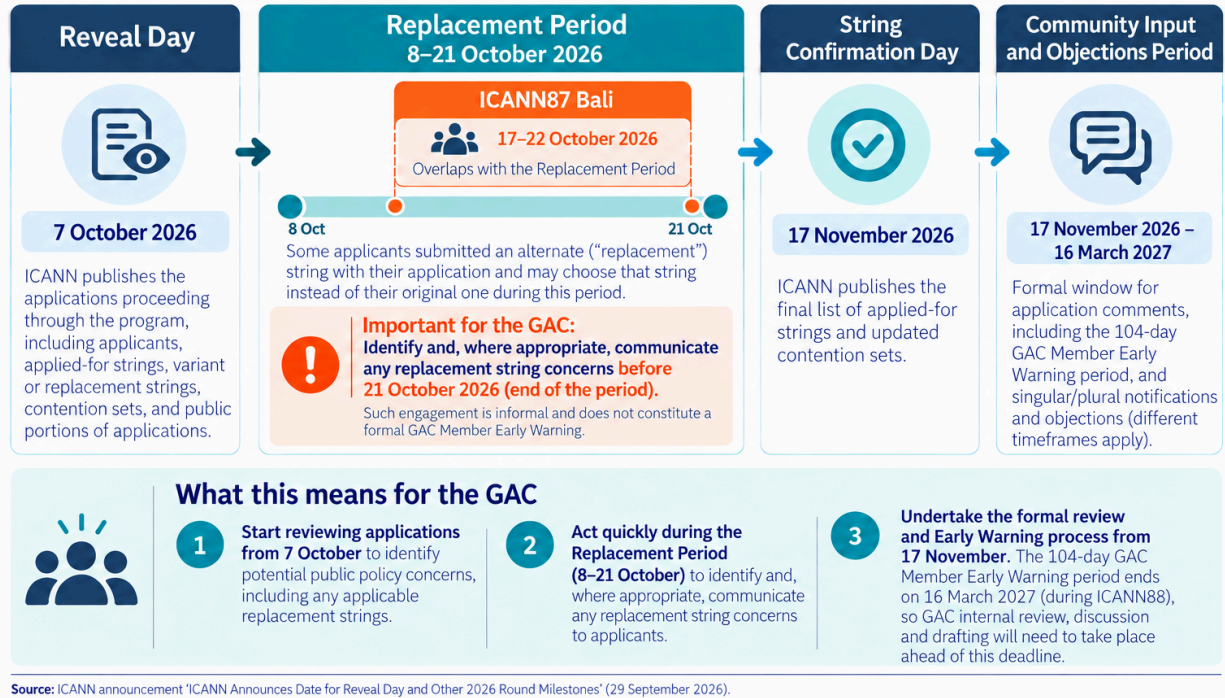
This framework is intended to support:

- timely review of published new gTLD applications by GAC Members and Observers;
- the exchange of factual information relating to applications that may raise public policy concerns;
- voluntary communication and coordination among GAC Members and Observers with shared interests or concerns;
- the independent ability of every GAC Member and Observer to determine whether and how to pursue any available input mechanism under the 2026 Round;
- an operational approach that does not create any additional approval, endorsement or decision-making mechanism within the GAC;
- a clear distinction between operational coordination and the independent substantive review undertaken by GAC Members and Observers;
- transparency and predictability in the GAC's operational readiness activities.

3. Operational Timeline

2026 Next Round: Key Milestones for GAC Planning

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



Phase 1 – Initial Review and Operational Readiness (7 October - 16 November 2026) Publication of Applications (String Reveal Day)

Objective

Enable GAC Members and Observers to begin reviewing published applications promptly following Reveal Day, including any applicable replacement strings; identify applications or strings that may warrant further attention; and prepare for the formal Community Input and Objections Period beginning on String Confirmation Day.

What Will Happen

Reveal Day is currently anticipated to take place prior to ICANN87 (subject to confirmation), at which time ICANN org is expected to publish the list of applications, applied-for strings, replacement strings, applicant IDs and all other public-facing application information.

Where eligible, applicants may elect to replace their applied-for string with a replacement string during the period between Reveal Day and String Confirmation Day, in accordance with the Applicant Guidebook.

Accordingly, while Reveal Day provides visibility of both applied-for strings and any associated replacement strings, String Confirmation Day establishes the final set of applied-for strings and marks the opening of the GAC Member Early Warning submission period.

GAC Support will circulate links to the published application information, relevant GAC guidance documents and information on the timelines for available input mechanisms under the 2026 Round, together with practical information on accessing application and string data in machine-readable form, where available.

GAC Members and Observers may:

- Become familiar with the published applications and identify applications of interest.
- Begin any national or internal consultations, as appropriate.
- Monitor any published replacement strings, where applicable, prior to String Confirmation Day.
- Participate in an introductory discussion on the review process and available resources, where one is convened by the GAC Chair.

Phase 2 – Member and Observer Review

Objective

GAC Members and Observers to conduct their review of confirmed strings that may warrant further consideration through their respective national or internal review processes.

Enable GAC Members and Observers to conduct their review of confirmed applications and strings through their respective national or internal review processes and identify those that may warrant further consideration.

Timing

The review phase begins following String Confirmation Day, once the final applied-for strings have been confirmed. Depending on the timing of Reveal Day relative to the ICANN meeting schedule, this phase may take place before the first GAC Application Discussion Session (described in Phase 3), in parallel with subsequent GAC Application Discussion Sessions, or

through a combination of both. The duration of this phase will depend on the application review period established for the 2026 Round.

Suggested Activities

GAC Members and Observers may:

- Review published applications in accordance with their respective national or internal review processes, taking into account relevant public policy considerations, as appropriate.
- Consult relevant ministries, agencies or subject matter experts as appropriate.
- Identify applications that they consider may warrant further discussion within the GAC.
- Where appropriate, exchange preliminary views with other GAC Members or Observers regarding applications that may warrant further discussion.

This review remains entirely within the discretion of each GAC Member or Observer.

Phase 3 – GAC Application Discussion Sessions

Objective

Provide a voluntary forum for GAC Members and Observers to exchange information regarding applications under review, discuss potential public policy concerns and consider possible courses of action.

Suggested Activities

Subject to Member and Observer interest, the GAC Chair, in consultation with the GAC Vice Chairs and supported by GAC Support, may convene Application Discussion Sessions during the application review period.

Participation in these sessions will be voluntary. The discussions are intended to facilitate information sharing and do not seek decisions, approvals or endorsements by the GAC. Participation does not affect the ability of any GAC Member or Observer to pursue any available input mechanism independently.

These sessions may provide an opportunity for GAC Members and Observers to:

- Exchange factual information regarding applications under review;
- Raise potential public policy concerns relating to specific applications or strings;
- Share relevant national experiences or perspectives, where appropriate;

- Discuss procedural questions relating to the available input mechanisms under the 2026 Round; and
- Identify applications that they consider may warrant further discussion within the GAC.

Timing

Based on the current 2026 Round timeline, the initial Application Discussion Session may take place during ICANN87 (subject to confirmation of Reveal Day and String Confirmation Day timelines). Should String Confirmation Day occur later than currently anticipated, the initial discussion would likely take place intersessionally.

Application Discussion Sessions may continue throughout the GAC's review of published applications, including during the GAC Member Early Warning submission period, as appropriate. The timing and frequency of these sessions will depend on Member and Observer interest, the volume of applications under discussion and the applicable operational timelines.

Phase 4 – Possible Courses of Action

Objective

Facilitate consideration by GAC Members and Observers of whether any further action may be appropriate following national review and the Application Discussion Sessions.

Suggested Activities

Following the review phase and the Application Discussion Sessions, individual GAC Members and Observers may determine, in accordance with their own respective processes, that one or more of the following courses of action may be appropriate:

- that no further action is required;
- a GAC Early Warning may be appropriate as an initial mechanism for raising public policy concerns and encouraging early dialogue with the relevant applicant(s);
- an application or string may warrant broader GAC discussion with a view to possible GAC Advice; or
- Another available input mechanism under the New gTLD Program: 2026 Round Applicant Guidebook may be appropriate.

When determining which course(s) of action to pursue, Members and Observers may wish to consider the applicable timing. GAC Member Early Warnings are subject to a defined

submission period following String Confirmation Day, whereas possible GAC Advice may be developed at any point prior to delegation of the relevant string. This distinction may be relevant when determining the sequencing of any actions that Members or Observers wish to pursue.

The submission of a GAC Member Early Warning does not preclude subsequent consideration of possible GAC Advice relating to the same application or string.

Where applicable, GAC Members and Observers should refer to:

- **GAC Member Early Warnings – Comprehensive Guide**
- **GAC Member Early Warning Template**
- **GAC Advice on New gTLD Strings (2026 Round): Operational Approach for Consideration of Possible GAC Advice**
- **Module 4 – Community Input, Objections and Appeals** of the Applicant Guidebook.

Each GAC Member or Observer retains sole discretion to determine whether, and if so which, course(s) of action to pursue.

The operational readiness activities described in this framework are intended to support GAC Members and Observers in considering these possible courses of action but do not affect their ability to pursue any available input mechanism independently.

4. Suggested Meeting Cadence

Subject to Member and Observer interest and the volume of applications, the GAC Chair, in consultation with the GAC Vice Chairs and supported by GAC Support, may convene:

- an initial Application Discussion Session following Reveal Day;
- regular Application Discussion Sessions during the application review period, with flexibility to adjust the frequency as appropriate; and
- ad hoc Application Discussion Sessions to discuss specific application categories or emerging issues, where appropriate.

The timing and frequency of Application Discussion Sessions may be adjusted, as appropriate, based on Member interest, the volume of applications under discussion and the applicable deadlines for the available input mechanisms.

