ICANN87 Bali | AGM – GAC Capacity Development (1 of 2) GAC readiness for Next Round
Saturday, October 17, 2026 – 10:30 to 12:00 WITA

JULIA CHARVOLEN

Welcome to the ICANN87 GAC Capacity Development on GAC Readiness for Next Round Session on Saturday 17th October at 10:30 local time. Please note that this session is being recorded and is governed by the ICANN Expected Standards of Behavior, ICANN Community Participant Code of Conduct and the ICANN Community Anti-Harassment Policy.

During this session, questions or comments will only be read aloud if submitted in the proper form in the Zoom chat pod. Interpretation for GAC sessions include all six UN languages and the Portuguese. Participants can select the language they wish to speak or listen to by clicking on the interpretation icon located on the Zoom toolbar. If you like to speak during this session, please raise your hand in the Zoom room.

Please remember to state your name for the record and the language you'll be speaking in case speaking a language other than English. And please speak at a reasonable pace to allow for accurate interpretation. I'll now leave the floor over to Amina Ramallan, GAC Capacity Development Working Group Co-Chair. Thank you.

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AMINA RAMALLAN

Thank you, Julia. Good morning, everyone. And welcome to the first Capacity Development Session for ICANN87. My name is Amina Ramallan from Nigeria, and I serve as Co-Chair for the Capacity Development Working Group with Christine, who is here, and Nima, who is online. So since last year, the Capacity Development Sessions for the GAC have been focused on building foundational knowledge for the GAC on the Next Round.

And with the round moving from preparation into application processing, the first session for today will just take us through understanding the Round, where we are, what has happened since ICANN86, future milestones to look forward to. I will just hand it over to Christine, who will walk us through the Capacity Development Working Group, because in the past, we all know the Capacity Development Sessions have been run by the underserved regions working group. But since ICANN86, we now have the standalone Working Group who will be focusing on Capacity Development for the GAC.

CHRISTINE ARIDA

Thank you very much, Amina. This is Christine Arida for the record. So as you probably all know, but we are just saying that again for newcomers, the Capacity Development Working Group is a newly formed working group with a mandate to act as a central hub for capacity development activities across the GAC. And in order to ensure that it is done in a coherent, efficient, and continuously

improving manner and specifically aligned with the GAC strategic objectives.

So the idea is to actually coordinate with GAC working groups who identify the needs and share the priorities for capacity development. So that we make sure that capacity development activities are planned, prioritized, and delivered in a coordinated way. Of course, there are capacity development activities that are maybe more relevant for newcomers, some that are also more relevant for underserved regions, and in that sense, the group is supposed to complement and reinforce the work of the underserved region working group. But the idea is to actually plan for activities that are for the wider and broader GAC membership to identify needs, especially during that phase.

So having said that, the only thing that I think is also important to mention is that there is a work plan that has been drafted and developed and discussed within the Capacity Development Working Group, and it will be shared with GAC members after Bali, hoping to have your review and adoption by the wider membership. So I think we can maybe turn for today's session. I'll hand back to you.

AMINA RAMALLAN Yes, now I will just urge the room to ask questions. I think during the sessions we will take a few pauses and take any questions from the audience or anyone on Zoom. And now back to our first

speaker. Who is speaking first, Marika? Yes, back to Marika for the session of today. Thank you.

MARIKA KONINGS

Yeah, thanks. Thanks very much to both of you for welcoming us here again. My name is Marika Konings, and I serve as the lead for the new gTLD program. I'm joined here on stage by a number of my colleagues who will be participating in this first session, but we'll also have a second, a third, and I think a fourth session that focuses on this topic, although I think only two of those are focused on capacity development. Other colleagues are here on the front row that will hopefully help us out as well as you prepare your questions.

As was said, we really want to make this as open and interactive as possible, so we'll pause at regular intervals for questions, but please feel free to either already raise hands or post questions in the chat, and we'll do our best to address those. I think if we go to the next slide, and I'll let the other speakers introduce themselves when they get to their part of the presentation.

So just a little disclaimer, and I think some of you may have seen this before as well. There's a lot of information that we're sharing here and other materials that we've made available to facilitate understanding of the rules around the program and information that is available, but the authoritative source is the Applicant

Guidebook. There's a link in here, so if there are any doubts or questions, please always refer back to that resource.

But as I said, what we're providing here is really to help everyone digest what is in there and facilitate understanding of some of these more complex topics as well. But as I said, Applicant Guidebook is the handbook here, or the authoritative source for any information and rules that govern the program. If we go to the next slide, please, and the next one.

So this first session is really a very high-level overview to start with of what the program is and what you may have seen happening over the last couple of weeks and months as we went through the first part, the application submission window. We'll also go through some of the steps that follow in the application and applicant journey, and then we'll have a preview of or review the application publication and statistics pages. This is all information that is now publicly available, but we thought it might be helpful to do a bit of a walkthrough so you can all see all the information that is available there.

Then for the second session, I think it's Lisa and George that are running that one, I think focusing on community input. So any questions you have about that, please hold those until we get to the second session that will cover that topic. So with that, I think we can dive into the first part of this presentation that I will cover, which covers a high-level overview of the new gTLD program. So go to the next slide, please.

We're really starting here with the basics, so please bear with us. But we're really starting with what is a generic top-level domain. I think most of you or all of you will, of course, be familiar with what domain names are. You see one here at the top, icann.org. ICANN in this context is a Domain Name, and the generic top-level domain is the last part of that name. So the strings and characters that appear on the right of the dots in left-to-right strips.

So here you see .futbol and .paris as some of those examples. If you then look on the right side of this slide, you see some examples of internationalized domain names, or what we're also referring to as IDNs. So IDNs are gTLDs which use one or more non-ASCII characters. And we know that those have been a consistent area of interest for the GAC, particularly in relation to accessibility, multilingualism, and inclusion of local scripts.

Similar to the 2012 round where we saw the first entry of IDNs, gTLDs, for the 2026 Round, applicants have also been able to apply for IDNs as well as variants, which is something we'll cover in a later slide, with a number of additional scripts that were made available for internationalized domain names as a result of the work that the different language communities have done in that area. I'll just pause here for a second to see if there's any questions or comments. If not, I think we can go to the next slide.

So a little bit of background on the 2026 Round. It's really the result of a multi-year policy development effort that was driven by the ICANN community with the support of ICANN Org. The effort

included broad stakeholder input, including participation from governments through the GAC. I think many of you have been very active in the different discussions. And that then resulted at the end of the day in the creation of the new gTLD program 2026 Round Applicant Guidebook. And as I guess many of you know, we tend to speak in acronyms at ICANN, so we like to refer to that as the AGB.

So many of the policy outcomes reflected in the AGB were informed by extensive community input, including perspectives shared by governments through the GAC, either through the policy development process, but also through experience and advice that arose from the 2012 Round and ever since then. I think many of you are aware that the window for applications closed on the 12th of August after it was open for a 15-week period. Applications needed to be submitted by legal entities. That includes businesses, organizations, and institutions, as well as governmental, non-governmental, and intergovernmental entities.

The program has been developed on a cost recovery basis, and that is in alignment with the community recommendations. And that has resulted in a gTLD fee of $227,000. In certain cases, and we'll talk about that in a second, conditional fees may also be applicable. And again, that's all developed and consistent with the community recommendations with regards to the cost recovery nature of the program. And that basically means that there shouldn't be an impact on ICANN's operational budget as a result of us implementing and running this round.

You may have already seen as well, as a result of recent announcements, ICANN has published the applications that were submitted and that are proceeding through the program, and that number is 615. Any comments or questions here? No? All right. We can go to the next slide.

So here we'll go into a little bit more detail in relation to the different application types. It's important to remember here that depending on the application type, applicants will have different requirements and processing steps that they will need to go through. As you can see here on the right, there are a number of different types of gTLD applications, including categories that may be of particular relevance to the GAC, like geographic names and internationalized domain names. As I mentioned before as well, variants are a new feature of this round.

As a result of a policy development process that the community undertook, the rules were set out for how and through what processes variants can be applied for in this round. And variants, I always have to say, it's a very difficult concept for me to explain, not having variants in my language, but I know for many of you that speak in languages or use scripts that have that concept, it's probably a known feature, but it's basically TLDs that are so closely related to another top-level domain linguistically that they could be considered the same based on specific script rules. And I'm hoping this example is still here, but my understanding is that we have here two Arabic variants of network.

Variant management has also been a topic of interest to GAC members and communities, particularly where script rules and user expectations intersect. What may also be worth calling out here, that depending on the type of application, so on the one hand, it will impact the type of steps you will need to go through, but there are also other impacts that may be relevant.

So, for example, the prioritization order for processing, community established in their recommendations that there should be priority for IDM applications when it comes to the prioritization draw. And again, that's the number that determines in what order applications are processed, which comes into play after string evaluation has completed. It is also relevant in relation to whether conditional evaluations and fees apply.

For certain applications, conditional evaluation needs to be carried out that comes at a certain cost, because in most cases there's a third-party panel that needs to be engaged to make an expert determination to assess whether that application or applicant meets the relevant criteria. So, for example, that's the case for brand applicants as well as geographic names.

Contention resolution is another area where the type of application may be relevant or come into play. The main example here is community applications. If they find themselves in contention, they have an option to opt for community priority evaluation, or CPE. And if they prevail in that evaluation, they will walk out as the winner of that contention set without having to go through auction.

And then last but not least, there are also contractual requirements that may differ depending on the type of application. You're coming back to variants, for example. There is a specification that is applicable to those that have or will be applicable to those that have applied for variant applications and that get to the contracting process that will become part of their registry agreement. So that's some kind of examples on where the different type of applications come into play. I think we do have two more slides that go into a little bit more detail on what these different types of applications entail.

So, I think on general, that's probably maybe an easy one. It's basically the type of string that doesn't fall into any of the other specialized application categories. And they are subject to a standard set of defined requirements that all applications will need to go through. As I said, those that have a specific type will have specific requirements that they will need to go through, either based on their application string or applicant type.

But everyone will need to go through the general set of application and evaluation criteria. Really briefly spoke about internationalized domain names and variant strings. I don't think Sarmad is in the room, but he's really our expert on this topic. So, if you have any specific questions around them, I will definitely need to direct you there. But I think, as you know, it has been an important priority for ICANN, not only in the context of the new gTLD program, but also other work to support internationalized domain names. And as I said, variant strings are the first time that

one could apply for those in this round. If we go to the next slide. I think it covers the other types of applications.

So, geographic names. I think that is one that probably most of you will be familiar with. These typically represent specific geographic places, cities and regions. They must meet specific criteria and require supporting documentation, including government support or endorsement to proceed through the evaluation process.

This is also where the community has determined that this needs to be done through a third-party panel that needs to review and make sure that the information that has been provided is sufficient to determine that level of support and be able to continue as a geographic name TLD. Reserve names. For those of you that have looked at the strings that have been applied for, we actually have spotted one that has come in or that has self-identified as a reserve name. It's .olympic. So that concerns names or strings that have been set aside on what we call ICANN's reserve name list.

So that's names of intergovernmental organizations, for example. And in this case, it's only eligible entities that may apply for these strings by meeting specific qualifications. So this type of application will need to go as well through an evaluation process by which we need to establish that the applicant is the entity that is eligible to apply for this name. Brand TLDs.

I think many of you may already be familiar with those because there are already quite a few operating, of course, as well in the gTLD space. Those are really intended for trademark holders that

wish to apply for domains that match registered trademarks. Typically, they're designed for exclusive use by the brand owner and their trademark licensees, and they have also a specific brand eligibility evaluation that they need to go through to, again, confirm that they have the required trademarks that they have applied for.

Community TLDs. I already just briefly mentioned that as well. These are for gTLDs that are intended to serve clearly delineated communities that share identities, interests, or have other common denominators. They also have specific requirements that they need to meet. We set those out, what we're calling registry commitment evaluation.

As I explained before, if they find themselves in contention, they have an option to participate in CPE, or Community Priority Evaluation, which is a process that is available to resolve contention for those applicants that are eligible to elect CPE. With that, I think I've covered my bit, so I'll pause and receive Marco's hand.

AMINA RAMALLAN Thank you so much, Marika, for that presentation. I will open the floor for questions. If we do have any questions or need any clarifications on Marika's slides or presentations before we move on to the next speaker. Okay, go ahead.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Thank you, Amina, and thank you, Marika. It's Marco, for the record. I know that we've got more sessions coming up, and we'll talk about the various pathways for GAC objections, but I guess the question on everybody's mind right now is, what if I don't agree to the classification that's currently there? Are there pathways to correct that or flag that?

MARIKA KONINGS

Yeah, thanks, Marco. I think that will come up when we get to community input period, because there are various mechanisms in which broader community, including the GAC, can indicate where they have concerns or if, indeed, an applicant has indicated that they fall in a certain category and there's disagreement with that designation, but I just want to also make sure to confirm, of course, just because someone says, I'm a GEO, and I have the necessary papers, doesn't make it so.

So we also have processes on our side to kind of confirm that and that they need to go through to demonstrate that they actually belong in that category and pass that evaluation. But as I said, in addition to that, there are a number of processes, and Elisa will go into more detail.

Some of those are available to everyone, to the broader community, but there are also some specific processes that the GAC has available to either flag or in the form of advice indicate if there are specific concerns that you would like to see addressed or raised. As I said, I don't want to go into too much detail, but for

application comments, for example, that is also information that gets passed on to evaluators.

So even if there would be a case where an evaluator may not have spotted something, they have also available to them any relevant comments that are submitted that they can take into account or have the option to take into account. So I hope that helps. As I said, Elisa will go into further detail, and I understand that that's probably the highest priority or interest to the GAC, so I appreciate your question. Thank you.

AMINA RAMALLAN Okay. Christine has a question as well.

CHRISTINE ARIDA So my question is, you mentioned that there could be contention, for example, and in that sense, for example, community can opt for the CPE. So is it expected that there could be contention from different types of applications? And in that sense, are there any criteria that apply here or just for the community ones?

MARIKA KONINGS I'm looking at Jared here as our expert on contention resolution, but indeed they're the only mechanism apart from community priority evaluation or a brand change request. Brands also have an ability when they're in contention to make a change to get out of contention. The only path is I can option.

So I said I think the only, and Jared is nodding, so I'm on the right path. So it's only for community gTLDs and brand applicants that have a potential alternative path out of contention. But I said for CPE, they would need to pass the community priority evaluation and there are pretty strict criteria around that.

And I said for brands, they do have an ability to request a change request, but there are also criteria associated with that. So they can't just say my brand is X and I'm going to apply for something completely different. It needs to be something that is contained in their trademark registration if I recall well. So those I think are the only two paths. And Jared is nodding, so I think I'm good. Thank you.

AMINA RAMALLAN All right. Thank you, Marika. I have Jorge.

JORGE CANCIO Thank you, Amina. Jorge Cancio, Switzerland for the record. Maybe on the category of geographic names because it's of a lot of interest to GAC colleagues, maybe you could elaborate a little bit on what names are specifically considered geographic because it's not the same as what we in normal language understand as geographic names. So something that in usual language, natural language, could be considered a geographic name may not be a geographic name under the rules and maybe even the other way

around. So maybe you could elaborate a little bit on that. Thank you.

MARIKA KONINGS I think on that one I may call in a helpline. I don't know. Justin may have that more at the tip of his fingers because I don't want to get this wrong, but specifically I'm going to give him a chance to kind of look this up as well. Are you ready? Yeah.

JUSTIN HO I'm happy to respond. But if I get anything wrong, I'll look to George. So based on the policy guidance and what's published in the AGB, what's considered geographic name or one subsect of it are country and territory names. So we go off of what's listed in the ISO3166 and this includes the full name and the alpha three-letter code. This includes like separable components of countries and territory names. I can't think of a specific example right now, but sorry. Sorry, I didn't hear you. Sorry about that.

GIACOMO MOZZONE The example last time was Spa. That is the name of a town in Belgium and the acronym for the thermal bath.

JUSTIN HO Thank you. So it includes a short name listed in the ISO list, the long form name. Jorge, did you have anything else to add about regarding that in any way? You want to?

GEORGE SARKISYAN I'm just adding the part. I think in the AGB it also says in any language for some of the categories, but I would just say refer to the AGB. I think we've been consistent with what's there. Thanks.

JUSTIN HO I'm sorry. I also forgot. It also applies to capital city names of any of those countries or territories listed in the ISO 3166 list. I did want to note that it doesn't necessarily apply to city names as a general statement. So I think that's what Marika mentioned earlier about geographic name evaluation. That's where we're going to have to take those letters of support and other supporting materials and go through the established evaluation procedures to determine whether or not a non-capital city name should have that geo designation or not.

AMINA RAMALLAN Okay, thank you. Do we have any other questions before we move on to the next presenter? All right. Over to you. Thanks.

JUSTIN HO I'm sorry. It's back to me, but I just realized I left out a few other things for the geographic names. It is a little bit more extensive, and I didn't want to create any kind of confusion about it. There's also exact matches of, like, sub-natural place names. Like provinces or counties. Those require support if they want to operate as a geo. It also applies to strings listed as, like, UNESCO

regions or up here as geographic regions in -- sorry, I'm looking at a footnote. As UNESCO regions, there is a link. I can log in and share the link in the chat if that's helpful. But sorry. Just going back to the presentation, if you don't mind moving to the next slide, please.

So I'm going to cover the applicant journey. Now that we've covered the different types of applications in the 2026 round, yeah, I'm going to walk through the journey. And where we currently stand in the process. We'll look at the key milestones that have already taken place. What applicants are doing now. And what we can expect over the coming months. Next slide, please.

So this slide provides an overview of the major milestones in the 2026 Round from the opening of the application window through the beginning of the string evaluations and community input period. In the gray, in the left-hand side of the slide, you'll see that the submission period opened on the 30th of April, 2026. And it closed on the 12th of August of the same year. Roughly a 15 calendar week period. 15.

Since then, ICANN has been processing these applications that we've received. On the 7th of October, we reached a major milestone of reveal day. When ICANN published information about the applications that passed administrative check. We're currently in the string replacement period, which runs from reveal day through the 21st of October. During this period, eligible applicants

can elect to proceed with a replacement string that they submitted during the application window.

The next milestone is string confirmation day. It's currently projected to take place on the 17th of November. This is when ICANN will publish the confirmed applied for strings and the corresponding updated contention set list. String confirmation day also marks the beginning of several important community input mechanisms, which are of interest to the GAC, such as GAC member early warnings.

Also, those who are interested can submit application comments and the objection filing period opens. It also marks the start of the string evaluation period with these activities proceeding in parallel. Looking ahead to 2027, the prioritization draw will establish the order in which applications are processed in later stages of the program. Just to note, these dates are projected and they remain subject to change as the round progresses. Next slide, please.

So this diagram provides a broader view of the entire applicant journey showing how applicants progress through the different stages of the program. As indicated by the we are here marker, we are still in the early stages of the overall process. Just to kind of connect this to the previous slide, what I mentioned just covers the purple box and the two light blue boxes. But with application submissions now closed, our focus has shifted to preparing applications for the evaluation stages, includes pre-evaluation

activities, finalizing applicant string selections, and preparing for community input and the string evaluation processes.

Following the string evaluation completion, it's important to recognize that applicants will not progress through every subsequent stages at the same time. Different application types and evaluation requirements may require, they may affect how individual applications move forward. That's kind of signified by those two smaller boxes listed by community input and objections and contention set resolution. With that context, I want to take a closer look at the immediate milestones within the pre-evaluation stage. Next slide, please.

This slide breaks down the pre-evaluation stages into five key milestones, including those which we've already completed and those that we're in the middle of and that are still coming. Starting with the one on step one, administrative check. Following the close of the application submission period on the 12th of August, ICANN conducted an administrative check. This involves verifying that the new gTLD evaluation fee is paid, reviewing applications for administrative completeness, and identifying applications involving identical strings and variants to place them in direct contention sets.

Applications that pass this check proceed to reveal day. Previously mentioned, reveal day took place on the 7th of October. ICANN published the public portions of applications, including the applied for strings, contention sets, and related application and applicant

details. So this gives applicants in the wider community their first opportunity to review the applications submitted in the round.

In step three, which we're currently in, which is string replacement period and closes on the 21st of October, applicants with eligible replacement strings can decide whether they want to proceed with their original applied for string application or if they want to select and proceed with their replacement string application.

The purpose of this stage is to give applicants an opportunity to potentially avoid contention that was identified on reveal day. Step four, that's the string confirmation day. Like I said earlier, it's on the 17th of November. On that date, ICANN publishes the confirmed applied for strings and updates the initial contention set that we published on the reveal day to reflect any of the replacement strings that were selected.

And on step five, like I said earlier, prioritization draw is expected to take place, well, it will take place in 2027. And this is an optional draw process for participating applications receive priority numbers that determine their processing order in the applicant application evaluation stage, contention resolution stage, and the contracting stage. Those boxes which were shared, I think, two slides ago. But the key takeaway here is that we're transitioning from application intake and pre-evaluation into the next major phase of the round. So because we're in the string evaluation stage, I'm going to dive in a little deeper. Can we go to the next slide, please?

So we're in the string replacement period. The purpose of it is during the submission period, applications have the opportunity to identify like a backup application or replacement string. And following reveal day, like I said, applicants can review all the published information and determine which application they would want to proceed with. So there is selection eligibility criteria for these replacement strings. The replacement strings have to be submitted alongside their original application during the window, and they have to meet the requirements listed under the Applicant Guidebook. In particular, replacement strings cannot be identical to or a variant of another applicant's applied for string or an existing TLD string.

In short, it can't add to or create contention. I want to note that the ability to select a replacement string is there to help avoid contention, but it doesn't guarantee that an application will avoid contention. The replacement period, like I mentioned, goes from the 8th to the 21st of October, which is the 14-day calendar period. Applicants that wish to proceed with an eligible replacement string must submit the replacement string. They must attest to making that selection within the TLD application management system, or TAMS.

This is an important decision and task because once an applicant submits the attestation, the selection is permanent and can't be reversed. If an applicant does not make a selection and they do

have an eligible replacement string, the application will default to proceeding with the original applied for string.

It's important just to keep in mind that the string from this list of applied for strings and contention sets that are currently published may change on string confirmation day to include the decisions made by applicants during this replacement period. String confirmation day will have that updated information for GAC members and interested parties to use to review and consider when they're considering the appropriate mechanism that's available to them. With the replacement period closing shortly, our next focus is preparing for string confirmation day and the activities that follow. That's the end of my section, but I'm assuming we're opening up to a bit of Q&A.

AMINA RAMALLAN

Yes, we are. Thank you so much, Justin. I do have a question in the chat, but it was already responded to, but for the benefit of those of us in the room who are not online, I will go ahead and read the question. The question goes, The AGB says applicant will not be allowed to use its replacement string if it is identical to the original applied for string or replacement string of another applicant.

This means that if two applicants have identical primary and replacement strings, they're forced into contention as neither can opt for their replacement. It was answered by Jared in the chat, and he said yes, that is correct. Those applicants would not be able

to use their replacement strings. Please also refer to this FAQ. Justin, if you would like to add to that, of course.

JUSTIN HO Thanks for the opportunity, but as always, Jared has provided a comprehensive response.

AMINA RAMALLAN Thank you so much. Do we have any other questions? I do have a couple of hands up. The first hand is Nigel. Nigel is here. Sorry.

NIGEL CASSIMIRE Nigel Cassimire from the Caribbean Telecommunications Union. Could you speak a bit more, Justin, about the prioritization draw? It was described as being optional. What are the circumstances under which it applies, and why is it optional?

JUSTIN HO Thank you for the question, Nigel. If you give me one moment, I'm going to pull up the relevant section of the AGB so I don't misspeak. I do want to note that there's a specific formula that ICANN needs to follow that's provided based on the policy recommendations. It's published in the AGB. I'm happy to walk through that.

NIGEL CASSIMIRE

What I'm trying to understand is does it apply to all 16, 15 applicants? And if it does, then why is it optional? Or is it some different circumstance in which it applies?

JUSTIN HO

I'm going to reference section 3.7.3 of the Applicant Guidebook. It's listed under prioritization of IDN applications. In general, it depends on allocatable variants of applications of strings from the 2012 round are automatically prioritized. I think you'll see in the APS webpage there's six of them. Those applications they automatically get moved to the front of the draw per the policy guidance. Aside from those, all other applicants, they can decide whether or not they want to be prioritized. They would pay a US$100 fee and they would be put into this specific formula that's listed in 3.7.3.

In a nutshell, we're drawing in groups of 500 applications. Each group of 500 need to have at least 125 IDN applications. We kind of randomly take these large lots and draw out of the ones that choose to be prioritized. Once that's completed, we apply that same formula for the applications that did not choose to pay the fee and choose to be prioritized. They get two separate drawings, the ones that opted in, and then applying the same formula again to the ones that did not choose to opt in.

MARIKA KONINGS

It is there in your response, but I think very simply you're not required to participate in a prioritization draw if you don't want to. Then you will just get added. We will still draw you, but you will get at the end of the queue of those numbers that have participated in the draw.

Maybe also important to point out, although of course it is used as a mechanism for us to put an order into which we process applications once they have gone through string evaluation, we did do some research on the 2012 numbers and it turned out there was very little relationship between the priority number and the actual time of completing the process and delegation, because a lot of other factors that determine how quick you move through the evaluation process.

If you're, for example, subject to GAC advice, it doesn't matter if you have priority number one, you will first need to deal with the GAC advice before you can actually start moving forward, and it may be similar for other evaluations. So, as I said, you may opt to participate in that, you will get a number, but there's not a direct correlation between the priority number that you have and the order in which you will complete the evaluation process, because there are many other factors that come into play.

MARCO HOGEWONING For clarity, it's Marco speaking. If I hear you correctly, it's not that a single application can block anything else. You are doing parallel processing, right?

MARIKA KONINGS Correct. We'll take whoever is kind of ready and move those forward if they're not subject to any other processes, although I said, and I think we'll probably cover that when we get to George, string evaluation happens for everyone at the same time, so those reports do get published for everyone at the same moment. But that's where, as I said, priority only comes into play after that.

AMINA RAMALLAN Go ahead, Nigel.

NIGEL CASSIMIRE Yes, thank you. So, what I'm understanding is that the order of the evaluation does not depend on the order in which the applications came in. It depends on other things, many other things, whether or not there might be some objections raised, whether or not certain of the applicants decide to opt into special priority, and some of the other things that you might have mentioned.

So, I'm thinking then that for the ones who say have no necessary problem with respect to policy objections or have not opted in, the ones that are left, would they also be evaluated on a random basis? Just trying to step through what the process flow is. Thanks.

MARIKA KONINGS Maybe trying to paraphrase what Justin said, I think he basically said that those that do not participate in a prioritization draw, we will still do a draw after we've done everyone that was participating in the draw, and they will still get a number. So, we'll still process them in that order, but it's basically not part of that draw, it's kind of the process that will come afterwards for those that did not participate in the official draw. Am I getting that right, Justin?

JUSTIN HO Yeah. I guess it will be part of the draw, it's just in that one drawing event that we have, there is the ones who choose to prioritize and the ones that don't choose to prioritize. I don't know if this is what you're asking about kind of the flow of the work. And I'm kind of just going off of what Marika had mentioned with the string evaluation work, because we're doing it in one big batch.

There's prioritization, your prioritization number doesn't matter, it's what comes right after that, it's whether they're going into contention resolution, if they're in contention, or if they're not in contention, they go to the applicant application evaluations.

For that, we do use what priority number you are. If you're priority number one, we're going to do our best to stick to what priority number you are, but like Marika mentioned, if you're subject to GAC advice, or objection, or if the applicant themselves, they're submitting a change request, that kind of puts their application on

pause until they can potentially clear something that they're trying to handle, or if they've satisfied if a GAC member wants, they've satisfied whatever the GAC member or the GAC as a whole needs them to do.

AMINA RAMALLAN

Okay, thank you so much, Justin. And I would like to also mention that there are some resources in the Zoom chat, so if you would like to refer to some of the FAQs or the AGB, it's in the Zoom chat. Tiago, I did see your hand up. I don't know if you still -- okay, thank you. All right, we will go on to George, I think. That's our next speaker, thanks.

GEORGE SARKISYAN

Thank you. Hi, everyone. George Sarkisyan here. I'm the string evaluation stage lead, so I'll cover this slide, and it's a lot of information, so please bear with us. So as Justin was sharing, the pre-evaluation phase, so what's next? What comes after the pre-evaluation work and beyond? Well, string confirmation day. We will have the confirmed applications and the strings at that point, so we will kick off the community input and the string evaluation period.

With that, the application comments, anybody can utilize the application comment forum or the ACF to submit their comments to applications. Those comments will be relayed to the applicants in the TAMS, the TLD application management system. GAC

members can issue early warnings for any concerns they have with any of the applications. We'll come back to singular plural in one second. With objections, there can be four different categories that can be filed in. We've got the string confusion, the legal rights, the limited public interests, as well as the community objections. And the three that I mentioned, those are processed during the 104 days.

Going back to singular plural, why I left it out is because that has a 30-day window starting at string confirmation day. And that will be when anybody can submit a singular plural notification to ICANN, alerting of any strings that may be a singular plural of another in the same language.

At the same time as community input, I'll cover the string evaluations next. It is expected to take 180 days to complete, includes five of the evaluations listed here that applies to the applied for strings and their allocatable variants, the first one being string evaluation.

It's a review of the applied for strings and variants for similarity according to the criteria that's in the Applicant Guidebook, and potentially as a result of that, any strings that are found to be visually similar to others could either be placed in contention or potentially ineligible to proceed or no impact. Geographic names identification, we'll focus on reviewing the strings to identify any that are geographic names, as Justin was mentioning earlier, we

went through that list of all the ones that are applicable in the Applicant Guidebook.

Next one being safeguard, which will help to determine whether strings require any specific safeguard public interest commitments for issues such as consumer protection, sensitive strings, or regulated markets. With initial assessment, name collision initial assessment, the focus of the evaluation is for any potential name collision risks in the DNS, and notice how singular plural notifications is on both sides.

The notification submission will then be followed by the singular plural notification evaluation, and determines if the applied for strings represent the singular or plural form of the same word in the same language as another applied for string, an existing gTLD, block name, or a string being processed from a previous round. As a result of that too, it could lead a string to either be placed in contention or potentially ineligible to proceed if it is a singular plural form of, say, a blocked name or an existing gTLD.

And I'll just finish by saying two of the evaluations here, the string similarity evaluation and the singular plural notification evaluation, do have a challenge mechanism available to applicants right after they receive the evaluation results. Next slide, or I see a question. Please.

AMINA RAMALLAN Do we have any questions from the room? Okay. So I will go ahead and read the question in the chat. So it goes, can objection to any application be informed now or wait until next step? I just remembered of objection to .islam and .halal. Okay. I will thank Ashwin. We will discuss the objection process in more detail during the next session. So there will be a second part of the next round after the launch so that we'll discuss more on yes. So next hand we have Jorge.

JORGE CANCIO Thank you, Amina. Jorge comes from Switzerland for the record. So thank you for this information on the string evaluation. I think it's of the interest to colleagues in the GAC maybe to also know more about the safeguard assessment, how you do this evaluation. So what are the criteria and how you intend to go about it so that we can imagine better what this evaluation part will be exactly. Thank you.

AMINA RAMALLAN Okay. We do have another hand. Paul?

PAUL BLAKER Hi, I'm sitting here. Thanks. It's Paul Blaker from the UK for the record and I have really the same question as Jorge. I think all of us would find it really helpful to have more information about the safeguard assessment, if not now, then perhaps in a future session. It's something that governments will clearly want to follow. I

understand there is already some GAC advice on this from the Beijing communique and I think it would be helpful for all of us to have a reminder of what that advice says.

It would be helpful to understand the different categories, what kinds of public interest commitments might apply. It would be helpful to understand the timeline because I expect GAC members will want to review the outcome of the safeguard assessment, so when and how can we do that. It would be helpful to understand if the evaluation will depend on comments received or will ICANN do it entirely independently based on its own criteria, its own gathering of evidence, etc. I think all of us will want to follow this closely and it would be really helpful to have a bit more of a presentation in detail about how it will work. Thank you.

GEORGE SARKISYAN Thank you. Happy to respond. We do have a session on Wednesday a little bit more in depth regarding string evaluations. We'll try to certainly cover more there. I think I can maybe address two more of your questions. Because safeguard assessment is part of the string evaluations, it will be released once we have the string evaluation report. Once that's out, it will have the results of all of the string evaluations at the same time. There was one other question. I'm trying to remember. We do have the answer though. If you can maybe remind me.

PAUL BLAKER: Thank you. I had a few questions, but one of them was, will it be done independently of comments received or will it depend on people sending comments?

GEORGE SARKISYAN: That was it. Thank you. Once the comment period closes, all of those relevant comments flagged for the safeguard assessment will be considered by the vendor as well and taken into consideration as part of the results of the safeguard assessment.

AMINA RAMALLAN: Thank you so much Justin. Sorry, George. I will close the queue after Lori Anne because we are running a bit behind time. Giacomo, do you want to go with your question?

GIACOMO MOZZONE: Yes, thank you. For the floor, madam. Giacomo Mozzone, WBU. My question is why not all relevant documentation has been published during the reveal day? For instance, there are some gTLD applications without the endorsement letter of the relevant authorities. How can we go through it if we don't have these elements? The second is, when will it be in the next session that we will discuss about a general assessment of the results of this gTLD round?

MARIKA KONINGS I can maybe take the second part, because I think in the second session, but I think that one after that we're looking at reveal day results, but again, important to know that it's just one point in time, first step in the process, but we'll have some further information during that part. I think Justin may be able to respond to the questions on information available in APS.

JUSTIN HO I'm happy to answer that question about the support letters for these GAC applications. These letters, they are a public response, so we are publishing everything that's provided. If you see something and you think it's missing, it most likely means that the applicant did not provide a supporting letter with their application.

AMINA RAMALLAN Thank you, Justin. Next we have Susan.

MARIKA KONINGS Can I just correct that maybe Justin I'm not sure if that's, because I think it's not public.

JUSTIN HO I just spoke. Sorry, they're not part of public posting. I'm sorry about that.

MARIKA KONINGS

So, maybe to add to what Justin says, and I think it's outlined in the Applicant Guidebook, not all information that applicants have provided is made publicly available. The Applicant Guidebook identifies which questions are public and what information is publicly provided and what information is not. There's certain information that's considered confidential.

In this case, that specific information is not provided. However, that does not mean that it will not be reviewed and checked. I think this is also, again, an opportunity if you believe that the relevant authority was not involved, that you can put that on record to note we have no awareness of the support here. It's something that the evaluator will take into account and look at the documentation that is provided.

GIACOMO MOZZONE

If I may, how you can evaluate gTLD without knowing who is supporting authority? This is very relevant information, so it has to be published. It doesn't make sense for me. According to our own rules, the Applicant Guidebook rules.

MARIKA KONINGS

I can just maybe respond because that information is provided to the evaluator to assess the authenticity and whether it's the appropriate authority. I think that's where the GAC has various mechanisms available to itself to flag if you believe that that is information you would like to have access to indicate that to an

applicant. They obviously have an opportunity to take extra steps if they want to.

Obviously, through the other processes, community input that we'll talk about next, the further opportunities to flag if a certain authority or government entity has no awareness of the support that has been provided to put that on record because that also means an evaluator can then go and double check and really verify is that an authentic letter and has the appropriate authority been involved.

AMINA RAMALLANS Okay. Thank you, Marika. Next question, we have Susan.

SUSAN CHALMERS Thank you. Susan Chalmers from the United States. Thank you so much for this presentation, and I understand that objections will be covered further in more detail during the session following lunch. We would be interested in hearing about the filing fees for objections specifically and how costs for the objections and that process will be calculated. Thank you.

AMINA RAMALLAN Okay. Thank you, Susan. Next we have I think I saw another hand up. Lori Anne. Oh, Lori Anne put her hand down, I think. Okay, we can just go ahead with the slides, please. Thank you.

GEORGE SARKISYAN

With that, we'll proceed to some of the I'll read the question here. How many applications are proceeding? So I think the link will be shared so you can vote. A, 1,893,402. B, 2. C, 1,615. Or D, 1,654. We'll give you guys a little bit more time to vote. A couple more votes. I think we can reveal, well, maybe it's already evident the correct answer was C, 1,615 applications.

We can go to the next question. What evaluation is the first one to kick off after string confirmation day? A, string evaluation. B, acronym comprehension evaluation or ACE. C, temporary delegation. Or D, none. All evaluations were performed before submission. Please go ahead and vote. I think there's still votes coming in. But there is certainly a clear winner. Yes, string evaluations. That's correct.

We'll go to the next one. What does APS stand for? A, application publication system. B, application publication and statistics. C, applicant program support. Or D, this is still being discussed internally. Sorry, I think are we going to move on and come back to those? One second. Actually, I think we'll come back to that poll. There's two more coming up.

But right now, we'll go to the next slides for the application publication and statistics. Hint, hint. But with that, I'll turn it over to Eduardo.

EDUARDO ALVAREZ

Thank you, George. Yes, that was a bit of a spoiler for the next question. But we are going to start talking about the APS system, or application publication and statistics system.

All of the received applications in the 2026 round of the new gTLD program include certain questions that are meant to be posted publicly as per the Applicant Guidebook. The APS system is where those details are already made available to the public. Back in the 7th of October, we launched the system, marking this round's reveal day.

As part of this publicly available information in the system, we can see several details about each specific application, including the applicant information, or entity information, as we see on the slide, general details of who the applicant is. There are some limited questions about the financial or operational profile that's going to impact the financial evaluation of those applicants, and then the details themselves about the application itself, which indicate the application TLD type according to whatever sections pertain to that specific type, as well as whether they're going to be implementing any safeguards, registry voluntary commitments, and so on, depending on each specific section.

Just a quick reference, and this relates to one of the questions we received on what questions are available or not in APS. Please do refer to Appendix 1 of the Applicant Guidebook. All of the question sets include a specific column that says if they're meant for public posting or not. That's kind of the authoritative source of all of the

questions that should be in APS. So if it says public posting equals yes, then they will be available in the APS system, otherwise they won't be there. Next slide, please.

So what else can we find on APS? Users that visit the APS system can navigate to four main sections, statistics, applications, contention sets, and objections. Each of these have different contents. On the statistics page, you will find a summary of high-level details of applications. Right now it's limited information, since we just had reveal day. We're going to have an updated set of statistics become available after string confirmation day in November.

On the applications page, you will be able to find the list of each received application in the round and will be able to see general details such as their types, their statuses, who the applicants are, what are they applied for strings and variants, and so on. You will be able to search and filter for those details of each application. You will also be able to see and filter or search by the applicant's region or ICANN region based on the primary place of business according to that applicant. And you will be able to download lists about your search with all of that metadata.

Going into specific details of each application, you will also be able to see now the full list of all of the applicant responses for those public questions as well as any attachments on those questions also meant for public posting. You will also be able to download a full export of that application for the public portions of it. And for

more information, you can always refer to the APS user guide, which is available on a help page in the APS website itself. On the last two sections, contention sets and objections, they're currently not available online.

These are going to become available after a certain stage is reached in the program. Contention sets currently are available as a static list based on what was there on reveal day, and it will be updated once we hit string confirmation day to account for any replacement string selections so that applicants and the general public can view the up-to-date contention sets.

The actual section in APS will become available after string evaluations are completed so that people can track the actual status of each contention set as resolution starts to happen. Objections and appeals, that page is going to become available after string confirmation day, which is scheduled for November 17th, and will reflect as objections are received and processed. They will appear listed on that webpage.

Lastly, what's the main purpose of APS right now? For applicants, make sure they can review and become aware of the contention sets that are current, that can inform their decisions on replacement string selections, and then for the community, just review the general details of the applications in case they intend to take any action in the community input period, which is set to kick off after string confirmation day.

Next slide, please. And that's it for me. I think it's back to George.

GEORGE SARKISYAN

Thank you. Since I already read the question, I'm seeing mixed results on this one. I think enough people have already voted. It is actually B, the application publication and statistics APS system. We can go to the next poll question, please.

Who can access public application information on APS? A, only today's presenters, except for Marika. Don't ask me why. B, only government authorities, provided they have a warrant. C, anybody without having to log in. Or D, anybody provided they have an ICANN account. And please vote. I'm happy to just go ahead and I'll discuss this one a little bit in the interest of time. We've got 38 votes, 39 still going, but I'll just speak to it as everyone still votes. It is actually C, anybody without having to log in.

So the APS is publicly available and anybody can see the data. Maybe just to call out the ACF, the application comment forum. That is also public and anybody can view it, but if anybody would like to actually share a comment or make a comment on an application, they will have to log in through their ICANN account to then make the comment. But both systems, just for viewing, C, anybody can view without logging in. You can go to the next slide. I will turn it over to Marika.

AMINA RAMALLAN

Thank you, George. We will open the floor back for questions. I see there is already a hand up. Pardon me if I pronounce your name wrong. Viacheslav? Sorry. I think he's online. Yes. We have a hand up, Julia. I think the person is online. Okay. You can go ahead and ask your question.

VIACHESLAV EROKHIN

Thank you. Is everything okay with my name? No problem. I have a question regarding APS site. If we will look on the list of applications, we have columns application status and some strings have status active and some strings have status deactivated. What does it mean deactivated and by whom it was deactivated?

MARIKA KONINGS

Do you want me to take up that one?

JUSTIN HO

I'm happy to answer the question. Active, just going back to what we chatted about for those applications that submitted past the check, they are set to the active status. Deactivated is specific to any applicable corresponding replacement string application that is not eligible for string replacement.

As an example, if I submit an application and I have a replacement string but my replacement string is identical to someone else's string, apply for string, then my replacement string is not eligible for string replacement and it is automatically set to deactivated.

You will see that replacement string applications that are eligible for string replacement, their status remains active.

MARIKA KONINGS: If I can maybe add to that, for those that are interested, because obviously as we proceed through the program, there may be other statuses that apply. If you look at the Applicant Guidebook section 3.9, it provides all the statuses that may be applicable as well as the definition of those. That may be helpful. As I said, now we have active and deactivated, but as we move through the process, there may be other statuses that become applicable depending on where the application is in its process.

AMINA RAMALLAN: I think, Eduardo, you wanted to add something?

EDUARDO ALVAREZ: Well, Marika already covered it. As always, yes, the Applicant Guidebook is the resource to go for where we define what the deactivated status is. Justin mentioned right now replacement string applications that are not eligible to be picked are shown with deactivated status. In addition, we can expect that after string confirmation day, those replacement or original applications that are not selected are also going to be displayed as deactivated once that milestone is reached.

AMINA RAMALLAN

I still see your hand up. I don't know if it's an old hand or a new hand, but I think we do have a question in the chat. I think it's an old hand. The question in the chat is, what is the exact fee structure for the four categories of objections? String Confusion, Legal Rights, Limited Public Interest, Community. Specifically, are these flat filing fees or do applicants slash objectors bear the full cost of the independent objector or dispute resolution service provider like WIPO? Are there fee waivers for developing nation governments?

Yes, I think this will be also part of the next session. In the afternoon, we will talk more about objections and GAC readiness for the coming milestones for the next round. So, please, we will take note of that question.

Do we have any other questions from the room? I don't see any hands up. I think it's an old hand. Okay. Viacheslav, you can go ahead.

VIACHESLAV EROKHIN

Yes, it's a new hand. One more question. It's a practical question. When I start to type anything in a keyword field, it's impossible to search because immediately search button became gray and deactivated. Does it mean that right now it's impossible to find any strings by keyword?

MARIKA KONINGS

I can take that one. I think the issue is you first need to select search by. So, you need to select whether you're searching by applicant name, applicant ID, primary string or TLD variants. If you then start typing in the search, then the search box will be blue. So, I had that issue myself. So, I know what you're referring to, but that should solve the issue. You first need to select in which category you're searching for your term and then you should be able to type in the keyword and be able to push the search button.

VIACHESLAV EROKHIN

Thank you.

MARCO HOGEWONING

Maybe I go just to check and I know it's not going to help the Russian Federation being remote, but are there any people available here this week to help people out with this interface?

MARIKA KONINGS

That's actually a really great point, Marco. We actually have a booth that's on the downstairs floor right next to the entrance where staff will be available. So, anyone that has any questions will be able as well. I think there's some demos that are running there live and anyone can kind of come there to talk to staff. If you're not here, we do have our global support team, globalsupport.iken.org.

You can submit any questions you may have there and for applicants they also have the ability to raise any questions they have directly through TAMS, the TLD application management

system. And there are also a number of sessions that are running throughout this week. I think in one of the upcoming meetings we'll have a slide on that as well, so feel free to join any of those as well. Thank you.

AMINA RAMALLAN Okay, thank you so much Marika for that. So, I think we will go ahead and close the session. Thank you so much Marika, thank you Justin, George and Eduardo for bringing us up to speed. Please let's be back for the second session of the next round. We will talk more about objections, like I said, and GAC preparedness. The session will be at 13:15pm. So, thank you so much, everyone, and thank you also to staff.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]