The ICANN GNSO "Business Constituency"

Comment on NextGen@ICANN: Community Consultation Process to Review Current Program

Status: FINAL

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Business Constituency Submission

GNSO//CSG//BC

Background

This document is the response of the ICANN Business Constituency (BC), from the perspective of business users and registrants, as defined in our Charter:

The mission of the Business Constituency is to ensure that ICANN policy positions are consistent with the development of an Internet that:

1. promotes end-user confidence because it is a safe place to conduct business

2. is competitive in the supply of registry and registrar and related services

3. is technically stable, secure and reliable.

BC response to "NextGen@ICANN Program: Community Consultation Process to Review Current Program"

Program Goals and Vision

1. In your group's opinion, is this current program goal clear and well understood? What improvements would you suggest?

While the general goal seems clear enough, the BC has at times expressed uncertainty as to what the end goal of the program is. It is not clear if the selectees are intended to be observers of the ICANN process to further their research or if the community is expected to attempt to bring them into the policymaking process in a manner similar to the Fellows group. This ambiguity makes it difficult to ascertain how to best work together with the program.

2. Does your group believe that the NextGen@ICANN Program is often confused with the Fellowship Program? If so, do you have any suggestions on how to reduce confusion between these two programs?

Yes, although this problem has lessened with time. It is not uncommon to see references to "NextGen Fellows" around the ICANN environment, both by community members and selectees themselves. A better separation of the programs could be promoted by each having a different logo instead of just different names. Initially, the NextGen did have its own logo, which was eventually dropped due to undisclosed reasons. Adding a visual element to further this distinction would be helpful.

3.What does your group believe should be the objective of the NextGen@ICANN Program moving forward? What would successful implementation of that objective look like?

The program needs to have a focus not only in bringing people in, but also in connecting them with the community. One meeting's time in not enough for the SO/ACs to pick up on talented people, unlike what happens with successful Fellows that get 3 shots at showing their skills to the community. Promoting a bridge between these youth and potential opportunities for them to make good use of their skillset in the ICANN environment should be an integral part of the program's objectives.

Assessment of Program

4. Are you aware of the contributions of NextGenners to the ICANN community? If so, where/how has the community benefited from the contributions of NextGen participants?

Alumni of the program act across the ICANN environment, with several having moved into the Fellowship program and built a basis for further engagement under that banner. There is, however, a distinct lack of mapping of these individuals, so it becomes difficult to both quantify the program's effectivity and engage with alumni that can potentially contribute to certain types of policywork, which would increase the benefits brought by the program.

5.Have NextGenners contributed to the work of your group? If so, please describe.

We currently have one NextGen member who is an active contributor to the workings of the group. Despite attempts to promote more engagement, the fundamentally academic nature of the selectees makes it difficult to recruit more members with a business inclination, and we do feel more could be done to outreach to post-grads studying international business and related fields.

6.How could the NextGen@ICANN Program evolve to enhance the future participation of NextGenners in ICANN?

It strikes us as important that ICANN org. proactively attempts to integrate these newcomers into the community. As it stands, neither the selectees nor community members have the tools to attempt to build more lasting relationships that can lead to active contributions to the policymaking process. An opt-out database of talents from the program should be created and made available ahead of meetings, so that those who want to be discoverable by the community can be reached and included.

Selection Processes

7. Should Selection Committee members be appointed by the community, in a manner similar to the Fellowship Program Selection Committee?

Yes, however, having a single representative for the GNSO is not viable, and at the very least 3 people should be brought into the Committee to represent it, with both parts of the Non-Contracted Party House and one for the Contracted Party House having a voice. This is an absolute must, seeing as we have previously pointed out in our self-funded "Building Sustained Business Constituency Participation in Latin America"[1] report that the Fellowship Program brings in significantly less participants from business-related areas in relation to other stakeholders, and one way to alleviate this is having more leverage in selection processes to ensure that no bias affects business candidates.

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[1] https://www.bizconst.org/2019-latin-american-outreach-study-and-report

8. Would your SO/AC group be prepared to nominate a Selection Committee member who would contribute the necessary time?

Yes.

9. Do you think the Ambassador selection process should be kept as is or be replaced by a process that allows the community to identify and nominate mentors?

The selection process itself is not problematic, what needs to be changed is the training and commitment aspects of those who return as NextGen Ambassadors. Currently, that role does not carry practical obligations other than to perform some degree of mentoring for the incoming NextGen.

The Ambassadors need to be made aware that their objective should be to go above and beyond in an attempt to make relevant the participation of these entrant members. For this, more extensive training should be required to be undertaken in the Learn platform, so that they have a sufficient degree of knowledge about both their role and the community's workings.

The coaching process that was ultimately assigned to the Fellowship program in its reform is far from ideal. It was a top-down decision, as can be corroborated by the Report of Public Comments from the "Draft Proposal of the New Fellowship Program Approach"[2], in which this decision appears as a statement, and not as a product of community input.

Doing something similar for the NextGen would be even less effective. Using the Fellowship as an example, most of the selectees need to be assigned to the GNSO and ALAC mentors to have proper guidance due to their backgrounds, leaving the other mentors either mismatched or with an inferior workload. In the NextGen's case, this sort of problem would only escalate, seeing as their backgrounds are much more homogenous.

10. Would your SO/AC group be prepared to nominate a mentor who would contribute the time required?

Yes, but we do not find this solution ideal.

Synergies

11. Given the academic nature of the program, do you have any suggestions on how to improve synergies between NextGenners and the ICANN academic community?

Despite being casually tied to the academic environment, there are no strong academic connections being pushed by the program. ICANN does not promote the students' research in a significant way other than the public presentations held parallel to the meetings. Considering how hectic these meetings are, few people can spare the time to attend even if they want to.

In this sense, there could be different strategies to make use of this research, promoting it in some way or at least making it accessible to the broader community. For example, a yearly publication could be assembled with the best papers or short essays of NextGen alumni, both highlighting their contributions and making it clearer to the community what sort of research they are outputting.

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[2] https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/files/report-comments-fellowship-proposal-10aug18-en.pdf

12. Do you have any other questions or suggestions about the NextGen Program?

As a result of baseless GDPR fear, the application process for the program has been made more unjust. The application used to allow for candidates to attach a video showing something they are proud of or speaking directly to the selection panel. This was a great chance for those with better speaking than written skills to be selected. More importantly, this provided a different outlet for those who have an interesting project to show it in action rather than having to describe it.

This option needs to not only be reinstated but expanded, to allow for a greater diversity of selectees other than those who are naturally good writers. This way, anything the candidate is proud of could be evaluated, including source code or blueprints for hardware.

A phenomenon very common to the NextGen Selection Committee is to see applications from candidates from the technical field who seem to have interesting things to present, but end up writing very short applications that do not say much, because it is not their natural inclination to write detailed prose. These candidates are never selected, but if provided the chance to present their best work, they would be able to do it.

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This comment was drafted by Mark Datysgeld.

It was approved in accord with the BC charter.