HOW WE MEET: A DISCUSSION PAPER FOR COMMUNITY DIALOGUE
8 July 2024

I. OVERVIEW & OBJECTIVE

ICANN's Policy & Advice Development staff team has prepared this paper as a starting point for a dialogue with the community on "How We Meet"; i.e., how ICANN org and the community can collaborate to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of our in-person and hybrid meetings in the current economic environment, exercise financial prudence and realize meaningful cost savings while continuing to ensure that the resources (including staff and community time) expended on meetings meets the community's actual needs.

At ICANN80, ICANN Interim President & CEO Sally Costerton held a meeting with the SOAC Chairs and Vice-Chairs. The meeting resulted in two specific topics for a dialogue with the community leaders, to be facilitated by ICANN's Policy & Advice Development function. In addition to the current dialogue on "How We Meet", there will also be a related community dialogue on "How We Work"[1].

This paper is not intended to limit these dialogues or constrain community input about how we can maximize the value of ICANN meetings. Rather, it is meant to provide a few ideas to kickstart a robust and constructive dialogue across the community. The ideas have been grouped under two headings: (1) broader, longer term, more strategic ideas; and (2) narrower, largely more tactical suggestions focused on ICANN Public Meetings. The first category encompasses all in-person and hybrid community meetings, with a goal to develop an annualized strategic plan for optimizing them (including but not limited to ICANN Public Meetings), as well as a potential community review of the current allocation of Funded Traveler slots across the community to each ICANN Public Meeting.

Should this community dialogue result in practical options that do not require significant time or effort to implement, these can be included in the budget and planning process for FY26 which is expected to begin at the end of August or in early September 2024. To this end, the Policy & Advice Development staff team will facilitate a series of meetings for Sally with the SOAC Chairs, Vice-Chairs in the months of July and August 2024.

We hope that the result of this dialogue is a balance between the need for cost savings with the continued importance of supporting the community's policy work. In this regard, we also hope that the dialogue will include suggestions for alternative or additional ways in which ICANN org can provide functionally equivalent support for the community without incurring a substantial increase in costs.

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[1] The staff team will collate community ideas about possible changes to working methods, communications, and other ways that can enhance org-community collaboration and efficiencies, to be integrated into internal work that ICANN org is currently undertaking to streamline, refine and improve how we support the community. This input will inform a planned discussion paper consolidating all these suggestions on "How We Work".

Proposed Assumptions for the Community Dialogue:
- Cost-saving efforts relating to in-person/hybrid meetings is part of an overall ICANN-wide initiative to reduce expenses and streamline services.
- Cost-savings realized through this effort that relate to ICANN Public Meetings should not be redirected to support other in-person or hybrid meetings (such as regional meetings and outreach events). It may, however, be necessary to discuss whether some portion of these savings should be used to support a few targeted small-group hybrid meetings with specific, time-sensitive objectives (e.g., policy working groups that have reached a time-critical stage of decision making).
- Some changes made to meetings because of this effort could implemented as a pilot or to test potential longer-term solutions.
- Unless agreed by the community, this dialogue is not intended to change the objectives or scope of the community-developed, Board-adopted Meetings Strategy[2].
- ICANN org will continue to pursue other cost-saving strategies and initiatives, including reducing staff travel to ICANN Public Meetings, leveraging hybrid meetings for Board and staff where feasible, and reviewing ICANN's sponsorship of events and conferences.

II. IDEAS FOR COMMUNITY FEEDBACK & DIALOGUE

A. Broader Strategic Ideas Spanning All Community Meetings

1. **Evaluate the full cycle of in-person and hybrid community meetings, including standalone SOAC Leadership and Strategic Planning meetings, targeted group meetings (such as the Contracted Parties Summit, the At Large Summit, and the High-Level Governmental Meeting) and similar, cost-intensive, travel-dependent Meetings**

The purpose of this discussion can be on ensuring that the cost of supporting all community meetings (and not just the ICANN Public Meetings) is commensurate with the benefits that arise from their in-person aspects. It is likely to be a difficult and challenging conversation, given the different objectives and working methods of each community and the possibility that there may not be community agreement about which meetings should involve in-person attendance and which not.

However, there has not been a comprehensive community discussion about the types of specific community meetings (including leadership, small group or other in-person meetings) that are absolutely critical for the community to manage its workload as its needs change. This dialogue may be an opportunity to assess how scarce resources can be equitably and appropriately allocated across all the Supporting Organizations and Advisory Committees, in proportion to their specific needs at particular points in time. It may also be timely to explore creative ways in which we can ensure that costs are

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[2] See https://meetings.icann.org/en/future-meeting-strategy#:~:text=The%20overall%20recommendations%20made%20by,in%20a%20most%20effective%20way.

shared equitably, e.g., via rotating support for meetings across groups, or "bunching" leadership meetings with an ICANN Public Meeting, and other such ideas.

2. **Review the planning by ICANN Org and the community for all in-person/hybrid meetings (including ICANN Public Meetings) by adopting an annualized, regular approach of planning for a full meeting cycle (either by a calendar year or a fiscal year)**

With the continuing, heavy workload across the Board, org and community, and the shared desire to remove obstacles to progress, improve communication, and get work done, it may be helpful to integrate planning for all in-person/hybrid meetings into each community's overall annual work planning. In this regard, planning for an ICANN Public Meeting should not be approached as a standalone (even if recurring) "showcase event". Currently, where some groups view ICANN Public Meetings - especially the Policy Forum - as primarily a forum for advancing policy discussions, the structure of other groups means that the meetings also function either as updates from its constituent working groups or as a venue for interacting with the broader community and outreach.

Integrating ICANN Public Meeting planning into annual work plans will require each community group to identify its policy focus and objectives in advance, to utilize each in-person/hybrid meeting appropriately and to achieve specific targets/goals across "The ICANN Year". Doing so, especially in conjunction with the previous idea to review all community in-person meetings, could ensure that travel and meeting costs are directed towards targeted meetings that have specific, actionable outcomes (e.g., reaching consensus decisions). It could also potentially improve continuity and follow up on discussions and agreements reached at an ICANN Public Meeting as well as cement the understanding that participation at ICANN is not just about attending ICANN Public Meetings.

In this regard, ICANN org's development of uniform project and program management tools for each of the SOs and ACs will likely be useful. As the new Five Year Strategic and Operating Plans are expected to be finalized shortly, this could be a good opportunity for ICANN org and the community to collaborate to ensure that objectives, priorities, and work plans are aligned and thus budgeted and planned accordingly and predictably.

3. **As part of the discussions around #1 & #2, consider a review of the current allocation of Funded Travelers to each ICANN Public Meeting**

With the substantial increase in inflation and travel costs in recent years, and since this is an area of activity that has not been reviewed for some time, it may also be timely to revisit the current overall number of Funded Travelers[3] to ICANN Public Meetings and share best practices and information about how each group allocates its travel slots for each ICANN Public Meeting (e.g., Community Forum, Policy Forum, AGM). Integrating this topic into the broader dialogue about the necessity of and planning for all

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[3] Currently, ICANN provides travel funding - which includes airfare, hotel accommodation and a per diem allowance - to up to 300 community travelers per ICANN Public Meeting.

in-person and hybrid community meetings that require travel, venue and other support could facilitate a more comprehensive discussion about how community travel support can best be utilized going forward, to maximize their value and objectives for each community group.

Guidelines and rules for other travel-related programs, such as the Community Regional Outreach Program (CROP), can also be retooled to align with community objectives at each ICANN Public Meeting. Finally, this could also be an opportunity for groups to review their internal rules and practices for allocating its travel slots, to ensure that travel support is used where the group's needs are highest and policy work prioritized.

For clarity, in proposing this idea for community dialogue, ICANN org has no intention of proposing a change to the understanding that it is the community (and not ICANN org) that decides on the number of community travel slots to an ICANN Public Meeting. Similarly, ICANN org is not proposing to change the practice that it is for each community group to decide how to allocate its travel slots, in accordance with its own internal rules and processes.

B. Narrower Ideas Focusing on ICANN Public Meetings

1. **Reduce the number of sessions at ICANN Public Meetings, which could result in a reduction in the cost of travel (i.e., accommodation) and venue-related costs (e.g., room and equipment rentals, contractors)**

Post-pandemic, ICANN org, the Board and the community leaders have remained sensitive to the benefits of ensuring that hybrid meetings are focused on substantive discussions about timely issues. Nevertheless, the number of sessions at ICANN Public Meetings have increased steadily, likely due to a continuing, heavy workload and the wish to engage as broadly as possible.

To ensure that sessions remain manageable and relevant, it may be helpful to explore ideas such as: (a) "bunching" of specific community sessions, such that a community group holds its meetings over fewer consecutive days instead of spreading them out throughout the duration of an ICANN Public Meeting, and/or (b) focusing each ICANN Public Meeting on specific types of sessions (e.g., bilateral meetings, Board dialogues, policy decision making, or cross-community discussions on key topics), with administrative or other internal work, wrap ups, topical updates, and sessions designed for broad outreach moved to virtual meetings. There are likely to be physical limits on how much this can be done, due to venue and timing constraints, but it may be worth sketching out some workable "concept scenarios" for discussions about their feasibility.

It will also be important to discuss how to leverage and assess the value of and impact on Prep Week. Moving more sessions to virtual meetings will require consideration of the appropriate duration and the costs of supporting Prep Week with the current level of services, especially in an expanded form. Issues around time zones and when to use Prep Week versus regular, inter-sessional, virtual meetings will also be relevant.

The discussion could also include an analysis of how sessions at ICANN Public Meetings are conducted. To the extent that ICANN Public Meetings are primarily a forum for advancing community work, the org and community can jointly agree to ensure that sessions should focus only on timely topics (e.g., there is an important deadline coming up impacting a significant cross-section of the community) for which interactive dialogue in a hybrid format is needed (e.g., to facilitate consensus decision making). As such, extensive slide presentations, updates, and meetings (including between ICANN staff and community groups) that do not clearly require in-person or hybrid interactions will not be scheduled during an ICANN Public Meeting.

If successful, this effort can also reduce the current pressures on room availability and duplicative discussions, as well as session conflicts. However, as already noted, implementing this suggestion will require expanding or revamping Prep Week, which could increase costs in that regard.

2. **Reduce or eliminate informational and training sessions at ICANN Public Meetings**

There are undeniable benefits to in-person interactions, especially where those interactions are intended to build "soft" skills and enable effective learning. However, these types of sessions necessarily incur significant costs (including contracting expert trainers and additional travel) and normally involve only limited participation. Reducing or eliminating these sessions can contribute to a leaner, shorter meeting, and save costs associated with travel, additional hotel nights and per diem/stipends for attendees and venue-related costs for additional training days.

The scope of this effort can include the "How It Works" (and similar) sessions as well as the skills-building and leadership development training sessions that are currently conducted, in some cases at every ICANN Public Meeting and in others as a periodic "Day Zero" event. Some of these sessions that are more broadly targeted toward the general community can be moved to an expanded Prep Week, while the more targeted leadership and skills training opportunities may need to be moved to purely virtual, regular cycles decoupled from an ICANN Public Meeting.

Implementing this suggestion will likely have a significant impact on Prep Week and on how ICANN delivers its capacity development programming. The implications of moving training, skills building and other capacity development sessions to virtual work will need to be considered as part of the ongoing internal ICANN org work on streamlining and assessing the full slate of community readiness capacity building programs and activities that ICANN org currently supports across multiple functions[4].

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[4] An internal cross-functional staff team has just completed a comprehensive inventory compilation and initial assessment of all org-supported capacity development efforts aimed at community readiness for policy participation. Done as part of the FY24 CEO Goal on Community Readiness, this work is expected to continue in FY25.

3. **Reduce or eliminate ICANN-hosted or ICANN-sponsored social and outreach events at, or associated with, an ICANN Public Meeting**

This includes receptions such as those held daily during the Policy Forum, any welcome and closing receptions, sponsored group dinners and other social networking events. While reducing or eliminating these events will impact on-site opportunities for networking and community relationship-building, it may be possible to seek sponsors for hosted events as well as explore creative ways to facilitate networking (e.g., if a community group can find a sponsor for their event, ICANN org can provide the space if it is already part of the contract with the venue, or the event could include a cash bar).

For outreach, ICANN org's regional and government engagement teams can work with the community to explore how regionally focused and other more targeted events can be further leveraged to introduce ICANN and the multi-stakeholder model of policy making to more stakeholders, deepen relationships in specific regions or areas of activity, and enhance interest in virtual participation at ICANN Public Meetings.

4. **Move at least one (1) upcoming ICANN Public Meeting to a Virtual Meeting**

Given the shared experiences from seven, consecutive Virtual Public Meetings during the pandemic and the costs of a hybrid ICANN Public Meeting, it may be timely to discuss whether there is, in fact, a current need to have three in-person/hybrid ICANN Public Meetings each year, or whether the community can work just as effectively if at least one of these meetings is conducted virtually.

It is possible that moving one ICANN Public Meeting to a virtual one may result in more community requests for alternative meeting opportunities (e.g., for small, focused, in-person meetings for leadership teams and working groups deemed to have reached critical points of their policy work). There should not be an expectation that this will be the case; rather, as described in other ideas contained in this paper, ICANN org and the community may wish to consider a more strategic and holistic approach to in-person and hybrid meetings (e.g., by planning across a full year and relating these meetings to specific targets and milestones).

5. **Review the current state of ICANN Public Meetings, with a view toward updating the ten-year-old ICANN Meetings Strategy (dating from 2014) to match current and expected future needs and budget constraints**

As part of this discussion, some possible topics might include:
- Making a long-term change to the current cycle of three hybrid meetings per year (e.g., conduct one or more as virtual meetings on a permanent basis)
- Changing the regional rotation cadence (e.g., explore the advantages of smaller, regional, targeted meetings and the benefits of longer-term contracting with fewer hub locations)

- Reviewing the need for three ICANN Public Meetings a year (especially if policy work can be completed just as well, or more effectively, via short, intensive meetings with limited attendees)

This effort need not require the formation of a formal cross-community working group and the attendant time and resources that would involve. Instead, the work can be conducted via "listening sessions" and feedback gathering about the continued need and purpose for each of the three ICANN Public Meetings ten years on, and ideas for feasible, cost-efficient alternatives that can accomplish agreed community goals.

Alternatively, ICANN org could conduct a preliminary review to provide the community with an initial assessment of the current state of ICANN Public Meetings, for further dialogue. This initial review could include a summary of community feedback on what is working and what is working less well, and detailed cost breakdowns and forecasts, including including any new or unanticipated or substantially increased costs since the Meetings Strategy was implemented.

The scope of the full review should include an evaluation of the utility of Zoom and other virtual collaboration tools that were either not available or were more primitive when the Meetings Strategy Working Group made its recommendations, the outcomes and effectiveness of regional meetings, and whether smaller, targeted hybrid meetings for specific groups will be more effective for achieving speedier consensus-based policy outcomes (and not just the ability to realize cost-savings).

III. A FINAL NOTE ON IMPLEMENTATION

Implementing some of the ideas outlined in this discussion paper may increase staff workload and require adjustments in working methods and expectations amongst the community. Implementation will likely also require an enhanced commitment to effective virtual means of training, collaboration and decision making.

In initiating this dialogue with the community leaders by providing this "starter list" of ideas for discussion, ICANN org hopes that we can work together to ensure that ICANN's in-person and hybrid meeting support can be improved and better targeted towards serving the community's current and future needs.