



FY27 Annual Strategy Review Program

Environmental Scan Session Pre-Reading Report

Introduction

The Annual Strategy Review program is designed to strengthen ICANN's agility and adaptability by systematically reviewing both our external environment and internal capabilities. This program provides a structured way to assess whether our Strategic Plan remains aligned with current realities. ICANN's Board Strategic Planning Committee oversees this program on behalf of the Board. The program concludes with a BSPC recommendation to the Board on whether updates to the Strategic Plan are needed, to reflect changes in the external environment and ICANN's internal capability

The "Environmental Scan" is one of the steps of this program. The objective of the environmental scan is to validate, refine, and enrich the environmental scan through inclusive stakeholder engagements. The goal of the session is to surface insights, challenge assumptions, and identify areas that may require deeper discussion and follow up. The environmental scan sessions will be conducted with both internal and external stakeholders.

Pre-Reading Report Purpose

This environmental scan pre-reading report provides a focused view of a number of external trends and internal issues most likely to potentially affect the relevance and effectiveness of ICANN's current Strategic Plan for FY26-30 in the coming year.

This document is not a comprehensive environmental analysis nor a recommendation document. **It is intended to:**

- Surface insights and different perspectives around the key trends
- Deepen our understanding of the core assumptions underlying the strategies
- Identify areas requiring deeper follow-up
- Enable informed discussion during the upcoming annual strategy environmental scan session

Participants / readers are encouraged to note:

- What resonates strongly
- What feels overstated or understated
- What maybe missing that could materially affect our strategy

Reminder: Current strategies at a glance:

Strategic Objective 1: Evolve and Promote ICANN's Multistakeholder Model to Sustain Its Inclusive Approach to Internet Governance

Strategic Goals	Strategies
1.1 Ensure Inclusive Stakeholder Representation and Enhance Collaboration.	1.1.1 Integrate new stakeholders into ICANN community groups as needed.
	1.1.2 Enhance collaboration among community groups.
	1.1.3 Foster an appealing environment for the next generation.
	1.1.4 Develop a new generation of leaders.
	1.1.5 Increase and broaden participation, particularly from underrepresented communities.

1.2 Enhance the Agility and Effectiveness of Policy and Advice Development.	1.2.1 Reduce complexity and create incentives to encourage active participation.
	1.2.2 Establish a proactive framework to ensure early involvement and avoid unexpected outcomes.
	1.2.3 Proactively engage with governments, regulators, intergovernmental organizations, and other public policy stakeholders.
	1.2.4 Incorporate flexibility and agile methodologies into the policy and advice development and implementation life cycle.
1.3 Expand Strategic Alliances to Advocate for the Multistakeholder Model of Internet Governance.	1.3.1 Demonstrate that ICANN's multistakeholder model of governance remains the right model for delivering ICANN's mission.
	1.3.2 Strengthen collaborative efforts to promote the multistakeholder model of Internet governance.

Strategic Objective 2: Enhance Organizational Excellence

Strategic Goals	Strategies
2.1 Pursue a Sustainable Future.	2.1.1 Improve institutional agility and adaptability.
	2.1.2 Preserve ICANN's financial sustainability.
2.2 Enhance ICANN's Global Presence and Impact.	2.2.1 Evolve the hybrid workforce model and optimize regional office utilization.
	2.2.2 Embed ecological responsibility into ICANN's operations.

Strategic Objective 3: Collaborate with Relevant Stakeholders to Evolve the Internet's Unique Identifier Systems

Strategic Goals	Strategies
3.1 Facilitate Digital Inclusion.	3.1.1 Promote the advancement of Universal Acceptance and Internationalized Domain Names.
	3.1.2 Proactively collaborate with all relevant external parties to promote Universal Acceptance.
	3.1.3 Cultivate consumer choice, competition, inclusivity, and innovation.
3.2 Evolve the Assessment of, and Responsiveness to, Technological Developments.	3.2.1 Evolve ICANN's understanding of the identifier systems landscape, and adapt as needed.
	3.2.2 Collaborate with technical community entities, such as the Internet Engineering Task Force, Regional Internet Registries, and root server operators, to understand new technologies.
3.3 Deliver and Enhance the IANA Functions to Meet Evolving Community Needs.	3.3.1 Continue to reliably deliver the IANA functions.
	3.3.2 Ensure that the IANA functions are properly resourced.

Strategic Objective 4: Strengthen the Stability and Security of the Internet’s Unique Identifier Systems

Strategic Goals	Strategies
4.1 Strengthen Partnerships with Relevant Stakeholders to Reinforce the Shared Responsibility of Ensuring Secure and Stable Internet’s Unique Identifier Systems.	4.1.1 Continue to provide and participate in trusted forums that convene relevant stakeholders.
	4.1.2 Identify and mitigate security threats to the Internet’s unique identifier systems.
	4.1.3 Increase ICANN’s coordination and collaboration with the numbers community for secure, stable, and resilient numbering and routing systems.
4.2 Strengthen DNS Root Server System.	4.2.1 Continue to enhance the governance and technical evolution of DNS root server operations and services.
	4.2.2 Increase the robustness of the root zone generation, distribution services, and processes.
	4.2.3 Support coordinated plans to address DNS Root Server System attacks.

Key Trends and Assumptions

The following broad trends were identified as relevant to our current strategic objectives. The goal is to use these as conversation starters, to gather diverse perspectives and insights around these trends, which will enrich the strategic discussion later on of this program.

External Environment Trends / Assumptions

1. Technological developments, Security, and Trust in the Internet’s Unique Identifier Systems

The unique identifier systems continue to be influenced / impacted by technological developments. On one hand, some technological advancements may present opportunities to strengthen the security and resilience of the Unique Identifier Systems; on the other hand, some may fragment trust, or perhaps challenge the universality of the Unique Identifier Systems.

2. AI impacts on ICANN and the Internet’s Unique Identifier Systems

AI operates at a much higher speed, how will that impact the multistakeholder model of ICANN? If bad actors can use AI to generate and register domain names for malicious purposes faster than previously available techniques, how will that impact ICANN and the IANA functions? AI tools make it possible to generate public comments, draft policy language, respond on mailing lists, and engage in community processes at a scale and speed. Will bad actors abuse ICANN’s MSM consensus-based processes with AI assistance?

3. DNS Market Place

There is uncertainty about the potential success or failure of certain new gTLDs in the near future, due to the fact that some participants in the 2012 round faced challenges in gaining

user adoption, limited market demand for their offerings, etc. The 2026 round new gTLDs may bring further challenges and risks in this area, or may show new opportunities, such as stronger branding, more inclusivity of other languages and scripts, and enhanced innovation in digital identity.

Additionally, evolving user preferences, such as the increase in usage of AI and the popularity of apps could change the way society uses domain names, and that could impact the demand for domain names.

Finally, the rise of alternative naming systems raises some strategic questions, such as how will those impact user experience and trust in the DNS? How governance, stability, and user clarity of the Domain Name System can be maintained in these evolutions mentioned above?

Internal Environment Trends / Assumptions

4. ICANN's Multi-Stakeholder Model (MSM) - Community Growth, Structures

The current ICANN community includes a substantial number of long-standing participants. Recognizing the benefit of having experienced veterans actively engaged in policy work and leadership, has to be balanced against encouraging knowledge transfer, the need for younger and motivated policy participants, and future leaders. This presents a strategic inflection point for ICANN - how can the community intentionally cultivate the next generation of participants, so they don't just inherit the MSM, but strengthen it for the future?

Transforming interest in ICANN into active, sustained and informed participation in ICANN's community structures and policy processes remains a challenge. At the same time, ongoing technological developments and the complexities of ICANN's current structure present important opportunities to innovate, strengthen engagement, and further enhance the resilience of ICANN's MSM.

5. ICANN Ecosystem Processes and Procedures

ICANN's policy processes are increasingly perceived as complex and process-heavy, with few incentives for consensus and timely decision making. This can be a deterrent to participation, especially by newcomers.

The community has expressed difficulties with finding volunteers willing to commit the time and resources to participation at ICANN. At the same time, the community's workload remains high and requires SOAC groups to find a balance between outreach to and onboarding of newcomers with focusing on getting the work done.

Stakeholder groups grapple with finding a balance between inclusivity and effectiveness. While broad participation in ICANN processes strengthens legitimacy and diversity of input, the increasingly large working groups addressing increasingly complex issues can slow progress and strain resources. Funding constraints, uneven stakeholder capacity, and varying levels of policy expertise - particularly within civil society and among newer MSM participants - add another layer of complexity.

Ultimately, legitimacy is not measured by participation alone, but also by delivery - completing policy recommendations by the community, timely Board decisions, and effective implementation. How can ICANN strengthen its legitimacy not only through who participates, but through what it delivers and how effectively policies are implemented?

Other Trends / Assumptions

Any other external and or internal trends based on your observations?

What to Expect After the Session

After the environmental scan sessions, the planning team will review and consolidate all inputs shared by participants. These will be organized into summary materials for the Board Strategic Planning Committee (BSPC) to use in the next stage of this program. The BSPC will prepare recommendations to the Board on whether the Strategic Plan remains relevant as it is, or whether adjustments or changes are needed. There will be ongoing communications and engagements throughout the entire process.



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