
DRAFT STRAW MAN PROPOSAL

Prepared by ICANN Staff for the Community Discussion Group on “How We Meet” (18 December 2024)

I. Problem Statement

The current ICANN Meetings Strategy was developed by the ICANN community and adopted by the Board in June 2014. There have been significant changes to the global economic and social environment in the ten years since this strategy was first implemented, most recently and notably demonstrated by our shared experiences and lessons learned from the seven consecutive, wholly virtual ICANN Public Meetings between 2020 and 2022.

As the ICANN community's structures, membership, decision making processes, and policy priorities continue to evolve, and in view of the current financial constraints impacting the resources available to carry out ICANN's mission:

- What do we need to change about how we plan, organize, conduct, and evaluate the three ICANN Public Meetings we have each year to ensure that we optimize these hybrid opportunities?
 - More specifically, what changes, updates, and improvements do we need to make to ICANN Public Meetings that entail meaningful cost savings while continuing to advance ICANN's mission to coordinate the development and implementation of policies through a bottom-up consensus-based multistakeholder process and ensure the stable and secure operation of the Internet's unique identifier systems?
- How can we achieve these changes, updates, and improvements?
 - More specifically, what are practical, implementable measures we can take, what should we prioritize, and what metrics can we use to assess their utility and effectiveness?
 - In particular, how will the work being planned as part of ICANN's next Five Year Strategic and Operating Plan - to improve how ICANN Hybrid Meetings advance policy and advice development work - impact the recommendations from this project and vice versa?

II. Background

Between 2013 and 2014, a cross-community working group developed a set of recommendations that the ICANN Board adopted in full in November 2014¹. The Meetings Strategy Working Group recommendations were for ICANN to:

¹ See the Meetings Strategy Working Group Final Report: <https://meetings.icann.org/assets/files/mswgrecommendations-icannfuturemeetingsstrategyfinalv119jun14.pdf>, and the Board resolution adopting all the recommendations from the report: <https://www.icann.org/en/board-activities-and-meetings/materials/approved-resolutions-special-meeting-of-the-icann-board-17-11-2014-en#2.a>.

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1. ***Continue the three-meeting schedule annually***, but evolve the structure of the three meetings to better address meeting objectives, scheduling conflicts and to use the time in a most effective way.
 2. ***Continue regional rotation for all meetings and coordinate rotation to balance global coverage on a multi-year cycle***, but evolve the rotation strategy to take advantage of the smaller mid-year meeting (Meeting B) to rotate through new geographic locations previously unavailable to the ICANN meetings due to the attendance and logistical requirements of the current meeting structure.
 3. ***Continue to allocate adequate time for SO/AC work***, but evolve the format of the meetings to afford greater opportunity for cross-community engagement and outreach.
 4. ***Continue with the public forum at the first and third meetings in the cycle***, but evolve the format by splitting the time into two portions with different focus.

Implementation of the new Meetings Strategy began with the ICANN Public Meeting in Marrakech in March 2016. Over time, several minor modifications to how ICANN Public Meetings are conducted were made as a result of community feedback and consultation, including through a Public Comment proceeding on the selection and duration of ICANN Public Meetings in December 2017².

III. How the ICANN Meetings Strategy is Implemented Now

A. General Structure

There are three ICANN Public Meetings in a calendar year, rotating locations across all five of ICANN's geographic regions. Each meeting has a specific focus and may differ in duration, beginning with the six-day Community Forum (typically held in March), followed by the four-day Policy Forum (typically held in June), and then the six-day Annual General Meeting (typically held in October/November):

- The Community Forum generally includes sessions focusing on SOAC internal work, cross-community interaction, and plenary sessions on topics of community-wide interest.
- The Policy Forum is dedicated to SOAC policy development work and regional outreach activities. This meeting is generally smaller than the other two meetings and has a shortened agenda that does not include a Public Forum or formal Board meeting.
- Like the Community Forum, the AGM includes time for internal SOAC work and cross-community interaction, but the overall focus is to showcase ICANN's work to a broader global audience, including more time dedicated to capacity building and leadership training sessions where feasible. The AGM is also where new members of the ICANN Board of Directors take their seats.

² See

<https://www.icann.org/en/announcements/details/proposed-incremental-changes-to-the-icann-meeting-s-strategy-14-12-2017-en>.

The current meeting rotation, which was agreed with the community, is for an ICANN Public Meeting to take place in each ICANN geographic region three (3) times over five (5) years.

Each of the three ICANN Public Meetings also incorporates a newcomer component, primarily through ICANN's Fellowship and NextGen programs that provide travel assistance and training to a total of 60 qualified participants selected for the program:

- The Fellowship Program is open to all interested participants over 21 years of age. Fellows are selected by a community-based committee based on specific criteria (including diversity and experience). Applicants from underserved and underrepresented communities with demonstrated financial need are given priority, and there is a maximum of three times for which an applicant may receive a Fellowship (note: only returning Fellows are eligible for selection to attend the Policy Forum).
- The NextGen program is aimed at youths aged between 18 and 30 years old who are studying and living in the region where the relevant ICANN Public Meeting is taking place. Participants are selected by a community-based committee, and may participate only once in the program.

At present, each ICANN Public Meeting is preceded by a two or three-day workshop for the ICANN Board and a 1.5-3 hour SOAC Chairs Roundtable meeting in the afternoon before Day 1 of the meeting. Periodically, there may also be half or full day "Day Zero" community meetings, where these have been requested and approved ahead of time.

B. Cost Breakdown³

Average Meeting Costs:

Between ICANN55 in March 2016, when the Meetings Strategy was first implemented, and ICANN60 in October 2017, the average cost of holding an ICANN Public Meeting was US\$4.06 million. Although the average cost for ICANN61-66 was slightly lower (at US\$3.4 million), this is directly attributable to substantially lower venue costs for this cycle (Panama City, Marrakech, and San Juan). When we resumed hybrid meetings after the pandemic (i.e. ICANN74-80), increased meeting costs mean that the average meeting cost is now approximately US\$4.7 million per meeting. It is important to note that this figure would have been substantially higher if there had not been an accompanying reduction in the number of Funded Travelers⁴, from an average of 570 people in 2018 to 492 people in 2024, representing a reduction of almost 14%.

The most significant factors that determine whether meeting costs will be over or under US\$4M are air travel (accounting for US\$1M and more per meeting), hotel accommodation and venue costs (e.g., meeting room rentals). Currently, these so-called "variable costs" account for fifty-three percent (53%) of the cost of an ICANN Public Meeting. The remaining forty-seven percent (47%) involves so-called "fixed costs", such as food and beverage,

³ For more details, please refer to the materials that were circulated to the SOAC Chairs on 1 & 4 November 2024, in preparation for the ICANN81 SOAC Chairs' Roundtable.

⁴ The term Funded Travelers includes staff, contractors and community members.

interpretation services and production costs, including audiovisual equipment. Notably, these costs have increased by thirty-one percent (31%) post-pandemic.

Funded Community Traveler Costs:

Pre-pandemic, the average cost of a funded community traveler to an ICANN Public Meeting was US\$3,338. This figure includes the cost of airfare, hotel accommodation, a per diem allowance, and visas. Post-pandemic, the average cost for a funded community traveler has now risen to US\$4,196, which represents an increase of twenty-five-point-seven percent (25.7%) per funded community traveler per meeting.

C. Community Feedback to Date

In July 2024, ICANN org prepared a discussion paper to facilitate a broad community dialogue and gather feedback on how ICANN org and the community can collaborate to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of in-person and hybrid meetings in the current economic environment, 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.

The community feedback⁵ revealed several key themes. Although there was no clear community consensus on what specific steps should be taken, these themes are noted here to serve as a useful framework for the current org-community work on how to address the Problem Statement outlined in this paper:

- **Meeting format and frequency**, including how to leverage virtual and in-person meetings, how to structure meetings to prioritize decision making and topical discussions, and maintaining a focus on regional needs (especially for underserved and underrepresented regions) and community priorities.
- **Cost reduction measures**, including prioritizing sessions that are “need to have” versus “nice to have”, improving how travel arrangements are made (such as earlier bookings and limiting premium travel), and focusing more on sponsorships.
- **Environmental considerations** relating to in person meetings.

IV. Proposals for Changes to How ICANN Public Meetings are Planned & Executed

Based on the above notes and community discussions and feedback to date, ICANN org offers the following proposals for discussion, as possible ways to approach the Problem Statement highlighted in this paper.

A. Meeting Locations & Purposes

1. Identify well in advance and prioritize meeting locations across the five (5) ICANN geographical regions with economical air travel, hotel accommodation and venue costs.

- Level of Effort (High/Medium/Low): High

⁵ A summary of the feedback received was included in the package of materials circulated for the ICANN81 SOAC Chairs' Roundtable.

- Impact on Community Meeting Experience (High/Neutral/Minimal): Minimal, even with potential limitations on local hosts and bandwidth sponsor availability.
 - Possible impact on visas, vendors and range of quality services.
- Alignment with 2014 Meetings Strategy (Yes/No): Yes, if we maintain the principle of rotation as much as feasible.
- Implementation Timeline (Short or Longer Term): Long (note: meeting locations are already identified through November 2025).

2. Select repeat meeting locations (while respecting the need to rotate across regions) and enter into multi-year contracts for venues, hotels and other services. Where feasible and subject to the geographical rotation requirement, prioritize returning to locations where we have successfully held previous meetings.

- Level of Effort: High (especially given the need to identify venues in specific locations that will agree to the arrangement.)
- Impact on Community Meeting Experience: Minimal (even with potential limitations on local hosts and possible lack of “excitement” from attendees that is usually generated from visiting a new location.)
 - May limit the ability to target new locations for strategic or other reasons.
- Alignment with 2014 Meetings Strategy: Need to review, as the recommendation was that ICANN not restrict rotation of any meeting to specific locations.
- Implementation Timeline: Long (note: meeting locations are already identified through November 2025).

3. Review and update the current meeting rotation for greater flexibility in selecting locations (currently, 3 visits per region over 5 years).

- Level of Effort: Low (but may depend on what the new cadence of rotation is.)
- Impact on Community Meeting Experience: Minimal (but may depend on what the new cadence of rotation is.)
- Alignment with 2014 Meetings Strategy: Need to review, as the recommendation was that regional rotation should be as regular as possible.
- Implementation Timeline: Short

4. Review the requirement of having three different types of meetings in a calendar year (Community Forum, Policy Forum & AGM).

- Level of Effort: Low
- Impact on Community Meeting Experience: Neutral (if agreed outcome aligns with community objectives and expectations from each meeting.)
- Alignment with 2014 Meetings Strategy: Yes
- Implementation Timeline: Short

5. Reduce the duration of either the Community Forum or AGM (e.g. by one (1) day).

- Level of Effort: Minimal
- Impact on Community Meeting Experience: Neutral (note: there could be a positive impact on self-funded attendees, especially those with financial challenges.)

- Alignment with 2014 Meetings Strategy: Need to review, as the relevant recommendation is somewhat ambiguous as it states “up to xx” number of days in length for each meeting.
 - Current room usage (numbers from ICANN81):
 - Day 1: 12 rooms in use, with 9 at full capacity
 - Day 2: 13 rooms in use, with 7 at full capacity
 - Day 3: 13 rooms in use (excluding Welcome Ceremony), with 7 at full capacity
 - Day 4: 13 rooms in use, with 9 at full capacity
 - Day 5: 13 rooms in use, with 4 at full capacity
 - Day 6: 13 rooms in use, with 7 at full capacity only during the following times: 09:00 - 10:00 and 13:15 - 14:30
- Implementation Timeline: Short (note: while a one-day reduction may still require financial commitment to the venue space for a certain period, this will likely be much less than savings that can be realized from reduced hotel stays, rentals, catering, and labor.)

6. Reduce the number of standalone inter-sessional community meetings by moving them to be collocated with an ICANN Public Meeting as much as possible.

- Level of Effort: High (for both org and community due to additional time, services and commitment required⁶.)
- Impact on Community Meeting Experience: High
 - Some community members will need to devote more energy and a longer span of dedicated time at once to ICANN work, and some may elect not to attend sessions during the Public Meeting to attend to other commitments.
 - There will also be a significant impact on staff time and energy.
- Alignment with 2014 Meetings Strategy: Not applicable
- Implementation Timeline: Short (but will depend on how easily these additional meetings can be scheduled and accommodated at the relevant venues.)

7. Convert one (1) of the three (3) meetings each year to a virtual meeting.

- Level of Effort: Low
- Impact on Community Meeting Experience: Variable (as there will not be the need to travel but face-to-face interactions and in-person networking opportunities will be lost.)
 - Participants with infrastructure or bandwidth challenges who may have attended in-person may be less effective remotely.
 - Based on the ICANN Virtual Meetings, there will likely be fewer sessions and lower participation numbers.
- Alignment with 2014 Meetings Strategy: No, as the strategy envisions three in-person meetings per year.
- Implementation Timeline: Long (note: likely earliest implementation will be 2026.)

⁶ This could require ICANN staff that support critical meetings logistics (e.g. technical services, production setup) to be on the ground for over 2 weeks.

B. Meeting Format, Logistics & Funding Sources

1. Reduce the number of meeting rooms required and/or amount of time/days for which meeting rooms are contracted, based on criteria such as average in-person session attendance at recent meetings (note: this may require a reduction in session numbers).

- Level of Effort: Low
 - Example: reducing Meetings Technical Services support from 12 to 11 meeting rooms could result in a 10-12% cost savings for such services per meeting, and will reduce the need for technicians and other contracted support.
- Impact on Community Meeting Experience: Medium (see ICANN81 room usage numbers, above.)
- Alignment with 2014 Meetings Strategy: Partial
- Implementation Timeline: Short (note: implementation can start as early as ICANN82 in Seattle).

2. Develop and impose agreed, community-wide criteria for how sessions are selected and placed on the ICANN Public Meetings schedule. In particular, review the need and agree on criteria for informational, training and similar sessions (e.g. “How It Works”) to take place at ICANN Public Meetings.

- Level of Effort: High
- Impact on Community Meeting Experience: Neutral (as this would likely require changes to and additional community time dedicated to Prep Week and other virtual sessions.
- Alignment with 2014 Meetings Strategy: Not applicable
- Implementation Timeline: Short (but depends on how quickly the criteria is developed and how easily it can be implemented.)

3. Revisit audiovisual and related production and equipment needs for meeting rooms, especially the main room.

- Level of Effort: Low
- Impact on Community Meeting Experience: Neutral
- Alignment with 2014 Meetings Strategy: Yes
- Implementation Timeline: Short

4. Consider reducing the number of sessions for which live interpretation and/or live scribing is used (note: this may depend on the reliability of automated or remote services, such as Zoom capabilities, and will require coordination with ICANN’s Language Services function to ensure its feasibility.)

- Level of Effort: Medium (note: ICANN does not yet have a policy for artificial intelligence implementations).
- Impact on Community Meeting Experience: Medium

- Alignment with 2014 Meetings Strategy: Need to review, as recommendation is for “consistent to current support, but effort should be made to focus on continuous improvement, especially for remote participation”.
 - May also need to review consistency with ICANN’s commitments to facilitate inclusive participation via interpretation and translation services.
- Implementation Timeline: Short

5. Revisit the block schedule to maximize room space, community time and overall cost effectiveness, including better use of the first weekend. This can also incorporate the suggestion to reduce the meeting duration of the six-day meetings by a day.

- Level of Effort: Low (but depends on broad agreement to change.)
- Impact on Community Meeting Experience: Neutral
- Alignment with 2014 Meetings Strategy: Partial (note: recommendation was to “optimize scheduling of meeting days to take advantage of recognized working days (Monday through Thursday), and minimize impact on globally recognized non-working or religious observance days”.)
- Implementation Timeline: Short

6. Reduce the number of networking receptions unless a sponsor is available.

- Level of Effort: Low (but significant pre-meeting time, effort and resources from org will be required to identify and negotiate with potential sponsors.)
- Impact on Community Meeting Experience: Minimal (but could limit networking time.)
- Alignment with 2014 Meetings Strategy: Not applicable
- Implementation Timeline: Short (note: If implemented, it should be implemented prior to any agreements which cannot be cancelled without penalty.)

7. ICANN org to explore opportunities by pursuing a more comprehensive sponsorship strategy (e.g., increasing assistance, financially or in-kind, and including subventions).

- Level of Effort: High (as this will require significant resources from org to identify and negotiate with potential sponsors.)
- Impact on Community Meeting Experience: Neutral
- Alignment with 2014 Meetings Strategy: Not applicable
- Implementation Timeline: Long

8. Implement a conference registration fee for attendees other than appointed community leaders, session facilitators or speakers, and working group members (note: ICANN org is not currently set up to process payments of this type or to report them as may be legally required).

- Level of Effort: High
- Impact on Community Meeting Experience: High
- Alignment with 2014 Meetings Strategy: Not applicable
- Implementation Timeline: Likely longer

C. Travel-Related Matters

1. Continue to reduce the number of staff traveling to ICANN Public Meetings (including through rotation or limiting travel to staff from that region wherever possible).

- Level of Effort: Low
- Impact on Community Meeting Experience: Minimal (note: this is already in progress and the working assumption should be that on-site staff levels will be commensurate with what is necessary to manage and support community work on the ground.)
- Alignment with 2014 Meetings Strategy:
- Implementation Timeline: Short

2. At a later stage of this project, consider a discussion on updating and aligning Funded Travelers from the community to the purpose of each ICANN Public Meeting (note: data on the current and increased cost of Funded Travelers have been provided to the SOAC leaders).

- Level of Effort: High (as this will require significant community time and work.)
- Impact on Community Meeting Experience: Variable
- Alignment with 2014 Meetings Strategy: Not applicable
- Implementation Timeline: Long

V. Metrics

Effectiveness of Cost-Saving Measures:

- **Meeting Cost per Participant:**
 - Continue to track the average cost of each ICANN Public Meeting per attendee.
 - Compare the average cost-per-participant across different formats (e.g., in-person, hybrid, virtual).
- **Venue and Resource Utilization:**
 - Analyze the usage (including in-room attendance) of reserved meeting rooms.
 - Compare actual usage to estimated need (e.g. size, setup) requested.
 - Analyze usage of technical, including audiovisual, equipment for resource allocation efficiency.

Impact on Community Engagement:

- **Participation Metrics:**
 - Monitor in-person and remote attendance trends to evaluate the accessibility of hybrid and virtual options.
 - Analyze geographic diversity of in-person attendees based on meeting location.
- **Session Attendance:**
 - Record and track attendance rates for individual sessions to determine their relevance and value.

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- Compare session-specific participation numbers before and after implementing agreed changes (such as shorter meetings or virtual formats).
 - **Cross-Community Interaction:**
 - Track time allocations for SO/AC-specific sessions versus general or cross-community sessions.
 - Track time allocations for informational and training sessions.

Operational and Scheduling Efficiency:

- **Session Overlap:**
 - Measure number of scheduling conflicts, particularly for cross-community and SO/AC-specific sessions.
- **Session Effectiveness:**
 - Collect regular post-session feedback to assess alignment with community needs and strategic priorities.

Hybrid and Virtual Meeting Success:

- **Technology Metrics:**
 - Evaluate the reliability of hybrid meeting platforms, including uptime, participant connectivity, and quality of interpretation services.
- **Remote Engagement:**
 - Measure active engagement metrics such as chat activity, Q&A participation, and polling responses vs. the in-person Q&A activity.

Environmental Impact:

- **Carbon Footprint Reduction:**
 - Estimate emissions savings from reduced travel due to hybrid or virtual-only meetings.
- **Sustainability Practices:**
 - Track the use of sustainable materials and waste reduction initiatives at meeting venues.

Metrics for Specific Proposals

- **Virtual-Only Meeting Impact:**
 - Compare attendance and engagement levels for virtual meetings against hybrid and in-person formats.
- **Regional Rotation Adjustments:**
 - Measure the impact of venue changes on regional participation and cost savings.
- **Networking Opportunities:**
 - Collect feedback from participants on the effectiveness of networking opportunities in revised formats.

Metrics for Fixed vs. Variable Costs

- Continue to track these costs