



# Refined Outline of Suggested Reviews System

Review of Reviews Cross Community Group

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# Preface

The refined outline prepared by the Review of Reviews Cross Community Group (CCG) builds on input received at ICANN85 and online on the [March 2026 proposal outline](#).

The refined outline aims to further advance discussions on designing “a refreshed system of reviews that meets current and future needs”. Refer to [Appendix A - Background](#) for more information.

While the Reviews CCG recognizes that the refined outline lacks certain details, the intent in sharing it at this stage is to present the foundational “backbone” of the proposal and to seek views from Nominating Groups on whether it provides a suitable basis for the development of the forthcoming Draft Report. Any interested stakeholder is also welcome to share views using the identified avenue for input.

## Request to Nominating Groups and Next Steps

The Reviews CCG shares the refined outline of the review system on which it intends to base its Draft Report, providing an opportunity for Nominating Group (Supporting Organizations and Advisory Committees [SO/ACs]<sup>1</sup>, Board, Staff) to raise any concerns regarding the direction being taken.

The Reviews CCG will hold two 60-minute webinar sessions on Tuesday, 5 May at 06:00 UTC and 18:00 UTC to provide Nominating Groups and interested stakeholders an opportunity to ask clarifying questions and offer suggestions.

The Nominating Groups are requested to use the public archived [inputonreviews@icann.org](mailto:inputonreviews@icann.org) communication channel to share considerations, if any. The Reviews CCG will take stock of any feedback received as it consolidates its proposal into a Draft Report for public comment. The Reviews CCG would appreciate feedback as soon as possible to help incorporate perspectives during draft development, and no later than 12 May.

The Draft Report will be released for public comment and discussed during ICANN86 providing an opportunity for structured dialogue, clarification of issues, and input.

Feedback received through the public comment process and community discussions will be systematically reviewed and incorporated, as appropriate, to strengthen the proposal and address identified concerns.

In phase 4, the Reviews CCG will focus on finalizing the outcomes of the work based on the analysis of public comments and community input received. This phase will also include the documentation of demonstrated community support for the final recommendations. The Final Report, together with the supporting documentation, will be formally submitted to the ICANN Board by August 2026 to enable Board consideration and decision-making.

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<sup>1</sup> The Reviews CCG encourages SO/ACs to also share the request with their Stakeholder Groups.

# Proposed Refreshed Reviews System

The Reviews CCG currently recommends a three-pillar framework for ICANN Reviews:

- Accountability and Transparency Review
- Structural Review
- On-Demand Review

## Accountability and Transparency Review

The Accountability & Transparency Review is a cadenced review conducted once every planning cycle with the option to defer if necessary. It focuses on assessing how ICANN has executed on its Mission in accordance with the Articles of Incorporation, its Bylaws, its Commitments and Core Values and its transparency obligations set out in Article 3.1 of the ICANN Bylaws.

This review is achieved by examining specifically scoped, community-prioritized existing procedures and processes, assessing the outcomes and progress achieved in respect to goals set out in planning documentation, recommending improvements where necessary, and identifying key development areas that may strengthen ICANN's effectiveness in support of its Mission.

The initiation process begins with the community analyzing the implementation of prior review outputs and the effectiveness of deployed solutions, considering whether the timeline is meaningful in light of ongoing work, to inform the need for review and scope setting. While deferral is permitted when necessary, safeguards ensure that it cannot be postponed indefinitely<sup>2</sup>.

The scope of the review is variable, within set boundaries. A scoping process would be undertaken by a Scoping Group that comprises SO/AC leadership teams or their designees, Board, Staff representation as well as the leadership of the previous ATR review, as outlined below:

- 1. Slate of topics** - Leadership of SO/ACs reaches out to its SO/ACs requesting suggestions of topics. Each SO and AC can use their own process to solicit topics (e.g. SO could set up an ATR topic working group). The Board should also be able to suggest topics. Adequate lead time should be factored into planning to allow for ample time to conduct consultations.

Each SO or AC leadership settles on a slate of topics they believe have consensus in their SO or AC, using the designated template that features built-in limits (3?) and rankings.

Any suggested topic should be documented with a rationale.

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<sup>2</sup> The Reviews CCG will identify a proposed safeguard for the Draft Report.

2. **Opportunity for input and refinements** - Duly completed templates are posted on a public work space page. Each SO and AC should work with their appointees on the Scoping Group to review all slates, potentially fine tune their own slate, and identify areas of overlap with other slates submitted by other SO/ACs. Any refinements should be underpinned by rationale.
3. **Scoping Group discussions** - SO/AC leaders or their designees bring their slates. Using open and transparent deliberations (to be set out in the Scoping Group charter), and assisted by Staff, the Scoping Group meets to review and rationalize the topics to create an initial shortlist. Overlapping topics are streamlined. Topics are tested against the following criteria:
  - a. In scope of ICANN's Articles, Mission, Commitments and Core Values and its transparency obligations set out in Article 3.1 of the ICANN Bylaws
  - b. No duplication of existing work or initiative
  - c. Not a topic for policy development
  - d. Topic specified with enough precision to define what would be reviewed
  - e. In the public interest
4. **Feasibility and resource assessment of initial shortlist** - The Scoping Group, working with Staff, assesses the feasibility of reviewing the shortlisted topics including the level of effort required, necessary data collection, dependencies, expertise or skills that would be desirable for each, the need for professional services, budget and timing constraints and produces a shortlist for comment. Depending on resourcing parameters, the set of topics could be affected.

[Topics that are not included in the shortlist could be potentially considered for an On-Demand Review in so far as a given topic meets the criteria and thresholds articulated in the process to convene an On-Demand Review.]
5. **Consultation on shortlisted topics** - The Scoping Group releases the shortlist. SO/AC Leaders solicit comments, through a formal public comment process or through direct consultation or both [TBD] on shortlisted topics, and accompanying rationale, including on associated resourcing ramifications where appropriate, from their SO/AC and report back to the Scoping Group. Adequate lead time should be factored into planning to allow for ample time to conduct consultations.
6. **Scoping Group aligns on topics (threshold to be defined)** and drafts charter. Using transparent deliberations, the Scoping Group agrees on the final set of topics and the charter.
7. **Send to Board** - List of topics and charter, along with supporting materials, are sent to the Board for action.

The Scoping Group shall maintain an up-to-date dashboard to track progress and ensure transparency of meetings and deliberations.

The review is foreseen to be conducted by a Cross Community Group, with the option to be assisted by experts, with conclusions and recommended actions, if any, to be provided to the ICANN Board.

This review originates from the existing Accountability and Transparency Specific Review (ATR).

## Structural Review

As the Board indicated on 19 May 2025: “each community group has been and remains empowered to look at its own structure and seek changes to how it is organized”. SO/ACs may independently consider restructuring at any time, independently of this process. These reviews, however, cannot unilaterally change their relationship with the rest of the community without the agreement of the rest of the community; for example they cannot add a seat to the Board, Nominating Committee (NC) or other apportioned body without ICANN community consensus.

The cadence for Structural Reviews is set every 15 years, starting from the implementation of the new structure. This review is deferrable and subject to a threshold that determines whether they should proceed.

The Structural Review will be carried out in three phases, as detailed below:

### **Phase 1 - External Landscape Assessment (6 months)**

External experts working together with a community liaison working group undertake an assessment of the external landscape identifying, researching and evaluating external factors that may have an impact on the structure of ICANN as a whole including its architecture with individual bottom-up SOs and ACs with their predefined roles and responsibilities.

### **Phase 2 - Internal Landscape Assessment (15 months)**

A Cross Community Group is convened to review all SO and AC structures, investigate any existing or longstanding issues, and produce recommendations (if any). Informed by the External Landscape Assessment, the intent of Phase 2 is to determine whether:

- a) the ICANN structure of SO/ACs and the NC is fit for purpose for ICANN to achieve its mission;
- b) each SO, AC and the NC continue to have a purpose in the ICANN structure as they are currently constituted or if any changes in structures and operations are desirable to improve the overall effectiveness of ICANN in support of ICANN’s Mission;
- c) new structures are required; and
- d) any existing structures need to be phased out or transformed.

Any recommendations for changes to an existing SO or AC structure made in Phase 2 will be categorized as Advisory Recommendations and are sent to that SO or AC for consideration.

Each SO and AC will consider the relevant Advisory Recommendations and advise within a set period of time, whether it accepts or rejects any or all of them. A rationale for their decision should be provided accordingly.

Based on the recommendations from Phase 2 and the SO and AC responses to the Advisory Recommendations, a proposed new ICANN SO, AC and NC structure is drawn up.

### **Phase 3 - Implications of the Proposed New Changes (12 months)**

Informed by the proposed new ICANN, SO, AC and NC structure, the Cross Community Group reviews the overall ICANN structure including the Board<sup>3</sup> to determine:

- a) if changes are desirable to improve the overall effectiveness of ICANN; and
- b) whether changes are required to accommodate the proposed new ICANN SO, AC and NC structure.

The final outcome of this phase will be subject to comment and submission to the Board as a recommendation. The Board decision of the recommendations will be open to all Bylaws defined accountability measures.

## **On-Demand Review**

An On-Demand Review can be convened under exceptional circumstances, contingent on high thresholds being met that would include alignment across all parties (SO/ACs, Board, Staff) to address the following:

- **Special topics**
  - Review of Reviews<sup>4</sup>
  - Security, Stability and Resiliency of DNS<sup>5</sup>
  - Aspects of gTLD Round (e.g. competition, consumer trust, consumer choice)<sup>6</sup>

At designated intervals, ICANN will reach out to the community to solicit interest in running a review on one of the special topics. Special topics are pre-known un-cadenced topics of interest.

- An **emerging topic** that is requested by the community or Board that meets the criteria for a review, specifically one that does not involve policy development, and cannot be adequately addressed through Bylaws-mandated processes.

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<sup>3</sup> The Reviews CCG is discussing whether the staff (ICANN organization) should be a component of the Structural Review.

<sup>4</sup> To streamline the envisaged system, the Reviews CCG moved the Review of Reviews effort, intended to audit the review system to assess whether it is performing as intended and is still fit for the purpose of enhancing accountability and transparency, to On-Demand.

<sup>5</sup> Matters of Security, Stability and Resiliency can be reviewed as On-Demand but may also arise as topics for review under the Accountability and Transparency Review.

<sup>6</sup> Aspects of the gTLD Round can be reviewed as On-Demand but may also arise as topics for review under the Accountability and Transparency Review.

The topic of review could be a topic raised during scoping of the Accountability and Transparency scoping process, emerge from an Accountability and Transparency Review process as a recommendation, or emerge from the Structural Review.

- Place holder for On-Demand Structural Reviews<sup>7</sup>

The On-Demand Review would follow the following scoping process:

- A minimum of two SO and/or ACs raise a suggested On-Demand topic, in the format of a charter using a designated template, that contains a clear narrow scope for the review, which, if supported by a minimum of five SO and/or ACs after due consultation, is submitted to the Reviews Scoping Committee<sup>8</sup> that comprises SO/AC leadership teams, or designees, plus Board, and Staff representation.
- The Reviews Scoping Committee conducts the following screening:
  - no duplication of existing work or initiative;
  - Not a topic for policy development;
  - Topic specified with enough precision;
  - In the public interest;
  - When the topic was last reviewed/assessed to ensure meaningful timing;
  - Confirmation that the suggested topic or issue has not already been covered by the ATR within the ongoing five-year cycle, and is not part of the recommendations under current consideration or implementation.
- The Reviews Scoping Committee works with Staff to assess the feasibility of work set out in the charter, including the level of effort required, necessary data collection, prioritization, dependencies, expertise or skills that would be desirable for each, the need for professional services, budget and timing constraints.
- The Reviews Scoping Committee liaises with its respective groups to confirm interest in proceeding.
- The Reviews Scoping Committee confirms whether the threshold of five SO and/or ACs is satisfied. The charter is sent to the ICANN Board for approval.

The committee shall maintain an up-to-date dashboard to track progress and ensure transparency of meetings and deliberations.

This current outline proposal does not limit the number of On-Demand Reviews that can be run in a given planning cycle. Rather, it relies on the resource scoping exercise and thresholds defined in the process to do a resource evaluation to convene a review in a time and manner to prevent challenges to budget and resources.

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<sup>7</sup> The Review CCG is discussing the possibility for a SO or AC or other structure to request a narrow Structural Review to remedy a structural problem or gap that has not previously been resolved..

<sup>8</sup> The Reviews CCG is contemplating the possibility of using a standing committee to help prevent duplication of effort and ensure resources are allocated efficiently without overcommitment.

## One-Time Review

The Reviews CCG recommends<sup>9</sup> a one-time review of the Continuous Improvement Program (CIP) pilot to inform whether the CIP initiative should be continued, discontinued, or refined. At that point in time, a determination could then be made on how the CIP results should be used and reviewed in the future, as appropriate.

## Proposed Definition of Purpose of Reviews

The Reviews CCG' current purpose of reviews definition is as follows:

“The purpose of reviews is to assess whether ICANN is fulfilling its Mission, Commitments, and Core Values, as set out in the ICANN Articles and Bylaws, in a transparent and accountable manner.”

The Reviews CCG will revisit and fine tune this definition, if needed, once it has settled on the review structure.

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<sup>9</sup> The one-time review supersedes the “CIP assessment” previously proposed by the Reviews CCG. The Reviews CCG decided against developing a system reliant on a programme that remains in pilot phase.

# Appendix A - Background

Building on years of discussion<sup>10</sup> on finding ways to streamline ICANN reviews to make them more sustainable, the ICANN Board, after consultation with the community at ICANN82, [directed](#) ICANN Staff, on 19 May 2025, to begin work to design a review program that better serves the community's needs and is fit for purpose. As a first step, the ICANN Board called for a community dialogue to develop a shared understanding of the areas and issues that would enhance ICANN's accountability, transparency, and effectiveness.

To address this, leaders of ICANN's SO/ACs convened to develop a [charter](#) that was formally signed off on in August 2025, and subsequently [approved](#) by the ICANN Board on 5 September 2025.

The Reviews Cross Community Group (Reviews CCG) brings together [members](#) from ICANN's SO/ACs, ICANN Board, ICANN Staff, two [expert advisors](#) selected by the Reviews CCG, as well as [observers](#). The Reviews CCG is tasked to perform "a fundamental evaluation" of reviews set out in the ICANN Bylaws, "as a whole system, including their implementation, and propose a refreshed system of reviews". Areas of focus include:

- Periodic review of ICANN structure and operations (section 4.4);
- Annual Review (section 4.5);
- Specific Reviews (section 4.6);
- Previously conducted Reviews; and
- Reviews that have previously been formally recommended.

As noted in the charter, the Reviews CCG is not evaluating the pilot [Continuous Improvement Program](#) itself, but is to "take account of its work and consider how it can best contribute to the broader system of reviews".

The Reviews CCG work is informed by [data received from ICANN](#) Staff on Specific Reviews and Organizational Reviews, as well as considerations, research, and conclusions of the [Third Accountability and Transparency review](#), which it considers a point of reference in its work.

The Reviews CCG conducts its work in a transparent fashion and welcomes observers to contribute to plenary call and subgroup discussions, as directed by Co-Chairs. Additionally, it has an open email address any interested individual can use to [provide input](#) on the work. The Reviews CCG also conducts outreach sessions at ICANN meetings, organizes webinars and issues status updates on its [work space](#) to keep the public apprised of progress and collect feedback.

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<sup>10</sup> Refer to Sections 2 of the *Information on ICANN Specific Reviews V3* and *Information on ICANN Organizational Reviews V2*. See background materials page on the Reviews CCG work space.

# Appendix B - Inventory of Key Changes Compared to ICANN85 Outline

One significant change from the [outline](#) shared during ICANN85 is the reduction in the number of reviews, from five to three. Previously, the outline shared during ICANN85 included the Accountability and Transparency Review, CIP Assessment, Structural Review, Review of Reviews, and Ad Hoc / On-Demand Review. In the refined version, the reviews were streamlined to three primary reviews: Accountability & Transparency Review, Structural Review, and On-Demand Review. The CIP Assessment has been recycled into a one-time review of the CIP pilot, and the Review of Reviews was moved to the On-Demand Review, thus eliminating them as standalone reviews.

The refined version also introduces the notion of a Committee with transparency measures like a dashboard to track progress, which is not mentioned in the ICANN85 outline. The Committee comprises SO/AC leadership teams, or designees, plus Board, and Staff representation, as well as leadership of the previous review for the Accountability and Transparency Review, if applicable.

Below are the key changes from the outline shared during ICANN85, compared to the refined outline concerning the three pillars of ICANN Reviews.

## **Accountability & Transparency Review**

The new version moves from focusing on ICANN's commitments in its Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, Strategic Plan, and Financial and Operational Plan, to a focus on ICANN's Mission, Commitments, Core Values, and its transparency obligations as outlined in Article 3.1 of the ICANN Bylaws.

The intended outcomes, which include examining community-prioritized procedures, assessing outcomes relative to goals, recommending improvements, and identifying areas for development, are essentially the same in both versions. The core goals and objectives of the review are unchanged.

The [outline](#) shared at ICANN85 mentioned a "flexible cadence" conditioned on completion of steps articulated in the initiation process, while the revised text specifies that the review will be conducted once every planning cycle, with an option to defer if necessary. While deferral is permitted when necessary, safeguards ensure that it cannot be postponed indefinitely.

In terms of scope, the second version introduces a definition of boundaries. While the first version mentions "variable scoping within set boundaries," the refined version provides more explicit criteria, including alignment with ICANN's Mission, Commitments, and Core Values, avoiding duplication of existing initiatives, and ensuring topics are precise and of public interest. The refined version also has a clearer connection between the ATR and On-Demand Reviews. The new outline specifies that topics not selected during the ATR scoping process could potentially be considered for an On-Demand Review.

## **Structural Review**

The ICANN85 outline describes the Structural Review in terms of two options and does not explicitly mention the micro and macro distinction. Option 1: Focuses on evaluating the ICANN multistakeholder model for any needed improvements or new structural elements. Option 2: A mandatory review that examines ICANN's structural coherence, dynamics,

placement, and representation, including Board composition and decision-making processes. Instead, the refined outline notes that the Structural Review will be carried out in three phases.

The ICANN85 outline included a set cadence for periodic evaluations but allowed flexibility for reviews to be prompted by an ad-hoc process. The refined outline notes that a Structural Review should be periodically scheduled to occur every 15 years provided a certain threshold is met. The refined outline also includes a placeholder for further discussion on the possibility for a SO or AC to request a Structural Review.

### **On-Demand Reviews**

Both versions of the outline state that the review can be convened under exceptional circumstances, provided that certain thresholds are met to address an emerging topic. The refined outline now states that this topic can be requested by the community, the Board or ATR. Additionally, a new category of special topics was included. Special topics comprise Review of Reviews, Security, Stability, and Resiliency of DNS, and aspects of the gTLD Round (e.g., competition, consumer trust, consumer choice), which were not explicitly mentioned in the ICANN85 version. The Refined Outline also introduces the potential concept of a Structural Review for a SO/AC to request with the caveat that this a placeholder that requires additional CCG discussion. A process for convening an On-Demand Review was articulated in the refined outline.