RySG reply on the call for nominations to the ICANN Community Onboarding Pilot Program (COP) of 20 November 2017

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The call for nominations to the ICANN Community Onboarding Program (COP) (previously called Stakeholder Journey Mentor Pilot Program) triggered a discussion within the Registries Stakeholder Group (RySG) on the COP and the effectiveness of the multiple ICANN outreach and engagement programs and initiatives in terms of retention and successful involvement of new participants in ICANN community policy work.

To many RySG members the announcement of the call for nominations to the COP came as a surprise and questions were raised about the origin and purpose of this 'new' initiative. This is a worrying situation, given that the COP is commencing the final stage of its two-year pilot which started in FY17, and has provided travel support for COP participants to six ICANN meetings so far. Internally, the RySG came to the conclusion that it nominated two people for the 'Stakeholder Journey Mentor Pilot Program' at ICANN55, but was not aware of subsequent calls for nominations for the Program under its current name.

The RySG is concerned about the lack of communication and transparency surrounding this project. A couple of observations: (1) To our knowledge, the announcement of 20 November is the first publicly announced call for nominations since the start of the pilot. (2) From a blog post on the ICANN website, we learned of a COP meeting organised on 27 October in Abu Dhabi. This meeting was not included on the ICANN60 schedule, and, as such, concealed from the community. We can only assume that similar meetings were organised at ICANN55, 56, 57, 58 and 59. Is this assumption correct? (3) The COP wiki page lists two Program Group calls, both in September 2017, with links to meeting notes and recordings. We therefore assume numerous other calls have been organised since the launch of the project in January 2016. Can we also have confirmation of this assumption?

The RySG shares the concern that the well-functioning of the ICANN multistakeholder model and its long-term survival largely depend on the ability of the ICANN community to constantly attract new people and involve them in its policy processes. Thus, volunteer recruitment and volunteer retention initiatives are indispensable, but only successful insofar they result in effective volunteer involvement in ICANN policy processes.

Based on the available information, the RySG fails to understand how the COP leads its mentees to active involvement in ICANN policy processes. The information collected in the (draft) documents on the wiki page, called 'onboarding materials', is interesting and might help newcomers to identify opportunities to get involved, however, investing travel support for multiple people to 8 ICANN meetings to produce a set of factsheet-like information papers seems out of proportion. There are more efficient ways to come to the same result. In addition, this program gives the wrong and dangerous signal to community members (new and existing) that volunteer work within the ICANN community is easily rewarded with a free ticket to travel to one or more meetings.

The RySG requests ICANN to publish a thorough assessment of the COP pilot in which the cost of the pilot is evaluated against the program's outcome in terms of the effective involvement of new participants in ICANN community policy processes. This

report should also indicate what plans, if any, are on the table for a continuation of the project beyond FY18. If such plans exist, the community should be invited to provide public comments before new steps are taken. In light of the ongoing preparations for the ICANN FY19 budget, the RySG considers this a matter of urgency.

A growing number of outreach and engagement initiatives aim at bringing new people to the ICANN community. The RySG calls upon ICANN to, together with the community, evaluate each of these initiatives against their success in involving new people in community policy work. Without questioning the valuable work being done by the Fellowship, Nextgen and other programs, the RySG believes that there are unused opportunities to guide newcomers more directly to sessions and groups that fit with their own personal interests and background. This would make their first ICANN meeting(s) more relevant to them, help to lower the barrier to join discussions (during sessions as well as during breaks), and increase the chance on further involvement in ICANN policy work, also when travel support ends. This review should examine a potential consolidation and refocus of existing initiatives, rather than the creation of new ones.

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