Registries Stakeholder Group Statement

Issue: **RySG feedback on the ICANN Fellowship Program Consultation**

Date statement submitted: **5 April 2018**

Reference URL: https://www.icann.org/resources/pages/fellowship-community-process-review-2018-03-20-en

Background[1]

The ICANN Public Responsibility Support department (PRS) launched a consultation on the Fellowship program. PRS will draw from the community feedback to revise the current program and present an updated draft Program to the community for comment.
   Plan and Timelines:
   ● Consultation questionnaire - input due 6 April
   ● Revised Fellowship Program Draft shared with community groups for initial feedback - May 2018
   ● Public Comment on Revised Fellowship Program Draft - June-August 2018

Background documents:
ICANN Fellowship 10-year survey
RySG comments on ICANN Fellowship Program Application Process Review (Aug 2016)

Registries Stakeholder Group (RySG) feedback:

The Registries Stakeholder Group (RySG) welcomes the opportunity to share its experiences with and views on a decade of ICANN Fellowships and looks forward to further contributing to the revision of the current program.

In light of the vigor and diversity it has brought to the ICANN Community, the RySG fully supports the continuous improvement of the Fellowship Program to maintain its success. The credibility, well-functioning, and long-term survival of the ICANN multistakeholder model largely depend on the ability of the ICANN community to attract new people of diverse backgrounds. Volunteer recruitment and volunteer retention are key, and the Fellowship Program is an important instrument to ease the path to a continued involvement for those from underserved and underrepresented communities.

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[1] *Background: intended to give a brief context for the comment and to highlight what is most relevant for RO's in the subject document – it is not a summary of the subject document.*

The ICANN Fellowship Program 10 Year Survey, is a valuable source of information that provides insight in how the Fellowship Program is perceived by its own Alumni. Their experiences and suggestions are of great importance. We recommend further analysis of the Program's full database of Alumni, to get more insight in the success of the program in terms of effective engagement of Fellows in ICANN, and better understand the reasons and profile of those no longer involved.

Program Goals and Vision

1. What does your group believe should be the objective of the Fellowship Program? How would the success of this objective be measured?
2. The Fellowship Program was established to provide access to ICANN meetings to individuals from underserved and underrepresented communities. In your group's opinion, how effective is the Fellowship Program at fulfilling its current goal?

3. In your group's opinion, is this goal still a priority for ICANN, given the new bylaws? If not, what new goals would your group propose for the program?

The RySG believes that the Fellowship Program would be well-served by developing a clear Vision for the program that has associated objectives and key performance indicators. The program does appear to have met and perhaps exceeded its original goal based on the number of people who have benefited from the program, but what is less obvious is whether those people have gone on to continue to contribute to the ICANN community in a meaningful way largely because of the lack of metrics.

The RySG does not believe that the original goal for the program remains a priority. One would hope that there would be a significant flow-on effect from the 650+ that have been funded to attend ICANN meetings in order to understanding ICANN. Networks can be very influential, and one would hope that a network that is the size of Fellowship recipients can be a very strong tool for spreading the understanding of ICANN within their respective regions.

Assessment of Program Impact on your SO/AC group

4. Have Fellows contributed to the work of your group? If so, where do you think they have added the most value? What might be changed about the Fellowship Program to enhance participation of Fellows in your group?
5. Does your group make efforts to involve, educate, and/or inform Fellows about your work? If so, please describe these efforts.

The RySG is not a natural home for Fellowship recipients and as a group we have little to no contact with Fellows. This is unfortunate as we believe that the Fellows should have an understanding of the domain name industry and it is our perception that this is not the case.

At the San Juan meeting, the RySG hosted a session 'A walk in the shoes of a new gTLD registry operator' which received good feedback from the Board and other community members. We understand that the Fellows were attending a session at the same time about how DNS abuse works. In order for the Fellows to have a balanced understanding of the industry and the issues that are discussed at ICANN meetings, we consider it extremely important that Fellows have more exposure to how those issues affect contracted parties.

In addition, as mentioned in an earlier RySG comment, we believe 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 the ICANN community, also when travel support ends.

Selection Processes

6. Are you aware of the Fellowship selection process? What changes, if any, would you suggest for the selection process?
7. An individual can be awarded a Fellowship up to three times. Do you suggest retaining or revising this number? Why?
8. For Policy Forum Meetings, currently only Fellowship Alums can apply. Do you support continuing with this approach? If not, what changes would you suggest?
9. How willing would your group (SO/AC/SG/C) be to participate and take ownership for selecting and developing fellows, including giving them assignments, assigning mentors, etc?

The RySG is aware of the Fellowship Program and are generally reminded that there is a selection process when we see the notice about the selected fellows for the next meeting.

It seems appropriate to continue the practice of only sending Fellowship Alumni to the Policy Forum and we would hope that one of the criteria is that they have been actively following a policy development process.

The RySG may be willing to become more involved in developing fellows and providing the balanced perspective of the industry as mentioned above and would welcome a conversation with the administrators of the program in this regard.

Program Size

10. Considering your responses to previous questions, would you suggest making the program larger, smaller, or maintaining the current size?
11. If the program were to be reduced in size, what would your group deem as the priorities for the program with a smaller cohort?

It seems that the Fellowship Program has reached the point of diminishing returns. Unfortunately, rather than seeing any benefit to ICANN from the program, the perception is that the program has become a travel destination support scheme with no real benefit, certainly not for the RySG. The only time the Fellows are visible is during the Public Forum.

We support the proposed reduction in size from 60 to 30 recipients for each ICANN meeting, even absent the current budgetary pressures, we believe this reduction is appropriate at this time.

It might be worth exploring alternative approaches to the current Fellowships, such as providing a mix of full and partial coverage of travel costs, or a remote Fellowship program (e.g., as introduction to ICANN and in preparation of attending a next meeting in person, or to support Fellows not able to attend or no longer entitled to receive travel support).

The program should aim to provide the Fellows with a balanced overview of ICANN's mission and associated issues. The RySG is concerned that the Fellows do not fully understand issues that are within ICANN's mission and are better versed in issues of Internet Governance.

Program Structure

12. When you interact with Fellows at an ICANN Meeting, do you find that they are sufficiently knowledgeable about ICANN? If not, what skills or areas of knowledge would you suggest increasing focus on for pre-Meeting preparation?
13. Do you think that Fellows spend sufficient time in working sessions with your group during the course of an ICANN meeting? If not, what would changes would your group propose?
14. Do you feel that you have enough time to engage with Fellows at an ICANN meeting?

As noted above, the RySG does not have any substantive interaction with ICANN Fellows, but would welcome the opportunity to discuss how we could change this. We are quite confident that the Fellows are smart people who are curious about ICANN related issues and we would certainly benefit from developing their understanding of issues that impact registry operators.

Information Available on Program

15. Is the information currently available clear and sufficient for your community members to understand the Fellowship Program? If not, which elements could be improved and how?
16. Are your community members aware of the differences between the Fellowship and NextGen@ICANN Programs? If not, please state what type of clarification would be useful.

The RySG does not consider that the distinctions between the Fellowship Program and NextGen are sufficiently clear, and unfortunately this seems to add weight to concerns about the value of the programs in terms of return on investment.

General Questions

17. The Fellowship Program seeks to engage participants who will go on to participate actively in the ICANN community. What skills, attributes and backgrounds have provided the most successful and active participation in your SO/AC/SG/C? What skill sets and backgrounds would your group see as desirable for candidates for the Fellowship Program?
18. With which elements of the Fellowship Program is your group most satisfied? What changes or improvements would your group most want to see implemented to the program?
19. Do you have any other questions or comments about the Fellowship Program?

One of the overarching tenets of the program should be self-sustainability. If a Fellow develops an interest in something that falls within ICANN's remit, ICANN generally provides the tools to enable them to continue their participation from anywhere in the world. An important skill or attribute is persistence. ICANN and its multistakeholder model can be very complex and difficult to understand from a holistic perspective and also sometimes difficult to find the niche in which to engage. It takes time and this needs to be well-recognised. We often hear about volunteer burnout -- in a perfect world, given the Fellowship Program is now over 10 years old, we would have hoped that we would be seeing a lot more new voices contributing to the discussions, but unfortunately it seems that it are still the usual suspects that show up to do the work.

With respect to changes or improvements for the program -- it is very important for the administrators of the program to deal with the widely held perception that the Fellowship and other similar programs are just Travel Support Programs with no real benefit. The Fellows must become more visible during ICANN meetings and make more significant contributions than thanking the Board for giving them this wonderful opportunity.