Issues identified during the initial consultation process for the ICANN July 2008 – June 2011 Strategic Plan

Background

The ICANN Strategic Plan is a three year plan that is reviewed and updated annually. The ICANN planning calendar is divided into two parts. Strategic planning occurs during the first six months of the fiscal year (July – December) and operating planning and budgeting occurs during the second six months (January – June). The present strategic and operating plans can be found at http://www.icann.org/planning .

At the ICANN meeting in San Juan, the consultation process for the July 2008 – June 2011 Strategic Plan was launched. Consultation sessions were conducted in Spanish, and French, a consultation was held with Caribbean members of the community. Questions were posted on an online forum to allow all members of the ICANN community to contribute to the initial consultation process.

As might be expected in the annual review of a three year plan, there are many issues that were noted in the July 2007 – June 2010 Strategic Plan that remain relevant. In addition, given that the plan only commenced operation in July, the impact of initiatives identified in the plan has yet to be seen. There is, therefore, significant overlap between the issues in the current Strategic Plan and the issues raised for the July 2008 – June 2011 Strategic Plan. This issues paper acknowledges that overlap by combining the challenges and opportunities identified for the current Strategic Plan with material generated by the recent consultation. Members of the community who were involved in the Strategic Planning process in recent years will see many common themes and a continuation of the ideas developed in last year's planning process.

Input for this document

In addition to material from the current strategic plan, the ideas contained in this document come from three sources: community consultation (the online forum, the French, Spanish and Caribbean consultation sessions in San Juan, subsequent comments by the French speaking community, additional comments from the Latin American community), input from ICANN staff including discussions at a senior management workshop and discussions by the Board. This issues paper brings together the ideas from these three streams. The community is now invited to review the synthesis of these ideas and suggest areas that should be priorities for ICANN for the next three years.

Key challenges and opportunities for ICANN

Although some aspects of the ICANN environment move "at Internet speed", many of the major drivers are more constant and remain relevant over many years. This list of challenges and opportunities builds on issues identified last year and includes comments from the recent round of consultation.

Key environmental challenges

   i.   The continued rise of the Internet as a truly global means of communication and the need for ICANN to meet the needs of a truly global stakeholder base

   ii.   Ensuring stability and security of the DNS in an environment of more frequent and more sophisticated attacks

   iii.   The increasing importance of the infrastructure of the Internet for a broad range of critical commercial and communication applications

   iv.   A wide range of abusive and malicious behaviours in the Internet environment that may be placed at ICANN's doorstep

   v.   Maintaining stability given expected increases in scale driven by the number of devices using the Internet, the number of users and the growth in number of domain names brought about by the introduction of IDNs and the new gTLD process

   vi.   Changes to the makeup of the ICANN community flowing from the implementation of IDNs, including increased numbers of registrars and registrants from non-English speaking areas

   vii.   Multiple complicated changes to Internet operations or protocols that need to be managed in parallel, including possible paradigm changes not yet anticipated

   viii.   Continuous evolution of commercial applications and business models that use the Internet, including the domain name market place and online advertising algorithms

   ix.   Possible fracturing of the current system perhaps brought about by dissatisfaction with perceived restrictions imposed by technical protocols or through actions of a government or governments

   x.   ICANN taking an appropriate role in the broad group of international and other global governance entities involved in Internet functions

Key organizational challenges

i. ICANN's evolving structure and the move towards independence

ii. An ongoing obligation to review and renew ICANN processes in order to operate efficiently and effectively

iii. Significant increases in the volume of policy and management work that needs to be done

iv. Successfully managing timely development of policy in a largely volunteer organization

v. Maintaining effective communication with a global audience of ICANN stakeholders with different levels of knowledge about how the DNS works

Major issues that need to be considered in the July 2008 – June 2011 Strategic Plan

This section is a synthesis of the community's views on the issues that need to be discussed in order to establish strategic priorities for ICANN for the period of the July 2008 – June 2011 plan.

1.   The introduction of Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) and the impact of this on all aspects of ICANN was a dominant theme in the feedback received. ICANN already has a detailed plan for implementing IDNs in the root (see http://icann.org/topics/idn/ for details). The comments received were not about the details of the implementation plan, but rather about the implications of IDNs for ICANN as an organization.

   a. All commentators who mentioned IDNs were supportive of the introduction of IDNs into the root. Some saw it as an important step in internationalizing the Internet. Many saw it as one of the most important activities that ICANN was undertaking.

   b. Some commentators suggested that the successful implementation of IDNs was a critical step in preventing the fracturing of the global interoperability of the Internet. To be truly effective in this regard, a global, common implementation of IDN.IDN will be necessary, as some early approximations of IDN at the top level already exist in non-globally interoperable formats.

   c. The introduction of IDNs will make the Internet more accessible and useful for billions of people around the globe. A number of comments suggested that these people (individuals, businesses, civil society groups and governments) should and hopefully will become stakeholders in the ICANN process. ICANN needs to educate these people about ICANN's role, encourage them to participate in the ICANN process and ensure that ICANN processes allow and encourage their full participation. If this is done successfully, in a few years the ICANN community might be much more geographically, culturally and linguistically diverse than it is today. It suggests that ICANN will need to be able to communicate effectively with a community in which the majority do not have English as a first language, if they speak English at all.

   d. The introduction of IDNs will bring about a significant increase in the number of registrars and registrants from non-English speaking markets. ICANN's business processes will need to continue to move to a more international framework, reaching beyond the translation of documents to the acceptance of a broad range of business cultures and practices to ensure a level playing field for people across the globe. Many from outside North America and Western Europe feel that some ICANN processes are more easily understandable to those who are familiar with working in English in an American business/ legal framework. This needs to be changed if ICANN is to become more truly international, providing high quality service to stakeholders around the globe.

   e. The introduction of IDNs is likely to raise a large number of policy issues. Policy development processes will also need to continue to be improved so that all stakeholders have a voice in the process.

   f. The introduction of IDNs will increase the number of domain names and might therefore increase the number of disputes about rights to particular domain names. This would create greater demand for dispute resolution processes. Given that many of these disputes would be about IDN domain

names, ICANN will need to consider developing and/ or strengthening mechanisms for resolving disputes in multiple languages.
g. Another implication of IDNs suggested by some respondents was that the increased size of the root zone would mean that management of the root zone would become more complex. There was also the suggestion that this increased complexity could mean increased security risks.

2. On a related note, there was some discussion of the **new gTLD process**. Most see this as closely linked to the IDN implementation process and many of the issues raised above apply.

3. **Security** was a theme mentioned by many respondents.
a. There was general agreement that there will be an increase in the number of attacks in coming years and that those attacks would become more sophisticated. The stability and security of the DNS are central ICANN's mission and ICANN must therefore develop strategies to deal with these attacks. Some saw DNSSEC as one of these strategies; others saw DNSSEC as only part of the solution and called for a broader framework for understanding security generally and ICANN's role in particular. There was also the suggestion that more research was needed to better understand the evolving nature of these threats.
b. Some respondents suggested that ICANN also had a role in protecting end users from malicious practices (such as phishing); a number of respondents were particularly concerned about the need to protect children. There is a need to deal with issues that are not exclusively within ICANN's mission, but where ICANN has a role to play. Significant requests have been received from Computer Emergency Response Teams (CERTS) in various countries for dialogue and policy advice on the security aspects of their work, especially regarding the use of IP addresses and the DNS for malicious purposes.
c. Given the concern about security issues, some consider it important to consider the role and responsibilities of registrars in mitigating malicious and abusive behaviours.
d. Some suggested that security issues (both the security of the DNS and security of individual users) will receive an increasing focus from governments in the coming years. ICANN needs to find ways to engage with governments on these issues.
e. Some pointed out that security of the Internet's unique identifiers will require more practical skill development and capacity building in some places (eg some developing country ccTLDs). There was an acknowledgement that this would have funding implications and that the solution might be some combination of government funding and funding from major corporations or other private funding. ICANN may have some coordination role of such a security fund or foundation.

4. **Capacity building for developing Internet communities** was seen as an important aspect of ICANN's role by many of those who contributed to the initial consultation.

a. Many members of the community believe ICANN should be doing more to facilitate regional Internet community development in developing countries. This might include awareness raising about Internet issues, training on technical issues and education about the role that ICANN plays. In particular, some have suggested that ICANN should provide more support for the growth of the Internet in the developing world. This might include analysing limitations to Internet growth and working with local communities and other stakeholders to facilitate usage whilst maintaining security and stability.

b. One important component of this was the sharing of knowledge and experience within the community. This was especially important for ccTLD operators, and the ccNSO had a continuing role to play here.

c. Some suggested that ICANN also had a role in developing or supporting user education on the domain name system in developing Internet communities.

d. There was a strong view that ICANN should not duplicate work already being done by others. Where appropriate, ICANN should play a coordinating role in working with developing communities, drawing on the resources and skills of partner organizations.

5. **The run out of IPv4 and the implementation of IPv6** is a concern for many members of the community. IPv4 address space is running out more quickly than anticipated. The allocation of IPv4 addresses will become a critical issue during the life of the next strategic plan. This applies to the both the allocation of currently unallocated addresses and the reallocation of currently assigned space. This will be of significant interest or concern to registries, registrars, commercial users and governments. Furthermore, uptake of IPv6 has been slower than expected. The ICANN community will need to decide how to deal with these issues through development of policies for IPv4 allocation and development of approaches for encouraging uptake of IPv6.

6. **Promotion of participation in the ICANN process** was an important theme for many respondents.

a. The policy development model for ICANN is based on a bottom up process that involves a range of stakeholders. It is critical for ICANN's future that it continues to encourage participation from all relevant stakeholders in the policy process. As mentioned above, the implementation of IDNs will mean that ICANN needs to reach out more effectively to a global stakeholder audience.

b. There was strong support for the continuation of the fellowship program and scholarships. It is seen as a very effective way to encourage participation by stakeholders from developing countries who would otherwise not be able attend ICANN meetings.

c. Some suggested that ICANN should organize or support regional events For some, the most important step in the further internationalization of ICANN is the establishment of regional presences. There are a number of reasons for suggesting this. Education and capability building in local communities would be more easily achieved through regional presences. It would also bring a knowledge of local laws, culture and context to improve ICANN business processes. In some cultures, having ICANN staff or a representative available to the region and from a similar culture provides a validity to ICANN's role

d. ICANN's communication and meeting practices need to become more international, especially by broadening of the use of languages other than English for key documents and other communication.
   o As a first step, greater attention needs to be given to translating from ICANN terminology to simple English. Doing this will make it easier for English speakers to understand the issues and also make it easier to translate into other languages.
   o A well defined and understood translation policy is a critical step in improving communication. This should define which documents are translated and into which languages.
   o The provision of forums in French, Spanish and Arabic during ICANN meetings has been well received, and participants at these sessions encouraged the continuation and expansion of opportunities for participants in the ICANN process to work in their native language. Others have suggested that ICANN should hold regional meetings where there would be more opportunity to discuss issues in the languages of the region.

7. **Improving policy processes** remains a continuing focus for ICANN.
   a. One important step acknowledged by a number of contributors was the implementation of the rest of the reviews of the Supporting Organizations and Advisory Committees. However, it was also seen as important that improvements were introduced as a result of these reviews.
   b. Some respondents suggested that greater effort needs to be put into supporting timely decision making in a process relying on volunteers. While this will be addressed in part by the reviews mentioned above, there was the suggestion that efficiency and effectiveness of the policy process could be improved by developing the skills of members of the ICANN community involved in policy work. Adequate staff support was also seen as crucial.
   c. In considering the policy development process, some contributors stressed the importance of providing a voice for end users. ALAC has made significant advances through the establishment of Regional At Large Organizations (RALOs) and At Large Structures (ALS). As with other parts of ICANN there will need to be ongoing reviews of RALOs and ALS to ensure that they are effectively representing the voice of the end user.
   d. Also of concern is the development of processes to deal with policy issues that cut across current SO/AC boundaries or require significant input from more than one of these groups. Some expressed the view that there was a need to better involve the root server operators and RIRs in policy development and in the ICANN process generally.

8. Consistent with issues raised by the community in the last year, some commentators were concerned **with the management of risks associated with business failure and the protection of end users.**
   a. Community concern around the RegisterFly issue highlighted the need for ICANN to take a more proactive role in compliance management. Members of the community expressed the view that ICANN needs to do more to ensure that registrars are meeting their contractual commitments, especially in areas such as data escrow. Steps that have been taken to strengthen the Compliance

function have been well received, but some are of the view that more needs to be done.

b. Another issue raised by the RegisterFly episode was the importance of ICANN continuing to ensure that contingency plans are in place for business failure of registrars or registries.

c. The RegisterFly incident also raised the issue of the protection of the rights of end users in the gTLD marketplace. Some contributors have suggested that ICANN should do more to educate and protect end users, others see this as stepping beyond ICANN's mission and suggest that it is the responsibility of local consumer protection agencies.

9.   ICANN will need to continue to focus on further improvements in **accountability and transparency**. While significant steps forward have been taken with regard to transparency, the issue of accountability will require further debate within the community. Some of the key issues are:

o Is accountability checks and balances, or is it achievement of strategic and operating goals?

o Does ICANN need some outside entity or entities to whom it is accountable?

o Is there a need for further accountability mechanisms (e.g. ability to remove a board member or to overturn Board decisions?)

10.   A final theme from the initial consultation is the importance of the **continued move towards independence.** Since the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with the United States Department of Commerce, ICANN has been on a journey towards independence. This was confirmed with the signing of the Joint Project Agreement in 2006. However the future or desired structure and accountabilities are not clear or commonly agreed and therefore discussion about transition is difficult. While some see value in maintaining strong links with a government or governments as way of providing a final level of accountability for ICANN actions, many others suggest that becoming truly independent should be ICANN's goal. Some see a need to disconnect from perceived US domination of ICANN. Defining the steps towards an independent ICANN will be an important task during the life of the next strategic plan.

Next steps

This issues document will be sent to the Supporting Organizations (SOs) and Advisory Committees (ACs) so that they can review the issues raised by the community and make whatever comments they feel are useful in the context of preparing the strategic plan.

In addition, the document will be posted on the ICANN website in English, French, Spanish and Arabic and members of the community will be encouraged to make comments through the on-line forum.

Based on the feedback that is received from the SOs, ACs and other members of the community, a key priorities document will be prepared. This will be a short document that sets out the proposed major areas of strategic focus for ICANN over the next three years and (depending on feedback received) would form the outline of the final plan. The key priorities document will be published for public comment. Subject to comments from members of the community, these priorities will form the basis of the strategic plan to be prepared and distributed in October for comment. A revised version of the plan will be prepared for further consultation at the Los Angeles meeting at the end of October. It is hoped that the strategic plan can be approved by the Board at the December meeting.