

Global Domains Division (GDD) General Operations Handbook for Registry Operators

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This GDD General Operations Handbook is provided for general education and informational purposes only, and is not intended to modify, alter, amend or otherwise supplement the rights, duties, liabilities or obligations of the registry operator under the terms and conditions of the base Registry Agreement or policies. This GDD General Operations Handbook should not serve as a substitute for the base Registry Agreement. As this document is meant to provide a high-level overview, you should not act or rely upon the information in this GDD General Operations Handbook without first confirming your obligations or rights under the base Registry Agreement itself. The information contained in this GDD General Operations Handbook shall not be deemed as legal advice by ICANN, and ICANN shall not be held liable for indirect, special, incidental, punitive or consequential damages of any kind including loss of profits, arising under or in connection with the registry operator's use of or reliance upon this GDD General Operations Handbook.

I. Overview

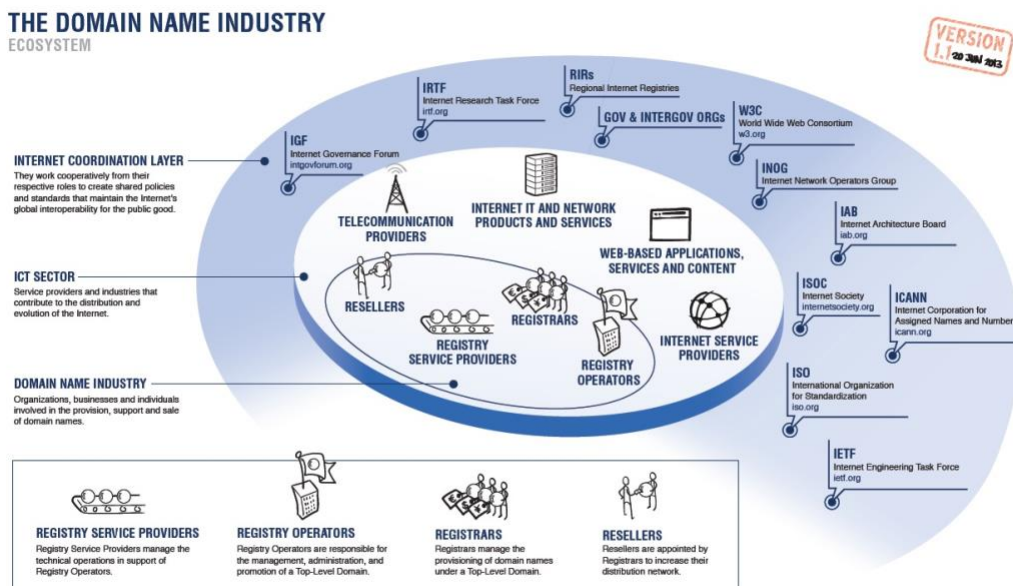
Welcome

As a registry operator, there are many obligations at various stages throughout the life of a generic top-level domain (gTLD). The *GDD General Operations Handbook* was initially developed in collaboration with the [Brand Registry Group \(BRG\)](#) as a resource targeted toward .BRAND TLD registry operators. After development, it became apparent that this information may be useful to all registry operators. The *Handbook* has been modified to provide high-level information pertaining to ongoing registry operations required to fulfill the obligations specified in the [base Registry Agreement](#) including [Specification 13](#). As you use this handbook, be sure to click on the links to additional information on services and resources. We hope this document serves as a helpful tool. For gTLDs not on the base Registry Agreement, refer to the language in the respective Registry Agreement as it may differ from what is outlined in this handbook.

The ICANN organization stands ready to assist you with ongoing operations of your gTLD to ensure that it operates as smoothly as possible. Your feedback on the *GDD General Operations Handbook* is encouraged and appreciated. Please email any suggestions or comments to globalsupport@icann.org and use “GDD General Operations Handbook Feedback” in the subject line.

Domain Name Industry Ecosystem

The diagram below (available at <https://www.icann.org/news/multimedia/163>) illustrates the various stakeholders involved in the domain name industry ecosystem. Note the placement of registry operators in the innermost concentric circle, along with registrars, registry service providers and resellers.



This graphic is a living document, designed to provide a high level view of the relationship between the different parties of the Domain Name Industry. It is for illustrative purposes only and is not intended to be a definitive guide. Some of the names of the documents they rely on may vary. Please provide feedback at www.gdnations.com/domainnameindustry

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II. Interfaces to Registry Operators

Global Domains Division (GDD)

ICANN implements domain name policies through contracts and services. The Global Domains Division (GDD) of the ICANN organization is the unit that engages with the Internet community to implement policies, as well as oversees and delivers the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) functions.

The purpose of GDD is to serve the global public interest, the registrants and end-users of the Internet by ensuring a secure and stable Domain Name System (DNS), while promoting trust, choice, and competition in the trusted domain name service industry.

GDD Operations, GDD Technical Services, Global Support Center and GDD Registry Services & Engagement are a few of the teams that you may interact with under the GDD umbrella.

- ⦿ **GDD Operations** – The mission of the GDD Operations team is to deliver defined, repeatable services and processes to applicants and contracted parties in a timely, consistent and predictable manner. Examples of such services include: Registry Services Evaluation Policy (RSEP) requests, Registry Operator Name Change, Change of Control, and Material Subcontracting Arrangement (MSA) assignments.
- ⦿ [GDD Technical Services](#) – This team is responsible for managing technical projects and providing subject matter expertise on technical issues related to the DNS.
- ⦿ [Global Support Center \(GSC\)](#) – The GSC is the first point of contact for questions and concerns pertaining to a registry operator. The team provides global, 5x24 support to ICANN contracted parties and the Internet community at large. If you have a question, open a general inquiry case in the Naming Services portal or email globalsupport@icann.org.
- ⦿ [GDD Registry Services & Engagement](#) – This team serves the domain name marketplace by supporting the registry operators to fulfill their contractual obligations. With a global presence, the team collaborates with registry operators to ensure a secure, stable, and resilient domain namespace.

Each registry operator has an assigned engagement manager who serves as its point of contact for matters of escalation. Engagement managers are the registry operator's liaison within the ICANN organization and represent registry operators' needs throughout the organization. Through periodic communications via email, scheduled calls, or in-person meetings at ICANN events, engagement managers are able to stay abreast of a registry operator's business needs and challenges. By having an open line of communication, either directly with the registry operator or with third parties representing registries, engagement managers work proactively to address concerns and provide educational resources and opportunities. If you do not know who your engagement manager is, email globalsupport@icann.org for an introduction.

The base Registry Agreement defines the rights, obligations, and provisions for registry operators to operate their top-level domain names. In circumstances where the registry operator must inform or request consent or approval from ICANN, services have been developed to facilitate these processes. Service managers are responsible for the planning, design, implementation, and maintenance of these registry services.

Additionally, the GDD Registry Services and Engagement team implements ICANN [consensus policies](#) by creating implementation plans, engaging the [Implementation Review Team](#), providing training, and conducting outreach to the public and relevant stakeholders.

[ICANN Contractual Compliance](#)

The ICANN Contractual Compliance team monitors and enforces the requirements of registry operators' Registry Agreements, as well as consensus and temporary policies. This team monitors and audits registry operations, per Section 2.11 of the base Registry Agreement, and responds to potential violations. It is imperative that registry operators respond to ICANN Contractual Compliance inquiries and notifications immediately. Failure to do so in a timely fashion may lead to escalation and, if not cured, a breach of contract.

Organizations for Registry Operators

(alphabetic order)

- ⦿ [Brand Registry Group \(BRG\)](#) – The BRG is an association of companies that share the goal of empowering dotBrand TLDs in the domain name industry. The BRG's purpose is to support the collective interests of its members and help them derive maximum value from their dotBrand TLD. The BRG is an Associate Member of the gTLD Registries Stakeholder Group (RySG).
- ⦿ [Generic Names Supporting Organization \(GNSO\)](#) – The GNSO brings together smaller stakeholder groups, which in turn bring together [constituencies](#) and other groups, which together form one [Supporting Organization](#) to develop policies, form consensus, and make recommendations related to gTLDs to the ICANN Board.
- ⦿ [geoTLD.group](#) – The geoTLD.group is an international not-for-profit membership association that represents the interests of geographic TLDs identifying a city, region, language or culture. Members include government entities, companies and associations. The geoTLD.group is an Associate Member of the gTLD Registries Stakeholder Group (RySG).
- ⦿ [gTLD Registries Stakeholder Group \(RySG\)](#) – A member of the GNSO, the RySG facilitates communication among gTLD registry operators and conveys the views of the RySG to the GNSO Council, the ICANN Board and other participants in the ICANN community, with an emphasis on consensus policies related to interoperability, technical reliability, and/or stable operation of the Internet or the DNS. The primary role of the RySG is to represent the interests of all registry operators.

III. Ongoing Registry Operations

Commonly Provided Registry Services

- ⦿ [Assignment: Change of Control](#) – A direct or indirect change of control of a registry operator is one type of assignment identified in the base Registry Agreement. This can involve a change in the entity controlling the registry operator. Reference the [Change of Control How to Guide](#) for additional information on submitting a request.
- ⦿ [Assignment: Material Subcontracting Arrangement \(MSA\)](#) – A change to an MSA refers to a change to any provider of one or more of the critical functions of a gTLD registry, such as DNS. This typically refers to a registry changing its back-end registry operator, also known as a back-end service provider or a registry service provider. Refer to the [Material Subcontracting Arrangement How to Guide](#) for additional information on submitting a request.
- ⦿ [Continued Operations Instrument \(COI\) Amendment Service](#) – The COI ensures that sufficient financial resources are in place to support the continued operation of the critical registry functions related to the gTLD in the event of problem with the registry's operation of the gTLD. The [COI Amendment Service How to Guide](#) provides information about how registry operators can request permission from the ICANN organization to change the value of their COI funds to align with the domain registrations under management (DUMs) projections for the gTLD, as well as update the issuing and/or advising bank, as needed.
- ⦿ **Data Escrow Agent (DEA) Change Request** – Registry operators must comply with the DEA requirements set forth in Section 2.3 and Specification 2 of the base Registry Agreement. To submit a DEA change, please log into the Naming Services portal and follow the detailed instructions for submitting your request.
- ⦿ [Registry Agreement Termination](#) – Under the base Registry Agreement, either party may terminate pursuant to certain requirements in the Registry Agreement, including but not limited to the following:
 - Section 4.3 and its subsections – termination by the ICANN organization
 - Section 4.4 and its subsections – termination by the registry operator
- ⦿ [Registry Operator Name Change](#) – If a registry operator changes the name of its organization, and it is not the result of a change of control, the registry operator must notify the ICANN organization of the change using the Registry Operator Name Change service. The process for submitting a request can be found in the [Registry Operator Name Change How to Guide](#).
- ⦿ [Registry-Registrar Agreement \(RRA\) Amendment](#) – The RRA Amendment process was developed for consideration of proposed amendments to RRAs where the registry operator is required to obtain ICANN approval of such amendments. This process is designed to ensure registrar input (and public input, where appropriate) before ICANN approves or otherwise resolves changes to an RRA.

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- ⦿ [Registry Service Evaluation Policy \(RSEP\)](#) – RSEP was developed through ICANN's consensus policy development process. The RSEP process is the mechanism to add, modify or remove a registry service as defined in the base Registry Agreement and in [Section 1.1 of the RSEP](#). The [RSEP How to Guide](#) explains how the ICANN organization evaluates the proposed service for its potential effect on security, stability and/or competition as they are defined under the RSEP.

 - ⦿ [Release of Two-Character ASCII Labels](#) – Specification 5, Section 2 of the base Registry Agreement requires two-character ASCII labels be reserved at the second level. Reserved two-character ASCII labels may be released if the registry operator implements the required measures to avoid confusion. However, the release of such labels must not be prohibited by other provisions of the base Registry Agreement.

IV. Useful Tools, Registry Resources, and Additional Information

Ongoing registry operations continue for the life of the gTLD in accordance with the base Registry Agreement. Below are useful tools and registry resources for ongoing operations of the gTLD.

Useful Tools

- ⦿ [Centralized Zone Data Service \(CZDS\)](#) – [Zone files](#) are text files that contain mappings between domain names and Internet Protocol (IP) addresses and other resources. The information included in a zone file is publicly available and can be accessed by any Internet user, as mandated by Specification 4 of the base Registry Agreement. Those who access this data include domain name security professionals who track malicious behavior, spam, and malware; legal professionals who identify typo squatting, trademark infringement, or similar misuse; and academicians who use the information for studying market trends and trending words used as domain names.

The CZDS provides a centralized access point to access and download zone files. Requests for access must be approved or denied by registry operators per the terms defined in Specification 4, Section 2 of the base Registry Agreement. Bulk processing can help process multiple requests simultaneously through the selection boxes on the list of pending requests. By default, access is set to 4,000 days. However, registry operators can change the access period to between 90 and 4,000 days for their gTLDs. It is also possible to download requests to a comma-separated values (CSV) file for processing offline.

- ⦿ [Naming Services portal](#) – The Naming Services portal replaced the GDD portal and New gTLD Applicant portal in late 2017, and is the primary vehicle for registry operators to communicate with the ICANN organization. It provides a secure communication channel and enables credentialed users to request various services related to managing their base Registry Agreement and relationship with the ICANN organization. A [User Guide](#) and webinar recordings are available on the [Registry Resources](#) page of icann.org. If you are unable to log into the Naming Services portal, please email globalsupport@icann.org for assistance.
- ⦿ [Registry Reporting Interface \(RRI\)](#) – The RRI is an interface provided by the ICANN organization to registry operators and data escrow agents to comply with the reporting provisions detailed in Specifications 2 and 3 of the base Registry Agreement. Credentials are obtained as part of the onboarding process, prior to delegation of the gTLD. If you do not have access, email globalsupport@icann.org. **NOTE:** Near the top of the ICANN Registry Interfaces document are links to each version of the document. Be sure you are viewing the most recent version.
- ⦿ [Root Zone Management \(RZM\) System](#) – The RZM is used by existing registry operators to submit changes to perform ongoing maintenance of their domain name delegation. This includes updates to the key contacts for the domain name and to the nameserver configuration for the gTLD. For additional information on the [process](#) for submitting a change, please email root-mgmt@iana.org.

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- ⦿ [Service Level Agreement \(SLA\) Monitoring System API Specification \(MoSAPI\)](#) – ICANN's MoSAPI enables registry operators to monitor the health of their gTLDs in near real-time, take immediate corrective action should the need arise, and retrieve a list of the SLA monitoring system's probe nodes. The system is available to both gTLDs and country code TLDs (ccTLDs).

[Registry Resources](#) on [icann.org](#)

- ⦿ [icann.org](#) – The [icann.org](#) website offers an abundance of resources and information covering everything from [policy updates](#), registry services, upcoming industry events, and more. Visit the [Registry Operator](#) and the [Registry Resources](#) pages, for helpful resources including [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#) and [How to Guides](#) for registry services.
- ⦿ [Mailing List for Technical Registry Operations](#) – The ICANN organization hosts a mailing list where you can subscribe to obtain technical announcements, ask questions, and address members' technical issues/questions in a community environment.
- ⦿ [New gTLD Program Case Studies](#) – As part of the ICANN organization's global efforts to raise awareness of new gTLDs, all registry operators are invited to partner with us to develop case studies. These case studies tell the story of a gTLD, including its background and business objectives. They are intended for use as educational resources. For information on how to participate and share your story, email globalsupport@icann.org.
- ⦿ [Registry Operator News & Events](#) – The ICANN organization provides communications to registry operators and GDD stakeholders in various forms. Whether via legal notifications for updates to a policy or via blogs and email communications for new initiatives, there is an abundance of available information. By consolidating the information in one location, the Registry Operator News & Events section is a valuable resource for staying informed.

Additional Information

- ⦿ **Trademark Clearinghouse (TMCH) Sunrise and Claims Period** – The purpose of the TMCH is to facilitate the Sunrise and Claims services as defined in Section 1, Specification 7 of the base Registry Agreement. The Sunrise Period provides trademark holders with an opportunity to register domain names prior to general registration. New gTLDs with a .BRAND TLD designation (Specification 13) are not required to provide a Sunrise Period as long as the gTLD continues to be qualified as a .BRAND TLD by the ICANN organization.

The Claims Period follows the Sunrise Period and runs for at least the first 90 days of general registration. During the Claims Period, anyone attempting to register a domain name matching a trademark recorded in the [Trademark Database \(TMDB\)](#) will receive a notification. If the notified party registers the domain name, the TMCH will send a notice to those trademark holders informing them that a domain name that matches their trademark has been registered.

All registry operators are required to register with the TMDB during the onboarding process. In order to register with the TMDB, the registry operator submits its TMDB contact information via the Naming Services portal. Upon approval, the ICANN organization will communicate with the TMDB contact about the registration and testing processes with IBM, the TMDB provider. For additional information about the TMDB, refer to the [Sunrise and Claims TMDB Registry User Manual](#).

- ⦿ [Universal Acceptance \(UA\)](#) – Universal Acceptance is the concept that all domain names should be treated equally. To achieve Universal Acceptance, Internet applications and systems must treat all TLDs in a consistent manner, including new gTLDs and internationalized Domain Names (IDNs). Specifically, systems and applications must accept, validate, store, process, and display all domain names. Visit the [Universal Acceptance Steering Group \(UASG\)](#) page for the latest information, as well as to [report instances](#) where an application or webpage is not UA ready. Additionally, questions or concerns about UA may be emailed to globalsupport@icann.org.

V. Registry Operator Obligations

Registry operators are responsible for fulfilling specific ongoing obligations at all times in accordance with their base Registry Agreement. Below is a general summary of these obligations. Many registry operators will use the services of a third party to manage these operational requirements, either directly through their RSP or combined with a registry management provider. However, the obligations under the base Registry Agreement ultimately rest with the registry operator.

NOTE: "Daily" frequency means the task is initiated and completed at a certain time each day, e.g., submitting data escrow deposits. "Continuous" frequency means the task is ongoing with no particular time of initiation, e.g., upholding rights protection mechanisms.

Continuous Obligations

- ⦿ **Submit New Registry Services for Approval Through a Registry Services Evaluation Policy (RSEP) Request: Article 2.1** – Contemplated new, modified, or removal of registry services may require the ICANN organization's approval per the [RSEP service](#). Evaluation is performed to determine whether there are security, stability, or competition issues in implementing the registry service.
- ⦿ **Comply with Consensus & Temporary Policies: Specification 1** – [Consensus policies](#) are developed through the multi-stakeholder process and become contractual requirements for registry operators and accredited registrars. The ICANN organization will send notifications to registry operators announcing the effective date and the requirements of each new policy. Additional information may be found on the [Advisories, Consensus Policies, and Temporary Policies](#) page on icann.org.
- ⦿ **Grant Zone File Access: Specification 4** – Zone files must be made publically available and requests for access must be approved or denied by registry operators per the terms defined in Specification 4, Section 2 of the base Registry Agreement. The [Centralized Zone Data Server \(CZDS\)](#) provides a centralized access point to access and download these files.
- ⦿ **Publish Certain Registration Data: Specification 4** – Registry operators must operate a publicly available Registration Data Directory Service (RDDS) in accordance with the requirements of Specification 4 of the Registry Agreement. The RDDS is often referred to as WHOIS. Registry operators must publish the following information:
 - WHOIS service available via port 43, and a web-based directory service at <whois.nic.TLD>
 - On the gTLD's website, a link to ICANN's WHOIS policy page

For additional information, please review the [April 2015 Advisory, Registry Registration Data Directory Services Consistent Labeling and Display Policy](#) and the [Temporary Specification for gTLD Registration Data](#).

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- ⦿ **Reserve Domain Names: Specification 5** – The [Reserved Names page](#) on icann.org provides information regarding domain names which must not be allocated or used by the registry operator.
 - ⦿ **Meet Interoperability/Continuity Standards: Specification 6** – Specification 6 of the base Registry Agreement mandates that there be continuity of registry services, abuse mitigation, and overall registry continuity (just to name a few standards) for the life of the gTLD. Registry operators must also publish DNS Security Extensions (DNSSEC) Practice Statements and Abuse contact information on the gTLD website.
 - ⦿ **Publish Internationalized Domain Name (IDN) Tables: Specification 6** – Registry operators who offer IDNs must comply with the [ICANN IDN Implementation Guidelines](#) and publish IDN tables in the IANA Repository.
 - ⦿ **Uphold Rights Protection Mechanisms (RPMs): Specification 7** – [RPMs](#) are safeguards that help protect trademark owner's intellectual property rights. RPMs include [Trademark Clearinghouse Requirements](#), Uniform Rapid Suspension (URS), and Trademark Post-Delegation Dispute Resolution Procedures (PDDRP).
 - ⦿ **Maintain Continuing Operations Instrument (COI): Specification 8** – Per Specification 8 of the base Registry Agreement, registry operators must maintain a [COI](#) for six years from the effective date of the Registry Agreement. The COI must provide for sufficient financial resources to cover the five critical registry functions in the event of an emergency transition.
 - ⦿ **Registry Operator Code of Conduct: Specification 9** – The Code of Conduct is a set of guidelines created to protect a gTLD's registrants. Registry operators are mandated to follow the Code of Conduct, as defined in Specification 9 of the new gTLD Registry Agreement, unless an exemption has been granted by the ICANN organization.
 - ⦿ **Maintain Registry Performance: Specification 10** – To avoid an emergency transition, as defined in Article 2, Section 2.13 of the base Registry Agreement, registry operators must comply with the performance specifications defined in Specification 10.
 - ⦿ **Abide by Public Interest Commitments (PICs): Specification 11** – There are four sections in Specification 11:
 - Section 1 states that the registry operator will only use registrars that have signed the 2013 RRA
 - Section 2* includes sections of the gTLD application that were requested to be included in the Registry Agreement as a binding commitment
 - Section 3 states that the registry operator must include a provision within the RRA prohibiting abuse, must maintain security threat reports, and must operate in a transparent manner in registration policies. Additional safeguards may be applicable to some gTLDs
 - Section 4* includes additional commitments that were not included in the application, but that the registry operator requested to be incorporated as binding commitment into their Registry Agreement

* Optional for applicants, and may not be included in all Registry Agreements.

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- ⦿ **Implement Community Registration Policies, if applicable: Specification 12** – If the gTLD was approved as a community application, Specification 12 mandates that the registry operator must implement and comply with all community registration policies described in the specification.
 - ⦿ **Abide by Specification 13 .BRAND Requirements: [Specification 13](#)** – Specification 13 provides qualified .BRAND TLDs modifications to the base Registry Agreement. One requirement is that registrants of .BRAND TLDs must only be the registry operator, its affiliates or trademark licensees and they must control the DNS records associated with domain names at any level in the TLD. Annual certification must also be provided to the ICANN organization to ensure requirements of the definition of a .BRAND TLD are met.
 - ⦿ **Ensure All Contacts on Record Are Current** – As contacts change within the registry operator’s organization and supporting subcontractors, the registry operator must submit a case via the Naming Services portal to ensure that contacts on record are updated. The ICANN organization relies on the integrity of this data for providing notifications, sending invoices, etc. Failure to do so could result in unwarranted escalation inquiries.
 - ⦿ **Ensure "Notices" Contact on Record Is Accurate** – The base Registry Agreement requires certain notifications related to contractual requirements from ICANN to registry operators be sent to a contact designated by the registry operator in its agreement. To update this information, submit a case via the Naming Services portal to update this information. Given the importance of this role, [Section 7.9](#) of the base Registry Agreement requires registry operators to notify the ICANN organization of changes to the contact within 30 days of any change.

Daily Obligations

- ⦿ **Submit Data Escrow Deposits and Send Notification: Specification 2** – Registry operators must engage with an [ICANN approved data escrow agent \(DEA\)](#) to provide data escrow services per the provisions in Specification 2. Additionally, Section 7 of Specification 2 mandates that registry operators deliver a written statement to ICANN that includes a copy of the report generated upon creation of the deposit, confirming that the deposit has been inspected by the registry operator, and that it is accurate.

Weekly Obligations

- ⦿ **Grant Bulk Registration Data Access (BRDA): Specification 4** – On a weekly basis, registry operators must provide the ICANN organization with up-to-date registration data as described in Specification 4, Section 3.1.

Monthly Obligations

- ⦿ **Submit Transactions and Functions Reports: Article 2.4 and Specification 3** – Within twenty (20) calendar days following the end of each calendar month, registry operators must deliver transaction reports via the Registry Reporting Interface (RRI) in the format set forth in Specification 3.

Quarterly Obligations

- ⦿ **Pay Registry-Level Fees: Article 6** – Registry operators must pay the registry fixed fee of USD 6,250 per calendar quarter.
- ⦿ **Pay Registry-Level Transaction Fees: Article 6** – Registry-level transaction fees will be equal to the number of annual increments of an initial or renewal domain name registration, during the applicable calendar quarter, multiplied by USD 0.25. The registry-level transaction fee does not apply until more than 50,000 transactions have occurred in the gTLD during any calendar quarter or any consecutive four calendar quarter period.
- ⦿ Fees will appear on quarterly invoices, issued at the end of the month, following the close of the calendar quarter. Beginning 31 July 2018, invoices will be transmitted via email only, unless otherwise requested. Paper invoices will only be mailed upon request. Per Article 6, Section 6.1(b), payment must be remitted within 30 days of the date on the invoice. To continue receiving paper invoices or to make updates to billing contacts, please email globalsupport@icann.org.
- ⦿ Please make note of the ICANN bank account number on the invoice as it is **different** than the original account number used to remit payments during the application and pre-delegation phases. Should your organization require updated vendor set-up documentation or require a purchase order be added to invoices, submit your request by opening a general inquiry case in the Naming Services portal. Additional information on fees may be found in the published [Billing FAQ](#).

Annual Obligations

- ⦿ **Submit Annual Certification and Internal Review Results: Specification 9 and Specification 13** – Within 20 calendar days following the end of each calendar year, registry operators must conduct internal reviews and provide results of the reviews to the ICANN organization. Such reviews are required to ensure that relevant gTLDs meet the requirements of the definition of a .BRAND TLD and maintain compliance with the Code of Conduct, when applicable. An [FAQ](#) is published to provide answers to commonly asked questions.

