



To: Tanzanica King, Sr. Manager, Meeting Strategy and Design, ICANN
Cc: Göran Marby, CEO, ICANN, Maarten Botterman, COB, ICANN
From: Christian Dawson, Executive Director, i2Coalition
Date: November 20, 2020
Subject: Re: ICANN Public Meeting Strategy

Tanzanica;

Thank you for your work in planning ICANN69, and for engaging our communities with your ICANN Public Meeting Strategy Survey. Speaking in my personal capacity but sharing my thoughts with others so that I may spur others to share similar thoughts, I seek to provide further input via this open letter, in hopes that it serves in guiding future meetings during this pandemic period.

In short, I greatly appreciate the efforts that ICANN has made in trying to keep us safe during the pandemic period. The effort to shift us to an online environment has taken a tremendous amount of effort that is greatly appreciated. The fact that it's worked as well as it has technically is a credit to your staff and coordination.

However, for as long as we remain remote, or partially remote, we need to take a good hard look at how we run meetings to see whether we can be more effective in the new venues. I've got a couple of strong suggestions. I believe in our ability to make improvements on virtual meetings by focusing on what we have learned over the last 9 months. I hope this helps.

Notes:

- 1) Restructure policy engagements to encourage meaningful participation

My impression of each meeting I participated in was that it had between 4-10 individuals actively engaged in the presentation of status on the topics they were presenting, and already actively engaged on, while commenters made either supportive or contrarian comments in the chat to whatever was being presented.

What was missing from that frame was the active dialogues that help drive us toward policy progress - particularly ones that bring new parties to the table to talk through their perspectives and concerns.

Our policy sessions can't be a few talking heads giving updates, while others already in the know engage in trash posting. We need your help in engaging the community in ways that create meaningful participation

How do we hold more effective virtual sessions at that level? First of all, we shouldn't waste precious meeting time on broad status updates, we should ask the planning groups to prepare reference materials that cover this for us.

Next, we need to focus on structuring meetings in ways that open them up to interaction to broad audiences. We should investigate the use of preliminary questions, and perhaps breakout rooms to discuss them.

One way or another, for remote meetings to be effective, they can't be just presentations, and they can't be environments where the same few people are the only ones who feel comfortable participating, time and again.

2) Focus on PDP progress, and deprioritize plenaries and panels

I get that you need to run panels and plenaries for political reasons, and that the community drove the process that decided on the number of plenaries per session, but that all happened before the global pandemic and the new remote meeting structure. As a result of changes to remote meetings, we are really far behind on making PDP progress, and this is a direct result of not being able to meet face to face and work through our differences. It stands to reason that we should revisit decisions to focus attention on non-policy work at this time. We are a policy organization, and right now with us as far behind as we are, we are not served well by keeping the same old plenary structure of 3 plenary sessions per meeting. Fewer plenaries and panels, more policy, NEEDS to be the focus of the coming meetings, if meetings are to help get us to where we need to be as a community.

At this meeting, the plenaries stunk particularly badly in their representations. We had a plenary session on GDPR, a European law, without any Europeans represented. This was, egregiously, also an all-male panel. This should always be unacceptable, but even more unacceptable at this time is that with these plenaries we rarely saw the kind of diversity of opinion and perspective that actually served to move us forward on our policy areas of focus.

More importantly, the plenaries have terrible community engagement by design - it's just the same small group of top presenters presenting again. When we're not meeting and communicating in the halls, and losing out on the community benefit those interactions bring, we can't be wasting our time and energy on meeting structures that only serve to showcase the thoughts of a select few hand-chosen insiders.

Conclusion:

ICANN meetings are supposed to serve the community. There's a serious risk of losing significant chunks of that community if we don't further evolve our current methods of engagement, which in an online environment end up favoring the voices of a small handful of active insiders over the voices of the general community participant.

Strongly prioritizing policy work over plenaries and panels, coupled with restructuring that policy work towards increasing participation levels, are the two ways I believe you need to focus your attention in order to make these meetings useful in a remote manner.

Sincerely,

Christian Dawson
Executive Director, i2Coalition