

ICANN CALL FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST (EOIs)

For a New gTLD Geographic Names Panel 25 February 2009

1. Introduction

Generic top-level domains (gTLDs) are an important part of the structure of the domain name system (DNS). Examples of existing gTLDs include .BIZ, .COM, .INFO, and .JOBS. A complete listing of all gTLDs is available at <http://www.iana.org/gtld/gtld.htm>. The responsibility for operating each gTLD (including maintaining the authoritative registry of all domain names registered within that gTLD) is delegated to a particular organization. These organizations are referred to as "registry operators" or "sponsors," depending upon the type of agreement they have with ICANN.

Following years of community-driven policy development process that recommended the introduction of new gTLDs, ICANN is preparing a process to receive applications to operate new gTLD registries. This program is described in detail at <http://www.icann.org/en/topics/new-gtld-program.htm>. ICANN has published a draft Applicant Guidebook at <http://www.icann.org/en/topics/new-gtlds/comments-2-en.htm> that provides detailed information about the process for applying to operate a new gTLD. The Applicant Guidebook will constitute the request for proposals (RFP) for new gTLDs.

The development of the Applicant Guidebook is an iterative process, which includes seeking public comment on draft versions. The comment resulting from the publication of the first draft Applicant Guidebook led to the identification of several overarching issues that will require additional examination and discussion to resolve. Although ICANN has prepared a revised Applicant Guidebook, the information in the Guidebook is not yet fixed and the new gTLD process is not yet launched. While that work goes forward, steps will also be taken to assure there will be a robust, effective and timely evaluation process in place to review applications once the round is launched. Retaining competent evaluation panels with sufficient expertise, resources and geographic diversity is expected to take many months. Some preliminary steps, such as the publication of this call for expressions of interest, are being taken now, even as important decisions regarding the overall implementation process are still being considered.

ICANN is now seeking expertise to enable the formation of panels to evaluate applications against the criteria published in the Applicant Guidebook. Expressions of Interest (EOIs) in providing management and evaluation services are sought in the following five areas of assessment:

1. Has the applicant demonstrated their technical capability to run a registry for the purpose specified in the application as defined by the criteria in the Applicant Guidebook?
2. Has the applicant demonstrated their financial and organizational capability as defined by the criteria in the Applicant Guidebook?
3. In the context of the criteria specified in the Applicant Guidebook, does the gTLD represent a geographical name, and if so, have authenticated support from the relevant government?

4. Will the introduction of the proposed gTLD string likely result in user confusion with (i.e., due to similarity with) (i) a reserved name; (ii) an existing TLD; or (iii) other proposed gTLDs?
5. In the context of resolving contention among two or more applicants for the same or similar gTLD string, does an applicant claim to represent a community and if so, satisfy the criteria for prevailing in a comparative evaluation?

ICANN also seeks information from potential providers regarding estimation of reasonable timeframes for each type of evaluation (e.g., per string or per application) and anticipated costs associated with conducting the evaluation. The cost and time to process an application are critical factors that must be carefully considered in the information provided by interested parties.

This EOI describes the criteria and requirements for providers that would propose to perform the evaluation of geographical names. Providers should respond by 13 April 2009 23:59 UTC with the required information that is described below. From the information provided, ICANN will invite respondents to exchange additional information.

Contracts will not be awarded from this EOI, but ICANN expects to use the responses to identify entities capable of providing the various evaluation roles and better refine the costs and time frames for conducting evaluation as part of the new gTLD process.

2. Background

The [Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers](#) (ICANN) is a not-for-profit, multi-stakeholder, international organization that has responsibility for Internet Protocol (IP) address space allocation, protocol identifier assignment, generic (gTLD) and country code (ccTLD) top-level domain name system management, and root server system management functions. ICANN's mission is to coordinate, at the overall level, the global Internet's systems of unique identifiers, and in particular to ensure the stable and secure operation of these systems. It coordinates policy development reasonably and appropriately related to these technical functions, consistent with ICANN's core values. Among these values are:

- Preserving and enhancing the operational stability, reliability, security, and global interoperability of the Internet;
- Where feasible and appropriate, depending on market mechanisms to promote and sustain a competitive environment;
- Introducing and promoting competition in the registration of domain names where practicable and beneficial in the public interest; and
- Seeking and supporting broad, informed participation reflecting the functional, geographic, and cultural diversity of the Internet at all levels of policy development and decision-making.

New gTLDs have previously been established based on proposals that were submitted to ICANN during two specific application periods. Materials from the 2000 application round, which led to the delegation of .AERO, .BIZ, .COOP, .INFO, .MUSEUM, .NAME and .PRO, are available at <http://www.icann.org/tlds/app-index.htm>. Materials from the 2003 round, which led to the delegation of .ASIA, .CAT, .JOBS, .MOBI, .TEL and .TRAVEL, are available at

<http://www.icann.org/tlds/stld-apps-19mar04>. Applications received during both of these rounds were evaluated on the basis of instructions and criteria contained in the respective RFPs published by ICANN. Applicants that were successful went on to negotiate and enter gTLD agreements with ICANN.

ICANN has also previously issued RFPs related to gTLDs in the cases of a reassignment of the .ORG gTLD in 2002 (see <http://www.icann.org/tlds/org>) and re-bid for the .NET gTLD in 2004-5 (see <http://www.icann.org/tlds/dotnet-reassignment/dotnet-general.htm>).

ICANN is seeking to establish a Geographic Names Panel (GNP) to assess each application for a new gTLD to determine if an application is a geographic name, in the context of the criteria specified in the Applicant Guidebook. In cases where such a determination is made, the GNP will then verify that the application is accompanied by the requisite government statement and then will authenticate that statement. In cases where the accompanying documentation is lacking or incomplete, the GNP will request same of the applicant and perform, within a specified timeframe, a re-evaluation. (Note: Separate EOIs are being issued for experts to assist with the assessment of technical and business/financial/operational criteria, string similarity and comparative evaluation). It is recommended that potential providers review all drafts of the Applicant Guidebook and other resources on the new gTLD program available at <http://www.icann.org/en/topics/new-gtld-program.htm>.

The number of applications that will be received for new gTLDs is unknown; however it is estimated to be several hundred or more. It is therefore vital that the provider be able to convene – or have the capacity to convene - as many evaluators as is necessary to evaluate all the applications, in a timely and complete manner. For example, the provider may wish to consider the process it will use to evaluate applications, and how that process will scale if 100, 250, 500, 700 or 900 applications are received. There should be a statement describing how 2000 applications would be processed (even though this is thought to be highly unlikely). The provider should also consider how the number of applications may impact evaluation timeframes and costs of evaluations.

It is expected that there will be more than one application round. Therefore, there may be an opportunity for cyclical work in evaluating applications. In the longer term, the work may become continuous with new gTLD applications being submitted and evaluated at any time.

In addition, given the international nature of the ICANN community and the likelihood that applications will be received for both ASCII and non-ASCII new gTLDs, it will be important that the provider can convene – or have the capacity to convene - globally diverse panels familiar with [internationalized domain names](#) (IDNs). A non-ASCII domain name, i.e., an IDN, is one that utilizes characters from the full Unicode set rather than just the “letter-digit-hyphen” characters specified in the original DNS standards. Using IDNs, for example, make it possible to add TLDs in Arabic, Hebrew, Cyrillic and other scripts. For more information on IDNs, please visit <http://www.icann.org/en/topics/idn/>.

3. Geographical Names Evaluation

The date on which applications will be accepted has not yet been set. The Initial Evaluation of the applications will begin immediately after ICANN concludes a check for administrative completeness.

There are two main elements of Initial Evaluation: “string reviews” (concerning the applied-for gTLD string or name) and “applicant reviews” (concerning the entity applying for the gTLD and its proposed registry services). Panels of independent evaluators will perform these reviews based on the information provided by each applicant in its responses to the application form. The evaluation of geographical names falls under the category of “string review”, and will be performed by the GNP supplied by the provider.

The GNP will be established to review applied-for strings to determine if a string represents a country or territory name, sub-national geographic name, city name, continent or UN Region as defined in the Applicant Guidebook; verify the supporting documentation is from the relevant government/s or public authority/s; and confirm the authenticity of the supporting documentation.

3a. Strings Representing Geographical Names

The following types of applications for new gTLDs are considered geographical names and must be accompanied by documentation of support or non-objection from the relevant government(s) or public authority (ies):

- An application for any string that is a meaningful representation of a country or territory name listed in the ISO 3166-1 standard (see http://www.iso.org/iso/country_codes/iso_3166_databases.htm), as updated from time to time. A meaningful representation includes a representation of the country or territory name in any language.
- A string is deemed a meaningful representation of a country or territory name if it is:
 - The name of the country or territory; or
 - A part of the name of the country or territory denoting the country or territory; or
 - A short-form designation for the name of the country or territory that is recognizable and denotes the country or territory.
- An application for any string that is an exact match of a sub-national place name, such as a county, province, or state, listed in the ISO 3166-2 standard, as updated from time to time.
- An application for any string that is a representation, in any language, of the capital city name of any country or territory listed in the ISO 3166-1 standard.
- An application for a city name, where the applicant clearly intends to use the gTLD to leverage the city name. An application for a string which is a city name, but is also a generic term or a product name, will not require documentation of support or non-objection, provided that the application clearly reflects that it will be used to leverage the generic term or product name. If an applicant declares that it intends to use the applied-for gTLD string for purposes associated with a city name, documentation of support or non-objection from the relevant government(s) or public authority (ies) will be required.
- An application for a string which represents a continent or UN region appearing on the “Composition of macro geographical (continental) regions, geographical sub-regions,”

and selected economic and other groupings” list at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm>.

Detailed information on the applicant’s responsibility to provide evidence of governmental support or non-objection from the appropriate level(s) is provided in Module 2 of the draft Applicant Guidebook at 2.1.1.4.1.

3b. Review of Geographical Names by the GNP

The GNP will:

- review applications and confirm whether a string represents a geographical name as defined in the Applicant Guidebook;
- verify and authenticate that the required supporting documentation is from the relevant government/s or public authority (ies) and the authenticity of the documentation.

The GNP may consult with additional experts as necessary (such as experts in linguistics or toponymy).

The results of the evaluation by the GNP will be publicly posted on ICANN’s website after the close of the IE period.

The GNP will take steps to ensure compliance with the Applicant Guidebook’s requirements for geographical names. The following items generally describe the evaluation procedure:

1. During the initial evaluation, ICANN will confirm that applications for geographical names (where the applicant has indicated the application is a geographical name as defined in the Guidebook) are accompanied by a letter of support or non-objection from the relevant governmental source(s) (a part of the check for administrative completeness).
2. ICANN will forward all applications to the GNP, the GNP will confirm which applications are for strings that are Geographical Names as defined in the Guidebook;
3. The GNP will review the sufficiency of the necessary supporting documentation for applications with strings determined to be geographical names. The GNP will determine whether the application is complete or will not pass the evaluation.
4. The GNP may consult with additional expertise to assist in the review of applications for geographical names.¹

3c. Applicability of Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs)

It is anticipated that the gTLD application process will include IDNs. Therefore, IDN strings will be evaluated by panels with access to appropriate linguistic expertise to ascertain whether the IDN string represents a geographic name and therefore requires government approval. In the event that an IDN is considered to represent any of the categories in “3a” above, the same requirements as for other geographical names will apply.

¹ The above steps are discussed in Module 2 of the draft Applicant Guidebook at 2.1.1.4.2.

4. Criteria

ICANN anticipates using the following criteria to evaluate expressions of interest (i.e., answers to questions posed in section 5 below) from providers to perform the functions of the GNP:

1. The provider will ideally be an internationally recognized firm or organization with demonstrated ability and expertise in the evaluation and assessment of geographical names located in all regions of the world. The firm or organization should be well-established, highly respected and reputable within the international community as a shared or neutral source of expertise in geographical place names.

Geographical expertise must include, but may not be limited to, the ability to assess and determine strings representing or potentially representing:

- Country and territory names;
- Sub-national geographic names such as a province, state, or county;
- Country and territory capital city names;
- City names; and,
- Continent names and UN Regions.

The provider must be able to provide for proficiency in and application of any string that is a meaningful representation of a country or territory name listed in the ISO 3166-1 standard (see http://www.iso.org/iso/country_codes/iso_3166_databases.htm), as updated from time to time. A meaningful representation includes a representation of the country or territory name in any language.

A string is deemed a meaningful representation of a country or territory name if it is:

- The name of the country or territory; or
- A part of the name of the country or territory denoting the country or territory; or
- A short-form designation for the name of the country or territory that is recognizable and denotes the country or territory.

2. The provider must be able to convene (either in advance or rapidly on-demand) a globally, linguistically and culturally diverse panel capable, in the aggregate, of evaluating applications from any location in the world, which may:
 - be local or global in scope;
 - be based on factors and interests other than geographic;
 - have certain linguistic, toponymic, cultural or other unique needs;
 - involve either commercial or non-commercial interests (or both);
 - be either objectively defined or self-defining;² or/and,
 - be ambiguous with regard to whether the applied-for string is intended to be a geographical place name.
3. The provider must exercise awareness and remain cognizant of the interests of governments or public authorities in relation to applied-for gTLDs that may represent geographical names (country, territory names, as well as certain other types of sub-national place names).

² An example of an objectively defined community is “the registered voters in the city of Perth, Australia”; an example of a self-defining community is “people who are interested in dogs.”

4. Starting with definitions provided in the Applicant Guidebook, the provider must have demonstrated capacity to confirm and clearly define the proposed method of confirming whether the string applied-for represents a geographic term, including but not limited to, technical capabilities to aid in the process. The proposal should outline the process, including timeframes and any costs associated.
5. The provider must have the expertise to be able to verify that the supporting documentation for applied-for gTLDs with geographical names is from the relevant government or public authority.
6. The provider must have the ability to authenticate supporting documentation from governmental bodies as necessary under the Applicant Guidebook.
7. The provider must have the ability to access and consult additional experts upon demand, including in the same or other relevant fields and professions, as needed and appropriate to fulfill the GNP's functions efficiently and completely.³
8. The provider must propose a structure and plan that is viable for the number of applications ICANN receives. At present it is not known how many applications will be received, how complex they will be, and whether they will be predominantly for ASCII or non-ASCII gTLDs. One estimate is that 500 applications will be received and that a fraction of those will qualify as a geographical name within the meaning of the Guidebook and require authentication of documentation. The provider should describe how operations will be scaled to evaluate 100, 250, 500, 700, 900, and (to be treated as a low probability occurrence) 2000 applications received for geographical names evaluation, how the number of applications would impact the evaluation process, and discuss ways to remedy any issues arising.
9. The provider must include targets for the time-frame necessary for it to complete a thorough and careful evaluation of all applications. If necessary, indicate at what volumes that batch processing would be employed.
10. The provider must be able to evaluate applications for IDN gTLDs and gTLD applications where government documentation is in the language of that country or territory.
11. Considering the criteria and unique needs for evaluating geographical names, the provider must propose a panel that is capable of:
 - exercising credible judgment in making its evaluations, including effective decision-making to engage additional expertise;
 - collaboration with other members of the panel and other experts;
 - reaching conclusions that are compelling and defensible; and
 - documenting the way in which it has done so in each case.

³ The types and nature of additional expertise that may be needed will not be known until applications are received and the needs of the applications have been assessed. However, examples of areas of related expertise may include, but may not be limited to, toponymy, political science, cartography, anthropological and ethnological sciences.

12. The provider must convene and operate the GNP so as to avoid communication between the GNP (or any of its members) and any party with an interest in the applications being evaluated, unless expressly permitted by the Applicant Guidebook, to avoid conflicts of interest. In addition, panelists and other experts engaged to assist in the evaluation process will be required to disclose any potential conflicts of interest that may arise during the period of the evaluation. The provider selected and each of its evaluators (including any additional experts) will execute a confidentiality agreement with regard to material contained in the applications under review.
13. The provider should be comfortable that the Applicant Guidebook is comprehensive and satisfactorily expresses all selection criteria, but understand that it is not finalized. It is possible, that the provider will be selected before the Applicant Guidebook is finalized, it will have the opportunity to review the text to ensure that the basis for the evaluation is clear. The criteria must be objective, measurable, publicly available at the outset of the evaluation process, and described fully in the Applicant Guidebook. All applications will be evaluated against these criteria.
14. The evaluation process for selection of new gTLDs will respect the principles of fairness, transparency, avoiding potential conflicts of interest, and non-discrimination.

5. Response to EOI Requirements

Interested parties should respond to each of the eight subject areas below. Responses will be gauged on the basis of the criteria defined in this document and Applicant Guidebook. Candidates desiring to express their interest to ICANN in the evaluation of geographical names in the new gTLD program should provide the following:

1. A Statement of Suitability that includes a detailed description of the candidate's ability to perform the work described in the previous section which demonstrates knowledge, experience and expertise, including but not limited to projects, consulting work, research, publications and other relevant information.
2. Evidence of the candidate's knowledge of and familiarity with ICANN, its role, structure and processes, including the Internet's Domain Name System (DNS) and past gTLD application and evaluation rounds.
3. The *curriculum vitae* for each person proposed by the candidate to manage or lead work on this project, the candidate's selection process for persons being proposed to ICANN, and explanation of the role that each named person would play. Also indicate the experience and availability of proposed panelists. The submission should identify any potential conflicts that would prevent them from making an objective evaluation of any application and how the conflict can be addressed.
4. A warrant that the candidate, if selected, will operate under ICANN's non-disclosure agreement and standard consulting agreement, and that neither the candidate nor any individual who might be engaged to work on this project (whether or not declared pursuant to (4) above) has a known conflict of interest.

5. A statement of the candidate's plan for ensuring fairness, nondiscrimination, avoiding potential conflicts of interest and transparency.
6. Considering the nature of the expertise necessary for evaluating geographical names at a global scale, a statement of the candidate's plan for ensuring that the GNP will consist of qualified individuals and that the candidate will make every effort to ensure a consistently diverse and international panel.
7. Project and operational timelines. A proposed work schedule for planning and starting panel operations including key milestone dates, consistent with but more detailed than those specified in this document. Also, the provider must include targets for the time frame necessary for it to complete a thorough and careful evaluation of all applications.
8. Costs. Although not all applications are expected to contain geographical place names in the applied-for strings, all new gTLD applications will be reviewed by the GNP to determine if the applied-for TLD represents a geographical place name such as a country or territory name, or a sub-national place name. Therefore, the candidate should provide a statement of the proposed fee structure, including any variable provisions that may be based on the number of applications received, in-depth evaluations, evaluations that would involve IDNs, or other factors.

6. Deadline

Interested providers must submit expressions of interest by email to gnp-eoi@icann.org by 13 April 2009, 23:59 UTC. A confirmation email will be sent for each submission received within one business day.

Also send queries regarding this request to gnp-eoi@icann.org. Questions will be accepted until 3 April 2009, 23:59 UTC. Queries and answers will be posted to a page on the ICANN website dedicated to this purpose.

If selected, the successful candidate is expected to be ready to assist ICANN with the finalization of the Applicant Guidebook, prepare for the evaluation phase, and be ready to begin work within four months after release of the final Applicant Guidebook.

Thank you for your interest.