Project Overview for the ICANN Support Applicant Review Panel (SARP) RFP

Request for Proposal

12 February 2024

ICANN

1 Introduction

1.1 About this Document

This document provides an overview of the Request for Proposal (RFP) for a supplier to assemble one or more Support Applicant Review Panel(s) (SARP(s)) that will conduct evaluations of all Applicant Support Program (ASP) applications received from Q4 2024 through Q4 2025. The RFP overview provides background and pertinent information regarding the requirements for the respondents. The complete RFP packet comprises this document as well as other documents that are hosted in the RFP portal.

1.2 About the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN)

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is an internationally recognized, non-profit public benefit corporation responsible for the technical management and coordination of the Internet's Domain Name System (DNS). ICANN is dedicated to preserving the operational stability of the Internet, promoting competition, achieving broad representation of global Internet communities, and developing policy appropriate to its mission through bottom-up, consensus-based processes.

See www.icann.org for more information.

1.3 Instructions for Participation

To participate, follow the required steps below:

1. **Email** your indication of interest to Support-Application-Review-Panel-rfp@icann.org, along with your RFP contact information. This is the point of contact who will be granted access to ICANN's sourcing tool for proposal submission. Please include:
   a. Full legal name of the entity
   b. Name of the contact
   c. Email address of the contact

2. Upon receipt of your indication of interest, ICANN will grant you access to its sourcing tool.

3. Within the sourcing tool, submit the completed RFP questionnaire (which constitutes the proposal) along with supporting documentation. Proposals should be electronically submitted no later than **23:59 UTC on 8 April 2024**.

2 Scope

2.1 Summary of Request

ICANN is seeking a supplier with the knowledge, capacity, and expertise to carry out a fair, consistent, efficient, and reliable process to assess ASP applicants based on applicant eligibility criteria as described in the draft New gTLD Next Round Applicant Support Handbook [https://community.icann.org/display/SPIR/ASP+%7C+Applicant+Support+Program; note that this is a draft and may be changed in response to comments received from the ICANN community].

ICANN will evaluate suppliers for the provision of the services specified in section 2.3 below. ICANN is looking for suppliers with a proven track record of (1) carrying out project management and application evaluation, (2) accurately evaluating applications using demonstrated expertise (or carrying out an approach to selecting and retaining individuals with expertise), and (3) possessing a deep understanding of programs similar to the ASP and how to evaluate applications based on financial need, financial stability, and whether the applicant is an eligible entity.

2.2 Project Objective

The New Generic Top-Level Domains (gTLD) Program: Next Round is a community-driven initiative enabling the continued expansion of the DNS through the introduction of new gTLDs. Among other goals, the program aims to foster diversity, encourage competition, and enhance the utility of the DNS.

The ASP seeks to serve the global public interest by fostering diversity, encouraging competition, and enhancing the utility of the Domain Name System. This program offers selected candidates the opportunity to receive gTLD application fee reductions and other forms of non-financial support.

ICANN is soliciting proposals from prospective suppliers who can carry out a fair, efficient, consistent and reliable process to assess ASP applicants in advance of the New gTLD Program: Next Round scheduled to open in Q2 2026. The supplier's goal will be to identify all ASP applicants that objectively meet the criteria and indicators of the program. The supplier may choose to conduct the evaluation process with in-house expertise, if available, or assemble and manage one or more Support Applicant Review Panel(s), an outsourced panel of qualified evaluators with relevant expertise. This work will begin in Q4 2024 with an estimated completion date of Q4 2025. The supplier will evaluate applications on an ongoing basis.

2.3 Scope of Work

The goal of the RFP is to identify a supplier that can provide services for the following areas:

- **Project Management:** Managing the external evaluation process, including assessing eligibility and qualification requirements, and determining pass/fail decisions according to the evaluation criteria and indicators. The supplier will convene one or more Support Applicant Review Panel(s) (SARP(s)), either made up of in-house, expert staff members, or of subcontractors with the needed expertise. The SARP(s) will conduct application evaluations on an ongoing basis from [Q4 2024 to Q3 2026] and identify all qualified applicants to the designated contacts within the ICANN org team.

- **Application Assessment:** Assessing applicants against program eligibility criteria and indicators, conducting research, as appropriate within scope [TBD], and identifying clarifying questions for the applicant as needed.

- **Reliable use of Evaluation Tools:** Using process guidance from ICANN, and translating that guidance into clear evaluation tools that can guide a reliable and valid evaluation of all applications.

- **Selection/Management of Evaluators:** Selecting and retaining the appropriate experts to participate in the SARP(s), which will evaluate the ASP applications. The supplier will establish a SARP(s) to conduct application evaluations, and has discretion over whether it will do so with available in-house capacity or with subcontractors who hold relevant expertise. The supplier must propose which approach it intends to take with regard to resources and ensure that the assembled evaluators have the required knowledge and technical experience to provide high-quality, well-informed evaluations, and do not have a conflict of interest that would disqualify them from providing this evaluation without bias. The supplier should also have the capability to formulate SARP(s) that are diverse in terms of geography, language, race/ethnicity, and gender.

- **Managing COI and NDA Requirements:** Ensuring all internal and/or external evaluators participating in the ASP evaluation process via the SARP(s) comply with Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDA), Conflicts of Interest (CoI) and other policies, as developed in cooperation with ICANN.

- **Maintaining Document Security:** Complying with all relevant data protection laws and regulations, and establishing policies and procedures to protect the privacy of any personal information that the supplier collects or processes on our behalf. The supplier must respect data subjects' right to control their personal information and ensure that their data is kept secure and used only for the purposes for which it was provided. The supplier must never sell, rent, or share personal data processed on our behalf with third parties. ICANN expects that the supplier will take all necessary steps to ensure the security and confidentiality of any personal data that is processed on its behalf, including implementing appropriate technical and organizational measures to prevent

unauthorized access, use, or disclosure. Compliance with these requirements will be a key consideration in ICANN's selection of a supplier.

3 High Level Selection Criteria

The decision to select a supplier as an outcome of this RFP will be based on, but not limited to, the following selection criteria, in no particular order:

- Project management capabilities
- Ability and positioning to carry out the ASP application evaluation process in an unbiased, organized, and timely manner
- Issue expertise
- Ability to identify, train, and manage subcontractors with relevant expertise where necessary
- Capability to formulate a SARP(s) with diverse members (please refer to the CCWG-Accountability WS2-Final Report p.9) who have the required expertise and skills.
- Ability to maintain document security
- Ability to build a systematic approach for issuing and tracking responses to clarifying questions.
- Capacity to comply with regulations related to ICANN's tax exempt status
- Submission of information that demonstrates the supplier and/or SARP(s)'s geographic, linguistic, gender, age, physical ability, and skill diversity.
- Financial value/Pricing
- Mitigation of any conflicts of interest
- Value added services
- Reference checks
- Financial health
- Flexibility and responsiveness throughout the RFP process, including during negotiations/contracting (if applicable)

4 High Level Business Requirements

The selected supplier must adhere to the complete list of business requirements, listed below and in the sourcing tool.

1. Submission of complete responses to the questionnaire along with supporting documentation by the designated due date via ICANN org's procurement tool (access will be provided by ICANN org upon receipt of your indication of interest).This includes the submission of a complete budget and budget narrative, as well as three professional references that attest to the applicant's ability to meet the selection criteria.

2. The supplier is expected to enter into a Service Level Agreement with ICANN.

3. Ability to communicate (verbally and in writing) in English.

4. Availability to participate in meetings in person or via conference call/remote participation.

5. Ability to maintain data security and integrity of the process, including by incorporating the principles of privacy and security by design into their work, to help ensure that privacy and security are considered throughout the project lifecycle, and that personal data is processed in a secure and compliant manner.

6. Ability to manage evaluation processes of international projects and organizations.

7. Ability to carry out all of the activities listed in the scope of work, including:

    a. **Project management:** Demonstrated ability to manage a complex, multi-year evaluation process with fidelity, including the capability to meet interim milestones; track and report on the process and budget to ICANN stakeholders; identify, retain, and compensate expert panelists; and manage a transparent and well-organized evaluation process.

    b. **Application assessment:** Demonstrated ability to apply process guidance (i.e., eligibility criteria, indicators, and instructions) to accurately and consistently evaluate ASP applications and materials.

    c. **Selection/management of evaluators:** As needed, demonstrated expertise in assembling and managing subcontractors participating in the SARP(s) at an international level.

    d. **Issue expertise:** Knowledge and expertise to accurately evaluate each application, including a deep understanding (or the capability to identify and retain experts with a deep understanding) of programs similar to the ASP and expertise evaluating applications on financial need, financial stability, and eligible entity type (e.g., if the entity is a charitable organization, a micro or small enterprise, an intergovernmental organization, etc.).

8. Demonstrated robust Conflict of Interest policy for the panelists in place. Eligibility to serve as an evaluation panelist on the SARP(s) will be based on an assessment of potential conflicts of interest. Should any applicants submit ASP applications that would present a conflict of interest, the supplier must have an established process for recusal and provide an alternative evaluation panelist. Please refer to the gTLD Applicant Guidebook Section 2.4.3.1 for Conflict of Interest Guidelines for Evaluation Panelists.

9. Demonstrated ability to develop work methods, evaluation/assessment approaches and reporting based on specific objectives and criteria.

10. Applicant eligibility check requirements. The supplier will have to show a demonstrated understanding of and commitment to ICANN's requirements for transparency and accountability. See: https://www.icann.org/resources/accountability.

5 Project Timeline

The following dates have been established as milestones for this RFP. ICANN reserves the right to modify or change this timeline at any time as necessary.

Activity	Estimated Dates
RFP published	12 February 2024
Participants to indicate interest in submitting RFP proposal (**instructions located in section 1.3)**	4 March 2024 by 23:59 UTC
Participants submit any questions to ICANN via Q&A Board within RFP portal	18 March 2024 by 23:59 UTC
ICANN responds to participant questions	25 March 2024
Participant proposals due by	8 April 2024 by 23:59 UTC
Evaluation of responses	9 April 2024 to 4 June 2024
Final evaluations, contracting and award	4 June 2024 to 13 September 2024

6 Terms and Conditions

General Terms and Conditions

1. Submission of a proposal shall constitute each respondent's acknowledgment and acceptance of all the specifications, requirements and terms and conditions in this RFP.

2. All costs of preparing and submitting its proposal, responding to or providing any other assistance to ICANN in connection with this RFP will be borne by the respondent.

3. All submitted proposals including any supporting materials or documentation will become the property of ICANN. If the respondent's proposal contains any proprietary information that should not be disclosed or used by ICANN other than for the purposes of evaluating the proposal, that information should be marked with appropriate confidentiality markings.

Discrepancies, Omissions and Additional Information

1. Respondent is responsible for examining this RFP and all addenda. Failure to do so will be at the sole risk of the respondent. Should respondent find discrepancies, omissions, unclear or ambiguous intent or meaning, or should any question arise concerning this RFP, respondent must notify ICANN of such findings immediately in writing via e-mail no later than ten (10) days prior to the deadline for bid submissions. Should such matters remain unresolved by ICANN, in writing, prior to respondent's preparation of its proposal, such matters must be addressed in respondent's proposal.

2. ICANN is not responsible for oral statements made by its employees, agents, or representatives concerning this RFP. If respondent requires additional information, respondent must request that the issuer of this RFP furnish such information in writing.

3. A respondent's proposal is presumed to represent its best efforts to respond to the RFP. Any significant inconsistency, if unexplained, raises a fundamental issue of the respondent's understanding of the nature and scope of the work required and of its ability to perform the contract as proposed and may be cause for rejection of the proposal. The burden of proof as to cost credibility rests with the respondent.

4. If necessary, supplemental information to this RFP will be provided to all prospective respondents receiving this RFP. All supplemental information issued by ICANN will form part of this RFP. ICANN is not responsible for any failure by prospective respondents to receive supplemental information.

Assessment and Award

1. ICANN reserves the right, without penalty and at its discretion, to accept or reject any proposal, withdraw this RFP, make no award, to waive or permit the correction of any informality or irregularity and to disregard any non-conforming or conditional proposal.

2. ICANN may request a respondent to provide further information or documentation to support respondent's proposal and its ability to provide the products and/or services contemplated by this RFP.

3. ICANN is not obliged to accept the lowest priced proposal. Price is only one of the determining factors for the successful award.

4. ICANN will assess proposals based on compliant responses to the requirements set out in this RFP, responses to questions related to those requirements, any further issued clarifications (if any) and consideration of any other issues or evidence relevant to the respondent's ability to successfully provide and implement the products and/or services contemplated by this RFP and in the best interests of ICANN.

5. ICANN reserves the right to enter into contractual negotiations and if necessary, modify any terms and conditions of a final contract with the respondent whose proposal offers the best value to ICANN