

# NCUC - Non-Commercial Users Constituency

Response to Community Consultation Process on ICANN Fellowship Program

## Program Goals and Vision

- 1. What does your group believe should be the objective of the Fellowship Program? How would the success of this objective be measured?**

It is the position of the NCUC that the fellowship program should allow digital rights activists, relevant academics, and other individuals whose initiatives are aligned with non-commercial uses and users of the Domain Name System to attend face-to-face ICANN meetings in order to learn and participate in the policy work of ICANN. This objective should be measured by monitoring the actions of the beneficiaries once their fellowship has concluded, and monitoring their subsequent involvement in the ICANN community and in particular, domain name policy. Also, creating awareness of ICANN at local or regional events by the program beneficiaries would be a good indicator to measure success. Above all, the NCUC believes the fellowship program is an important opportunity to recruit new voices, who wouldn't have been able to find their way otherwise, into ICANN's unique, multi stakeholder policy development process. The ongoing success of the program should be monitored and evaluated in a manner agreed by, and developed by, the community.

It is noteworthy from the internally-conducted ICANN Fellowship Program 10-year Survey<sup>1</sup> that 31 per cent of the respondents said they were still unclear as to how to become involved in the ICANN community. We believe that this sheds light on an area of necessary improvement: for the fellowship program to succeed, there needs to be follow-up to ensure that participants are able to become meaningfully involved in the ICANN community.

- 2. The Fellowship Program was established to provide access to ICANN meetings to individuals from underserved and underrepresented communities. In your group's opinion, how effective is the Fellowship Program at fulfilling its current goal?**

The goal of listening and giving access to voices from underserved and underrepresented communities and including their participation has been effective. However, it is our impression

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<https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/files/icann-fellowship-program-10-year-survey-dprd-28jun17-en.pdf>

that the program has been more effective at raising awareness rather than in increasing active engagement in ICANN policy activities; a development which is naturally expected to follow that current goal. The outputs can and should be improved as outlined in the answer to question (1) above.

**3. In your group's opinion, is this goal still a priority for ICANN, given the new bylaws? If not, what new goals would your group propose for the program?**

Similarly to what has been stated in the NCSG's response, the new ICANN bylaws have a limited definition for ICANN's mission. ICANN's mission is limited to Domain Name System policy. Considering that, the program's goal should be limited to building capacity for engagement in domain name policy at ICANN.

On another note, and according to the new bylaws, covering "functional, geographic, and cultural diversity of the Internet" are ICANN's core values. The NCUC agrees that while we ensure the program's commitment to the defined DNS scope while pursuing ICANN's core values, it is important to bring in and keep voices from underserved and underrepresented communities especially those in civil society with limited to no funding.

**Assessment of Program Impact on your SO/AC group**

**4. Have Fellows contributed to the work of your group? If so, where do you think they have added the most value? What might be changed about the Fellowship Program to enhance participation of Fellows in your group?**

The current NCUC Chair and three out of five Executive Committee members were fellows. Apart from leadership positions, which are one indicator of success but not the most important engagement indicator, fellowship alumni are members of different working groups, they contribute regularly to the discussions, they represent and carry out outreach activities inside the ICANN community and also to external audiences.

Fellows have been visible in various Internet governance spaces in all regions, thereby creating more awareness of the Constituency's activities and broadening the debate during policy development processes. Although there is always room for improvement, the perception of some in the NCUC is that it creates considerable space and opportunities for fellows to engage.

It would also be an important factor, for fellows to be able to attend outreach events by NCUC outside and during ICANN face to face meetings. Thus the importance of not having parallel fellowship and NCUC sessions running at the same time.

Moving forward, the NCUC believes that new initiatives which can give fellows guidance on skills such as writing public comments and on reaching consensus would help to integrate fellows into the community more swiftly. We believe it would also give them a good view of which interests they mostly relate to in a concrete, yet guided debate during their fellowship experience. Such exercises should be kept and improved.

**5. Does your group make efforts to involve, educate, and/or inform Fellows about your work? If so, please describe these efforts.**

The NCUC goes to great efforts to engage newcomers, including fellows. We host regular outreach webinars to welcome and onboard new members, have developed onboarding materials that explain our constituency to new voices, and regularly host face-to-face outreach and inreach events which explain our core values and how new voices can become involved in our work. Our diversity manifests itself in our leadership, as testified by how many new faces enter our constituency and are subsequently elected to a leadership role. Other initiatives include participating at the fellowship program track with an introduction to NCUC, Regional Webinars and Mailing lists set for sharing updates and information with each of the regions.

Independent of the ICANN fellowship programme, and a result of NCUC fundraising efforts, our constituency also has its own fellowship program. The NCUC Fellowship Program is an opportunity for our up and coming members to attend in person an ICANN meeting and involves structured interaction with a community member who acts as his or her mentor. We have recently launched the NCUC Buddy Program, which is a slightly more informal, six-month long mentor-mentee experience.

We are focused on upskilling the capabilities of our new members, who include fellowship alumni. One recent example consists of the NCUC Policy Writing Course held onsite in San Juan at ICANN 61, and complemented by two webinars and remote participation. This course was aimed at walking our members through some public comment contributions with a view to teaching our members how they could similarly produce such comments.

**6. How willing would your group (SO/AC/SG/C) be to participate and take ownership for selecting and developing fellows, including giving them assignments, assigning mentors, etc?**

We have experience in this area, as there is already an NCUC Fellowship which we administer and fund. We would be glad to share our experience here and, within reason, to assist in the selection, development, and mentoring of fellows who will be funded by the general program.

The NCUC has open membership and has always been open to newcomers, including fellows. We have an excellent track record of engaging fellows in our deliberations, membership, and leadership. Even though our resources are scarce and volunteers are limited, the NCUC is willing to help as much as possible to engage with fellows whose values align with ours.

## **Selection Processes**

### **7. Are you aware of the Fellowship selection process? What changes, if any, would you suggest for the selection process?**

We are not familiar with the fellowship selection process, and would like to learn more about how ICANN chooses fellows. As previously stated, the NCUC would be willing to be a part of the selection process in order to increase the transparency of the process and to improve the accountability of the whole programme.

### **8. An individual can be awarded a Fellowship up to three times. Do you suggest retaining or revising this number? Why?**

We do not have enough information to be able to comment on how many meetings it takes for one to become active in ICANN policy making processes. As this information is unavailable, we are unable to comment on whether three times is the right number. However, we do believe that the process of engagement should be a demonstration of commitment. The criteria for participation should be less demanding for a fellow's first engagement, and become progressively stricter for subsequent fellowships, including concrete outputs on mailing lists, participation in Working Groups and policy-making processes, and regional initiatives in collaboration with the fellow's respective ICANN community.

### **9. For Policy Forum Meetings, currently only Fellowship Alums can apply. Do you support continuing with this approach? If not, what changes would you suggest?**

We support this approach given the condensed nature of Policy Forum Meetings. Attending a Policy Forum as a newcomer would be overwhelming and confusing more than anything, while it would help alumni to stand more on their feet.

## **Program Size**

### **10. Considering your responses to previous questions, would you suggest making the program larger, smaller, or maintaining the current size?**

We understand the need for ICANN to be financially responsible and healthy as an organization and we acknowledge that the current supporting structure would make it more effective to mentor/onboard a lesser number of fellows to face-to-face meetings. However, our concern is that a reduction of the program is likely to strike the capacity of ICANN to bring, hear and keep onboard the “functional, geographic, and cultural diversity of the Internet” which is mentioned in the new bylaws. It is important to highlight that the comprehensive educational materials that ICANN develops to aid fellows and other newcomers in understanding the ICANN ecosystem, can have a much broader use, and this does necessarily not require travel support.

### **11. If the program were to be reduced in size, what would your group deem as the priorities for the program with a smaller cohort?**

We agree with our colleagues in the NCSG that priorities for a smaller cohort of fellows should be to understand what ICANN does, understand its governance structure and the groups within it, along with the values the various groups hold and what they want to achieve at ICANN. Above all else, it should be a priority to integrate fellows into the community and to become active in policy work. In doing so, we support the organisation prioritising the selection of individuals coming from underserved and underrepresented communities, where they are under-represented in GNSO policy development process working groups.

## **Program Structure**

### **12. When you interact with Fellows at an ICANN Meeting, do you find that they are sufficiently knowledgeable about ICANN? If not, what skills or areas of knowledge would you suggest increasing focus on for pre-Meeting preparation?**

The answer to this question depends on whether or not it is their first meeting or a subsequent one. Certainly first-time fellows are not sufficiently knowledgeable about ICANN, but it might be unreasonable to expect them to be. It is our impression that fellowship alumni are not always in a position of confidence to use the knowledge they have gained in order to influence

deliberations or to make deeper points. It is necessary to increase the focus, including in the guidelines for coaches and online courses and materials which are made available for fellows, on educating fellows and other newcomers about ICANN's mission and role, and the purposes of the various aspects of the ICANN community, so that they can more easily perceive and contextualize the substantive issues that will be discussed in an environment with whose characteristics and limitations they are already familiar.

**13. Do you think that Fellows spend sufficient time in working sessions with your group during the course of an ICANN meeting? If not, what would changes would your group propose?**

No. However, it is very hard for the fellows to find the time to do so between the mandatory introductory sessions that fellows must attend, and without which they may not have a high-level overview of processes and the community, and the time they need to engage in working sessions of their potential interest. Even harder if we are talking about newcomers, who really need an overview of ICANN. We believe that there should be more effort in the pre-meeting preparation so that fellows come to meetings already possessing a good, more accurate understanding of what ICANN's purpose and role is. This would place them in a much better position to understand the discussions they will see and follow.

That being said, many of the fellows do in fact attend the NCUC's working sessions. Some of these sessions are mandatory for the fellows to attend, and we appreciate that. We believe, however, that without prior knowledge, preparation and adequate guidance, fellows who do not have a civil society background will be unable to follow the discussions in our sessions. To be able to make the most of the experience and of the working sessions in any constituency, fellows must at least have had contact with the substantive issues that are going to be debated. They must also have an idea as to the operational dynamics of the constituency so as to follow administrative discussions. Since themes are discussed prior to meetings, it is important that fellows are told of what issues are likely to be on the agenda in the months prior to their meeting so that they can self-educate themselves.

**14. Do you feel that you have enough time to engage with Fellows at an ICANN meeting?**

Meetings are intense weeks where the schedule is very busy and many sessions overlap. This is perhaps unavoidable. However, we do think it would be fair to expect a bit of proactivity from the fellows in identifying relevant contacts in the community, and in advance of a meeting approaching the community member(s) with which they feel they might have something in common with, asking questions and making the most of the opportunities they are given. We believe the kind of engagement this question refers to is not among the most serious structural

issues with the program, as we in the NCUC do ultimately end up seeing and interacting with fellows frequently at meetings in informal settings.

### **Information Available on Program**

**15. Is the information currently available clear and sufficient for your community members to understand the Fellowship Program? If not, which elements could be improved and how?**

The information currently available is sufficient for the NCUC to be able to understand the goals of this important capacity-building initiative. However, we would like to see more information as to the results and outcomes of the programme.

**16. Are your community members aware of the differences between the Fellowship and NextGen@ICANN Programs? If not, please state what type of clarification would be useful.**

The differences are clear to the NCUC.

### **General Questions**

**17. Fellowship Program seeks to engage participants who will go on to participate actively in the ICANN community. What skills, attributes and backgrounds have provided the most successful and active participation in your SO/AC/SG/C? What skillsets and backgrounds would your group see as desirable for candidates for the Fellowship Program?**

The NCUC believes a minimum level of knowledge of the Domain Name System and a demonstrated interest in policy writing would be most desirable. We believe it is also important to try to bring in fellows who can potentially engage in different tasks and activities, since there are community interests that touch economic, business, technical, governmental, legal and policy aspects, and diversity in the available backgrounds and skill sets of fellows would help equip the NCUC better to address these interdisciplinary issues. Among the soft skills which can be helpful would be consensus building, community networking, and communication skills but, most of all, the time and an ability to learn what is needed to actively engage in policy making.

The NCUC understands that the desired skill set will change constantly, and it should therefore be periodically reassessed based upon the current shortfalls in the working groups.

**18. With which elements of the Fellowship Program is your group most satisfied? What changes or improvements would your group most want to see implemented to the program?**

We are delighted that a small number of fellowship alumni have gone on to make the NCUC their home at ICANN, and we welcome the active involvement of more.

Metrics need to be put in place to evaluate success of the programme on a short and mid-term basis. Leadership positions, as mentioned, are a helpful indicator, but they are not the goal of the fellowship program, nor are they enough to demonstrate engagement. They should not be the only or even the most important assessment criteria. Other relevant indicators to assess the success of the fellowship program include meaningful involvement and support provided by fellows in PDP/WGs and also within their region and country of origin, preferably in the ICANN or DNS-related environment, but also in other Internet Governance spaces, provided a DNS dimension is at stake.

Finally, it is important to highlight, as it was stressed by Fellows themselves during the Public Forum at ICANN61 in San Juan, and incorporated by our fellows from NCSG in the comments they are putting forward, that to this day the fellowship program is only a travel line item in the budget. Our suggestion, as it is once again mentioned by NCSG, is that the program be given an institutional structure, that a budget is elaborated considering this structure, and that metrics which are discussed by the community are put in place and periodically reassessed, to ensure they are permanently and dynamically aligned with ICANN's mission and core values.

**19. Do you have any other questions or comments about the Fellowship Program?**

Thank you for inviting our input.

**You are welcome to append any general comments on the ICANN Fellowship Program community consultation**