

## Memorandum

**To:** Maarten Botterman, ICANN Board Chair and Leon Sanchez, ICANN Vice Chair

**Cc:** ICANN Board members

**From:** Maureen Hilyard, ALAC Chair, Marita Moll and Joanna Kulesza.

**Date:** 22 March 2022

**Re: Comments and concerns raised at the ICANN73 ALAC-Board meeting on the issue of establishing incentives/definitions/indicators for volunteers in the MSM system**

Thank you for giving us an opportunity to revisit an issue with the Board that has been a high agenda item during my term as ALAC Chair which has mainly been during the timeframe of the global pandemic and virtual ICANN meetings, on top of a regular schedule of ICANN Working Group meetings and PDPs for some very committed and dedicated members of our At-Large community. I say "revisit" as I have been reminded that many of the issues that we have raised here, have been ongoing matters of concern raised by previous Chairs.

During the ICANN73 meeting with the Board, ALAC representatives highlighted the need to recognise the value of volunteers in the MSM system. I was encouraged by the fact that there was general agreement among Board members who noted that, although the work of volunteers was highly appreciated by ICANN, it was important to establish ways of "valuing" as well as of "showing a return on" work. Board members requested additional input from the community on ways to do this. This brief memo which has been a collaborative effort with Marita Moll and Joanna Kulesza, expands on their original presentations and is an attempt to provide several suggestions on the kinds of initiatives that might address this issue.

**1. There is a need to recognize and reward the efforts of volunteers who kept the public face of the institution going through 7 virtual public meetings.**

The global pandemic significantly enhanced challenges to volunteer participation which were present in the ICANN community well before the pandemic. During COVID, volunteers found themselves needing to urgently attend to new and demanding on-the-ground issues. As a result, the time they could devote to volunteering within ICANN decreased. The At-Large community has always relied on volunteer input and these challenges have had a particularly strong impact on the representation of end user interests within the community in general and PDPs specifically. At the same time, the pandemic has provided an opportunity to identify individuals, who have proven most efficient and reliable in this time of trial. In the short term, a way to address this challenge, as well as to incentivise volunteer influx in post-pandemic circumstances, is to take the present opportunity to recognise those who have endured the virtual meetings and made major contributions to their proceedings. Any incentives would be tied to levels of participation. We are happy to further discuss metrics to facilitate a just and accountable recognition of volunteer community participants in the organization and implementation of the virtual meetings.

Examples of specific incentives might include:

-- extending appointments to community leadership positions to make up for direct interaction opportunities

lost due to the pandemic. We note that some very active ALAC members have spent much of their term without having personally met any of their ALAC colleagues.

-- one or two trips to future ICANN meetings, in lieu of opportunities missed for those who missed face-to-face interaction with colleagues yet who demonstrated a high level of participation in the virtual public meetings  
-- a retroactive honoraria for those who would have been funded travellers during the period of virtual meetings, considering the fact that they were still incurring costs re: internet connection, electricity, food, etc

- 2. To prepare for the future, there is a need for a better definition of “volunteers” at ICANN and an explanation of various categories. We believe that such a definition needs to come out of a community process.**

The definition of "volunteer" currently in use within At-Large is "individuals who commit time and effort to the work of ICANN with no personal connection to the domain name industry and who pay their own costs of participation, engagement and commitment to this work." However, there are other "volunteers" participating at ICANN who do this work from a professional perspective, although, to be fair, often well above and beyond the call of duty. However, there is a difference here that needs to be addressed in order to make the non-professional side of the multistakeholder model sustainable.

ICANN is not unique in the NGO world in this respect. The United Nations *Handbook on Non-Profit Institutions in the System of National Accounts* provides a good starting point for an investigation into the concepts of volunteers and volunteering (see the link below).

- 3. At the same time as we are establishing definitions and categories of volunteers, there is a need to establish indicators of value which would be applicable in the ICANN context.**

The United Nations *Handbook on Non-profit Institutions* recommends a methodology to generate the value of volunteer work. One of the reasons for doing this is that “it gives the volunteers themselves a sense of personal satisfaction, fulfillment, well-being and involvement in society.” This document also notes that “What is not counted cannot be effectively managed”. Although ICANN is not in the business of managing its volunteers, it does manage the work of these participants and not counting their contribution limits ICANN's ability to effectively manage that work. The Handbook also notes that “obscuring the real value of volunteer work ... undermines volunteering and therefore fails to encourage the volunteer effort”.

Also raised at the ALAC-Board meeting was the significant issue of establishing more trust within and between ICANN constituencies. While the evolution of the MSM model is one of ICANN's strategic objectives and trust is one of the core issues to be addressed in that work, we suggest that showing appreciation can enhance trust and, as a consequence, would enhance the effectiveness of ICANN and the MSM model.

- 4. Once such indicators are established, they must be tied to a set of new, effective and direct incentives to reinvigorate the volunteer community.**

The pandemic ultimately exposed the limited efficiency of the existing volunteer system within the ICANN community. It is clear that the system of incentives currently in effect needs to be adjusted to address challenges of the post-pandemic reality. The experience of the current NomCom process underlines this point. Deadlines for applications for mostly volunteer positions had to be extended twice due to lack of applications. This cannot be allowed to continue.

We recognise that volunteer work by definition is work without pay or compensation, in cash or in kind. However, as per the ILO Handbook, referenced below, some forms of monetary or in-kind compensation are possible without violating this feature of the definition. In the ICANN context, some examples of such compensation could be:

- volunteers may receive stipends intended to cover their expenses re: ICANN work, so long as the stipends are not contingent on the local market value, quality or quantity of the work, or on its outcome (if any);
- symbolic gifts, or other similar expressions of gratitude for volunteer work, may be given to the volunteer so long as they are not equal to the value of local market wages;
- return to pre-pandemic participation and reimbursement rules to the extent possible, and to include within these rules, recognition of volunteer participation in working group meetings of dedicated PDPs, granted appropriate metrics are in place

We know that addressing these matters will not be easy. There is significant resistance to defining volunteers and refining differences between various kinds of contributors to the multistakeholder model or measuring their contributions. The belief was that there was a bottomless pit of volunteers willing to come forward to do this work. That is no longer true. It has become increasingly difficult to convince a new generation of potential volunteers with no financial or academic stake in the matter, that the hours spent on zoom calls, PDP processes and policy writing without any evidence of recognition has been time and effort well spent. We hereby kindly request the Board to consider new, effective, and direct measures to ensure continued volunteer participation.

In conclusion, we quote the ILO Manual on Measurement of Volunteer Work:

**Volunteer work, often referred to simply as “volunteering,” is a crucial renewable resource for social and environmental problem-solving the world over. The scale of such work is enormous and the contribution it makes to the quality of life in countries everywhere is greater still. Despite this, little sustained effort has so far gone into its measurement.**

In a time of growing concern over the effectiveness of the MSM, a model that is fundamental and crucial to the ICANN community, we feel it is high time to take the next step in its evolution -- the essential step of measuring the work of the volunteers who are essential to its existence and ensuring these measurable efforts are duly recognised.

References:

International Labour Office. 2011. Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work. 2011. Geneva: ILO.  
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United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2003. Handbook on Non-profit Institutions in the System of National Accounts. New York: United Nations.  
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