To: Susanna Bennett, ICANN Chief Operating Officer

CC: Joseph de Jesus, Diane Schroeder, Heidi Ullrich, Sally Costerton, Rinalia Abdul Rahim, Sébastien Bachollet, George Sadowsky, Steve Crocker

From: Alan Greenberg, ALAC Member from North America[1]
        Tijani Ben Jemaa, ALAC Member from Africa

Subject: ICANN Community Travel Program

Date: 06 October, 2014

Dear Susanna,

This letter is being sent to you as the ICANN executive responsible for community travel support. It is also being copied to those individuals responsible for carrying out the program, the lead At-Large Policy Support staff member, the VP for Global Stakeholder Engagement and several ICANN Directors who have expressed an interest in the issue.

Those of us who volunteer our time to ICANN are appreciative of the travel support that ICANN offers. Although there are many volunteers who are well funded to participate in ICANN by their employers, many of us, and particularly those who represent individual end users and the not-for-profit sector, generally have no such alternative funding source. ALAC has had its travel to ICANN meetings funded since it was created by the Bylaw change of 2002, and more recently, RALO leaders have been similarly funded. There is no question that without such ICANN funding, we would not be able to carry out our Bylaw-mandated charge to represent the interests of end users.

However, there are many problems and deficits in the program that really need to be addressed without delay. None of these issues are new. Over a period of years, they have been discussed at length with your predecessors who owned the program. Sadly at a point where it looked like there might be some possible resolution of at least some of the problems, they either left ICANN or ceased to be responsible for the program.

The authors of this letter are heavily committed to ICANN[2]. Moreover, we are both experienced business travellers – together we account for over eighty years of business travel, most of it paid for by employers or by not-for-profit organizations for whom we were volunteering. Although not signatories of this letter, several other long-term ALAC members have reviewed this letter and support its contents.

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[1] Alan Greenberg has recently been selected as the ALAC Chair beginning at the completion of ICANN 51. However, this letter was conceived and largely written long before and unless this letter is later supported by the ALAC, it should be considered solely as a personal statement of signing ALAC members.
[2] One of the authors documented one year when he turned down about $40k in contracts in order to work with ICANN, and in another year calculated the value of the time donated to ICANN, using a modest hourly rate, was several times the lost income.

Perceived problems

The issues break down into a number of generic groups and we will deal with them one by one.

Overall lack of respect for volunteers, and lack of accommodation of their needs

Various travellers have used the terms *demeaning, insulting, disrespectful, inhumane*. The words are rather strong, but they do give a feeling for how many committed volunteers react. The references are generally to the rules that are in place to ensure that travellers do not take unfair advantage of ICANN, and to the operational practices associated with arranging travel. To ensure that no one can abuse the travel privilege, rigid rules and processes have been put in place. In theory exceptions can be granted, but in practice this does not often seem to happen, or perhaps we do not know that magic words required to properly invoke these exceptions, or perhaps the process is so arcane and time consuming that many no longer even try. When an exemption is requested and refused, it is unclear at what staff-level the refusal was made. Since no statistics are available, the process is opaque. There seems to be a presumption that if you cannot follow the rules, you are trying to game the system and take unfair advantage of ICANN. There are certainly such cases, but the presumption of guilt for all is not an appropriate counter-measure.

The rules can take a variety of forms:

- The traveller is typically authorized to arrive on the day before meetings start. That is generally reasonable. But at times that means travelling half-way around the world in a packed economy class seat on a flight arriving at 10 or 11 pm, getting into the hotel after midnight, and being expected to be ready to work first thing next morning. But if the traveller requests to arrive the night before, it is refused because it will cost another hotel day and it is presumed that the traveller is trying to get a free vacation day. Yet if that same traveller arrives at 5 am on the approved day, it is quite fine, and ICANN pays for a room starting the previous night to allow the person to check in upon arrival. There have been cases where a flight arriving at 00:30 on the approved arrival date was allowed, but an arrival 60 minutes earlier was not allowed because the traveller would arrive on the previous day (and therefore was obviously trying to get a vacation day at ICANN's expense). In short, volunteers coming from far away at times do not have an opportunity to get a reasonable night's sleep before starting work.
- Travellers are at times instructed to leave on the last day of meetings. If that means a late night departure, it may work, but often it means flights that leave earlier in the day requiring the person to skip important meetings. Late departures for flights often taking 18-24 or more hours, after a long work week are difficult, especially when the traveller must check out of their hotel room early in the morning (before meetings start on the last day of work). Note that this issue has at times been resolved for the members of the ALAC Leadership Team that tends to meet on Friday mornings at ICANN meetings. We appreciate this flexibility that ICANN has shown, but experience has shown that for following meetings, a "special case" process must be followed once more.

Business Class Travel

Under current rules, Board members and AC/SO Chairs travel in business class, all others without medical certificates travel economy. The rationale is that Board members and Chairs work hard and need that luxury. The reality is that there are others in the community who work just as hard as a Board member. Moreover, there are some for whom long economy flights are very difficult, even if they chose not to present a medical certificate.

Prior to 2006, the only travellers that ICANN funded were Board members, Nominating Committee appointees, Nominating Committee members and Board-appointed ALAC Members (before RALOs were formed). Most travelled in business class (except perhaps the Nominating Committee). As the funding of volunteer travellers ramped up, it was only Board members and AC/SO Chairs that automatically flew business class. All other volunteers without medical certificates flew in economy.

When it was pointed out that ICANN staff always flew in business class, it was widely publicised this would change and that for ICANN meetings, all staff (executives included) would fly in economy (they still flew in business class for long-haul flights other than ICANN meetings, but this was not mentioned). Then senior executives quietly regained business travel to ICANN meetings with no public announcement.

If Directors travel on ICANN business other than to ICANN meetings, in most cases they also travel in business class. AC/SO Chairs are funded only for economy class for such travel.

In recent history, the rules seem to have been randomly applied. ATRT members were limited to economy class. The Directory Services Expert Working Group (DS-EWG) flew business class[3]. A DS-EWG member who was also an ALAC member was told that he had to fly economy, despite the rest of the EWG flying in business. After protesting, he was funded for business class for the next meeting, but for the following meeting, corporate memory failed and he was once more instructed to fly in economy (an instruction which was eventually reversed).

Overall, this saga demonstrates a lack of transparency which does not serve ICANN well.

When the issue was discussed before (and it has been), the simple answer was that it was too expensive to fly everybody in business class, and that there was no fair way to decide who would get it if only some would. Later in this message, we will offer some suggestions regarding how one might achieve a "fair way" of making such decisions.

"Volunteer Management" Discretion

Board members are given a full discretion to decide when they travel (presumably within some overall limits). Perhaps there is an occasional case where the privilege is abused, but in general, they are presumed to be mature enough to know when they need to arrive to be rested for their grueling week,

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[3] It is rumoured that the DS-EWG Chair complained that ICANN could not expect important people to donate their time and fly in economy.

and how much time they need to recover before leaving, all balanced by the other non-ICANN (real world?) demands that they may have.

AC/SO Chairs have a lot of responsibility and are trusted to ensure that ICANN can meet its global commitments. It is a common occurrence at ICANN meetings for the ICANN CEO or Board Chair to praise the AC/SO Chairs and credit them for the often great achievements of the organizations that they lead.

But compared to Board members, AC/SO Chairs are given no such flexibility. Their arrival and departure dates are prescribed, just as they are for a one-time ICANN Fellow. They have no authority to change their own travel dates or to advise ICANN staff of commitments/needs that people within their domain may have. In a recent case, the ALAC Chair had an opportunity to represent ICANN at an important international telecommunications meeting and at a regional IGF. All he needed was to have his return trip from an ICANN meeting re-ticketed to alter the route at a total cost of $600 (a small fraction of the total ticket cost). No other expenses were requested. It was refused. In another case, it took several e-mails, several weeks and the involvement of At-large Policy staff to have the ALAC Chair's travel dates adjusted to allow him to arrive at an ICANN meeting in time to attend scheduled meetings with the ICANN CEO and the Board Chair.[4]

It is difficult to reconcile AC/SO Chairs being so important and so critical to ICANN's mission (which is the case based on comments of our CEO and Board Chair) and the way that they are lumped together with other non-Board volunteers for travel.

Constituency Travel Service Level

It is unclear whether Constituency Travel is significantly understaffed or if there are other issues, but the service level being experienced by travellers is not acceptable. Several recent examples may illustrate the situation:

- It can take a week or more to have an e-mail with respect to travel acknowledged. Having the issue raised in the e-mail actually addressed can take even longer.
- Requests for traveller information for an ICANN meetings go out just a few days before their return due date (admittedly better than the times that the forms went out after the return due date). Many of our volunteers are juggling complex lives to allow them to devote unpaid time to ICANN. They cannot just drop everything because ICANN is late.
- We have travellers who speak many languages, and English is not always a strong point. So travel documents are translated into multiple languages. Sometimes. For London, despite At-Large having close to 150 additional travellers many of who did not speak much English, there was no translation of documents until several months AFTER the meeting ended (one has to question the cost effectiveness of that expenditure!). For LA, despite the original deadline for submission of forms having passed, the English version was posted in the first week of September and other languages near the end of the month.

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[4] The current ALAC Chair has been regularly funded to attend other non-ICANN meeting events and this example is not meant to imply otherwise.

- Unless an exception is granted, ICANN expects travellers to use ICANN's travel agent. Service from them is haphazard. It can take several days to get a reply, and if the price of the requested itinerary has gone up during that period resulting in too high a price, it may be rejected.
- Wire transfers for per diems typically come a day prior to departure. This is often too late for the funds to be usable by the traveller, many of whom are from developing countries and need the per diem to cover their out-of-pocket travel costs.
- Many travellers pay a service fee on receipt of a wire transfer, decreasing the amount received. At one point ICANN reimbursed these fees. Then it set a rule saying that they were not reimbursable. Then the rule disappeared, but they are still not reimbursed.
- Sometimes travellers get an e-mail detailing the per diem wire transfer. Sometimes not.
- Reimbursements are only made after the end of the ICANN meeting, even if the expense was incurred months before. According to the most recent Travel Summary, such reimbursements may take 40-50 days[5].

Issue Summary

ICANN volunteers appreciate that ICANN funds many travel costs. However, the processes that we are subjected to are far more draconian than they need to be, and there should be far more respect for the level of maturity and commitment that cause these travellers to volunteer for ICANN. There will surely be occasional abuses, and when detected, ICANN should take appropriate action. But all volunteers should not be penalized because of the exceptions.

It is also important to realize that some parts of the community rely far more on ICANN travel support than other parts. The vast majority of ICANN volunteers are part of the domain industry, or whose job functions are directly linked to ICANN-related matters. Before travel funding for AC/SO volunteers was close to universal, they managed to come to ICANN meetings, and if travel funding were withdrawn, they would still come. Their livelihoods often depend on ICANN. At-Large, and to a lesser extent, parts of the GNSO Non-Commercial Stakeholders Group (NCSG) are different. For At-Large and some NCSG participants, our livelihoods have NOTHING to do with ICANN or in most cases, the Internet. We are truly volunteers in the most rigorous sense. We do not have employers who will readily pay for an extra day's hotel, or a business class upgrade. Recommendation 10.5 of the recent ATRT report (accepted by the Board in London) called for ICANN to "facilitate the equitable participation in applicable ICANN activities, of those ICANN stakeholders who lack the financial support of industry players".

Recommendations

Traveller Differentiation

At least part of the overall problem is that with the exception of class-of-travel for AC/SO Chairs, ICANN treats all non-Board travellers according to the same rules. A volunteer who has regularly worked with ICANN for five or ten years is generally subject to the same rules as a first-time Fellowship attendee (only the Per Diem/stipend varies). That need not be the case.

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[5] In the past, they have at times taken far longer!

Travellers could be subject to different rules based on demonstrated volunteer commitment to ICANN coupled with the need for ICANN funding. The age of the traveller may also be a factor – long-haul travel is always somewhat difficult, but as one ages, it can become more onerous - certainly the authors of this letter found it far easier to survive 8-14 hour economy flights years ago than is now the case. As an example, the following criteria could be used to identify those travellers deserving more flexible consideration - for this exercise, let's call them Long-Term Volunteers (LTV).

- Travellers with a history of volunteering for ICANN for more than 4 years and during that time have generally accepted ICANN travel support. Possible exclusions would be those who regularly accept ICANN travel support but upgrade to business class at their own expense (often recognized by paying for their own tickets and taking the maximum funding allowed by ICANN).
- Travellers over 60 or 65 years of age (although not sufficient alone, could be used in conjunction with volunteer history).

Clearly, a subset of LTVs (we believe a small subset) maintain a volunteer commitment but do not actually work very hard, and do not truly deserve extra consideration. However, measuring real work and true dedication is not possible, and we believe that this is a sufficiently accurate approximation as to be useful.

Overall lack of respect for volunteers, and lack of accommodation of their needs

All travellers should be allowed to arrive so that they can be reasonably rested when meetings begin. One could let common-sense prevail in setting that time, or one could set latest possible arrival times based on length of trip and meeting start times. Such a reasonable guideline could be (based on a concept in a letter to the ICANN CFO 5 years ago):

- For trips less than 7 hours duration, the traveler should arrive at the hotel at least 12 hours prior to the first meeting he/she needs to attend;
- For longer trips, they should arrive at least 18 hours prior to his/her first meeting.

Departures should not require volunteers to miss meeting or official events. Departures on the last day of meetings should be avoided. If late-in-the-day departures are scheduled, ICANN should ensure late checkouts (such as 8 pm) or if the hotel cannot accommodate that, sufficient spare rooms should be reserved to allow travellers to shower and change clothing in private prior to departing. Changing in a hotel lobby washroom, as has been suggested by a very senior ICANN staff member, is not an acceptable alternative.

LTVs should be provided with additional arrival flexibility and departures no earlier than the day following any scheduled meetings. Preferably they should be given the same courtesy in scheduling their travel as are Board members.

Business Class Travel

LTVs should be allowed to travel in business class for trips over a specific duration – perhaps 7 hours. If traveller age is not a basic consideration in setting the LTV criteria, it should be given additional credit in deciding on class of travel.

Travellers who qualify for business class travel for ICANN meetings should similarly be granted business class for other ICANN-sponsored travel. Just as with Board travel, there might be exceptions for certain types of travel.

"Volunteer Management" Discretion

Those who are given management responsibilities within the volunteer organization should be given reasonable discretion in deciding on their travel schedules as well as in making recommendations for other travellers within their AC/SO. If ICANN trusts them to ensure that it meets its commitments to the Internet ecosystem, it should allow that trust to include travel-related issues. Such flexibility of course is not without guidelines, limits or answering for possible abuse.

Constituency Travel Service Level

No specific recommendations are provided here regarding problems with overall service. Standard business practices should apply. There should be documented service-level targets and reporting.

Regarding Per Diems, we do have specific recommendations, none of which should be onerous:

- Pay Per Diems in sufficient time for all travellers to be able to use the payment during the trip;
- Pay reasonably documented bank fees levied by the traveller's bank;
- When the wire transfer is initiated, details of the transfer including how many days are being funded and any other fees included should be sent to the traveller via e-mail.

For reimbursements, we recommend the following, both of which are standard business practices:

- Volunteers should not be expected to carry large out-of-pockets expenses. A volunteer should be able to request and receive advances to cover documented and ultimately reimbursable expenses. ICANN's liability in the case of a planned trip that is not taken due to unavoidable occurrences (such as illness) should be the same as if ICANN directly incurred the expense;
- Both reimbursements and advances should be paid promptly. Waiting weeks and months is not reasonable.

Summary

There is no doubt that the remedies described here will cost ICANN more money[6]. But the value to ICANN of: the time donated to ICANN by volunteers; the specific outcomes (such as policy development); and the credibility afforded by multistakeholder involvement, is FAR in excess of any additional costs. If ICANN wants those benefits, it should be prepared to pay a reasonable price for them.

This letter is written with the full understanding that some of the issues here would require substantive budget allocations and could not be implemented overnight. Others, however, could easily be changed with minimal budget implications. We hope that we will have an opportunity to begin discussing this at ICANN 51 in Los Angeles.

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[6] The authors of this letter are not in a position to develop costs estimates. ICANN staff were consulted, and the only item that could be readily estimated at this point is providing more flexibility for volunteers with meetings ending part-way through the day. We understand that the only such current volunteers are the ALAC Leadership Team (8 people including Liaisons) which meets on Friday morning. In a worst-case scenario, all 8 people would leave on Friday if ICANN insisted, and none would leave on Friday if ICANN allowed a Saturday departure. At an estimated average room cost of $250 per night and an average per diem of $70, the highest cost would be $320 x 8 = $2560. In fact, it is likely that some people would opt for a Friday flight or would not have any Friday departure options, and so the actual amount would like be somewhat less.