

**RESPONSE FROM AYDEN FÉRDELINÉ
TO ICANN COMMUNITY CONSULTATION:**

ICANN Fellowship Program Application Process Review

Introduction

1. My name is Ayden Férdeline and I am responding to this community consultation exercise in my individual capacity. My response may be considered public.
2. I would like to commend ICANN for demonstrating its commitment to participatory, bottom-up policy development by requesting community insight on this topic. I greatly welcome the opportunity to comment and to contribute to the discussion in a spirit of collaboration and shared responsibility for furthering the work which is embarked upon and accomplished by our community.
3. I am new to the ICANN community, but in the short time that I have been a part of the community I have been impressed by the engagement activities led by ICANN's Development and Public Responsibility Department. Indeed, many of the community members I most regularly interact with found their place in the ICANN ecosystem as a result of participating in the Fellowship programme.
4. After participating in the NextGen@ICANN programme in Dublin at ICANN 54, I joined the Non-Commercial Users Constituency (NCUC) and am now actively participating in one working group with a view to joining a second. I have also immersed myself in the Non-Commercial Stakeholder Group's (NCSG) policy work, recently drafting our statement on possible modifications to ICANN's Geographic Regions Framework, and have started to revise my thinking on different, complex policy questions based on evidence and careful analysis. But more importantly, I have fallen victim to the kindness and welcoming embrace of the multistakeholder community both online and in Dublin and Marrakech, with numerous actors – community members and ICANN staff – reaching out to me directly and lending me the support I needed to create and exchange knowledge.
5. While I understand this consultation activity refers to the Fellowship programme, of which I have not been a participant, I nonetheless feel that as an alumnus of the NextGen@ICANN programme I am able to speak to what it entails. I am earlier in my career than most ICANN Fellows are, but we are united in how deeply we care about our own involvement in ICANN-related activities. We have also all been aided in our journey by many of the same ICANN staff members. I remain extremely grateful to Deborah, Janice, Jeff, Lauren, Nora and other ICANN staffers for all their efforts and support in introducing ICANN and Internet governance matters more broadly to a wider audience.

6. I find myself in near total agreement with the proposed revisions to the Fellowship programme, and I commend ICANN staff for their commitment to further catalysing the engagement of new voices in the community's work. My comments are thus intended to lend support to the recommendations.

Summary of my views

7. The Internet enables opportunities for economic and social development. The starting point, then, for any topic to do with Internet governance must be to do with what solutions are needed to preserve these very opportunities and to further foster confidence in the Internet. It is my view that the proposed changes to the Fellowship programme do seek to accomplish these important goals.
8. **I strongly support ICANN in extending the possibility to participate in the Fellowship programme to those of all nationalities.** The previous, economically deterministic view in assessing eligibility was problematic, as there was never a direct correlation between a country being classed high-income by the World Bank and a Fellow coming from such a background. The other flaw was in the data set. ICANN was relying on data self-reported by sovereign states to the World Bank. This was a thorny situation because it was always unclear what repercussions there were for countries which intentionally or unintentionally reported inaccurate information. The figures that Argentina would report, for instance, were widely acknowledged by economists as being intended for domestic consumption and not grounded in reality. The very real impact here, however, was that Argentines were not eligible for ICANN Fellowships, because Argentina had self-reported itself to the World Bank as a high-income economy. Of course there should be some way to recognise and account for privilege, and so I am glad to see that the proposed revisions to the Fellowship programme account for this by prioritising candidates from underserved or underrepresented communities. My one addendum here is to note that, particularly for early career participants and those without institutional backing, it doesn't matter which country you come from — ultimately, the primary barrier to participation in ICANN activities is going to be funding to travel to face-to-face meetings.
9. **I would encourage ICANN to mandate that Fellows purchase travel insurance, and to verify that this has happened prior to the booking of travel.** At the moment, ICANN pays a stipend to defray the costs of participation in meetings and says that, "Fellows should always carry proof of health insurance. Insurance is NOT supplied by ICANN." I believe that ICANN has a duty of care to ensure that all participants hold insurance which covers medical emergencies, lost or stolen luggage, and repatriation of remains in the event of death. I would suggest that Fellows be required to purchase travel insurance independently, using the existing stipend allowance, and to provide ICANN staff with an electronic certificate of coverage before air travel is booked.

10. **I am not certain that ICANN should be supporting the participation of persons who represent commercial interests.** On page 5 of the Projected FY17 Improvements to the ICANN Fellowship Program document, it notes that applicants engaged in “business focused with involvement in internet issues, particularly ICANN related issues, from a private-sector perspective” are eligible to be ICANN Fellows. Fellowship funds are precious and limited, and this sector has financial resources and access to capital that many academic, civil society, and technical community actors do not. Accordingly, I kindly request clarity around under what circumstances a Fellow from the private sector would be supported to participate in an ICANN meeting. My objection may not be sustained if we are talking about micro-enterprises, but I would not want Fellowship funds to be used to enable the participation of startups with venture capital, large enterprises, or professional lobbyists.

Conclusion

11. The recommended improvements to the Fellowship programme, as proposed by ICANN’s Development and Public Responsibility Department, present a balanced look at the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead as we think about how we can bring new voices into Internet governance debates. We must strike a delicate balance: we want to foster cultural diversity on many levels, while recognising there are resource constraints and a community largely fearful of mission creep.
12. As you move forward, I ask that you:
- a. Ensure participation in the Fellowship programme is not restricted on the basis of nationality,
 - b. Mandate and verify that Fellows purchase travel insurance,
 - c. Reconsider whether it is appropriate or not for Fellows to receive support from ICANN if they represent commercial interests, and
 - d. Continue to involve the community in decisions to do with the future of the Fellowship programme.
13. Thank you again for opening this conversation up to the community. I am grateful to ICANN for this opportunity to share my views and trust you will find my recommendations helpful.