First Mile Connectivity Consortium
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Submitted Electronically

RE: Comments from the First Mile Connectivity Consortium ("FMCC") on Projected FY17 Improvements to the ICANN Fellowship Program

Dear Ms. Janice Douma Lange,

In accordance with the process established through the ICANN Fellowship Program Application Process Review, the First Mile Connectivity Consortium (FMCC) files the comments below.

The FMCC is an incorporated independent not-for-profit national association based in Canada. Our members are First Nations Internet service providers – what we call "community/regional intermediary organizations". Our associate members are university and private sector researchers and others interested in Indigenous and community communications and telecommunication services for the public good. Our work focuses on innovative solutions to digital infrastructure and services with and in rural and remote regions and communities across Canada. For more information, please visit: www.firstmile.ca

The FMCC is seeking means to ensure access to reliable and affordable broadband in northern Indigenous communities. Importantly, our member organizations support broadband-enabled public services such as online education and telehealth, as well as entertainment services for household consumers. We stress the engagement of residents of these communities in the provision of services – and in the decision-making processes regarding the governance, administration and management of such activities.

Institutionalizing Indigenous Participation in Telecommunication Policy and Regulation

The FMCC advocates for the institutionalization of Indigenous participation in telecommunications policy and regulation. For years, our FMCC members have advocated government agencies and departments in Canada for the need to include Indigenous peoples in decision-making about the broadband development requirements and activities taking place in their territories and communities.

For example, in a recent intervention before the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), the FMCC argued that the Commission should establish an internal Office with expertise on Indigenous and northern issues. This Office could advise the Commission on Indigenous and northern issues, conduct outreach to Indigenous organizations, and take the lead in establishing a coordinating mechanism for federal Indigenous and communications programs and policies.[1]

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[1] For our record of interventions in this proceeding, CRTC 2015-134, please visit:
https://services.crtc.gc.ca/pub/ListeInterventionList/Documents.aspx?ID=224010&en=2015-134&dt=f&lang=e&S=C&PA=t&PT=nc&PST=a

We also refer to the example of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which has established an Office of Native Affairs and Policy (ONAP) (http://www.fcc.gov/topic/native-nations) and a National Native American Broadband Task Force. ONAP has provided outreach to Native and Tribal organizations, and has acted as a resource on Indigenous issues within the FCC.

ONAP is mandated to work with federally-recognized Tribal governments and Native organizations through regulatory action, consumer information, and community outreach. The FCC also now requires that carriers receiving support to serve tribal lands must engage with tribes. Specifically, they must show how they have met with tribes to discuss service requirements and any problems or issues. Applying a "one size fits none" policy, ONAP makes any decisions, including funding decisions, on a case-by-case basis, and an internal Office to fulfill a similar role.

In the spirit of these recommendations, we recommend that ICANN consider establishing similar supports for Indigenous participation in the governance of digital infrastructures and services.

A first step to this goal could be to include opportunities for Indigenous peoples from Canada and elsewhere to participate in ICANN's Fellowship Program. Such a step provides a means for Indigenous peoples to build capacity in this area and to "strengthen the Multi-stakeholder Model by bringing more diverse voices into ICANN in order to have more inclusive decision-making, reflective of the ICANN global community".[2]

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this issue.

Sincerely,

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[2] As noted in the consultation notice, available at: https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/files/fellowship-projected-fy17-improvements-14jun16-en.pdf