Operations Handbook for Registrars

Version 2.0
1 December 2023

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This Operations Handbook for Registrars is provided for general education and informational purposes only, and is not intended to modify, alter, amend or otherwise supplement the rights, duties, liabilities or obligations of the registrar under the terms and conditions of the Registrar Accreditation Agreement or policies. This Operations Handbook for Registrars should not serve as a substitute for the Registrar Accreditation Agreement. As this document is meant to provide a high-level overview, you should not act or rely upon the information in this Operations Handbook without first confirming your obligations or rights under the Registrar Accreditation Agreement itself. The information contained in this Operations Handbook shall not be deemed as legal advice by ICANN, and ICANN shall not be held liable for indirect, special, incidental, punitive or consequential damages of any kind including loss of profits, arising under or in connection with the registrar's use of or reliance upon this Operations Handbook.

I. Overview

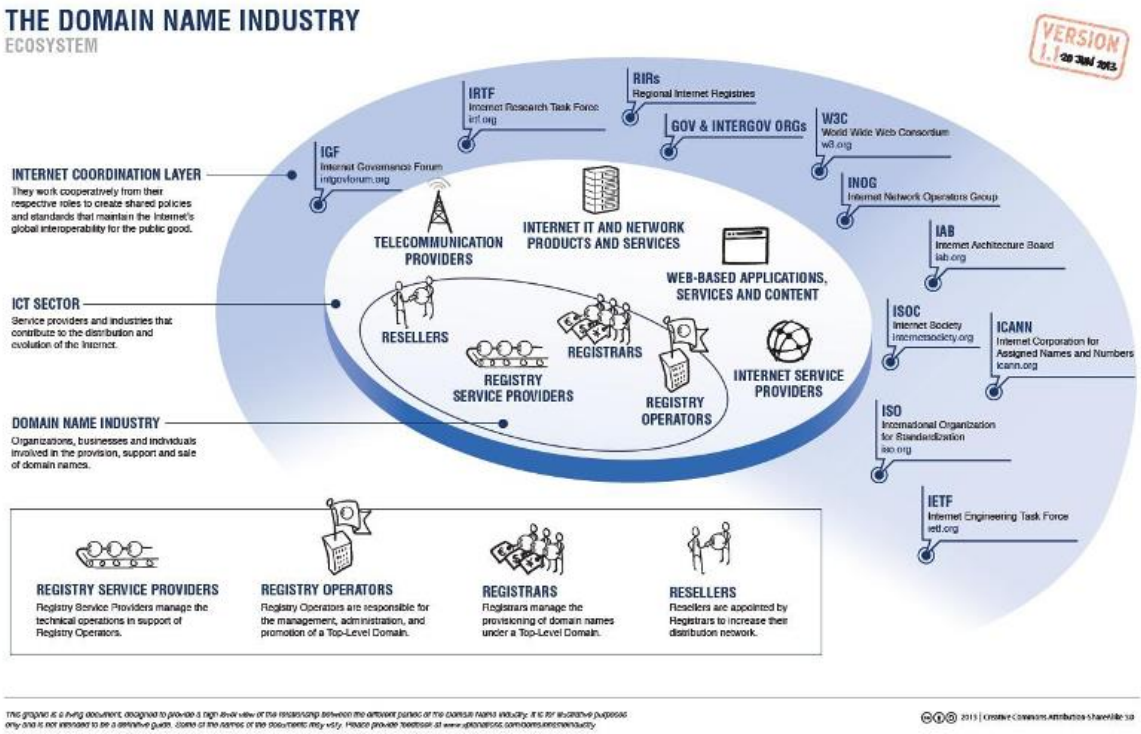
Welcome

The *ICANN Operations Handbook for Registrars* provides high-level information pertaining to ongoing registrar operations required to fulfill the obligations specified in the Registrar Accreditation Agreement. As you use this handbook, be sure to click on the links to additional information on services and resources.

Your feedback on the *ICANN Operations Handbook for Registrars* is encouraged and appreciated. Please email any suggestions or comments to globalsupport@icann.org and use "Operations Handbook for Registrars Feedback" in the subject line.

Domain Name Ecosystem

The diagram below (available at https://www.icann.org/news/multimedia/163) illustrates the various stakeholders involved in the domain name industry ecosystem. Note the placement of registrars in the innermost concentric circle, along with registry operators, registry service providers, and resellers.



II. Interfaces to Registrars

Global Domains & Strategy (GDS)

ICANN implements domain name policies through contracts and services. The Global Domains & Strategy (GDS) of the Org is the unit that engages with the Internet community to implement policies.

The purpose of GDS is to serve the global public interest, registrants, and end users of the Internet by ensuring a secure and stable Domain Name System (DNS) while promoting trust, choice, and competition in the trusted domain name service industry.

Service Delivery, Technical Services, Global Support, and GDD Accounts and Services are a few of the teams that you may interact with under the GDS umbrella.

- **Service Delivery –** The mission of the Service Delivery team is to deliver defined, repeatable services and processes to applicants and contracted parties in a timely, consistent, and predictable manner. Examples of such services include: Registrar Name Change, Registrar Assignment, and RAA Data Retention Waiver Requests.

- Technical Services **–** This team is responsible for managing technical projects and providing subject matter expertise on technical issues related to the DNS.

- Global Support **–** The Global Support (GS) team is the first point of contact for questions and concerns from or about a registrar. The team provides global, 5x24 support to ICANN contracted parties and the Internet community at large. If you have a question, email globalsupport@icann.org.

- GDD Accounts and Services **–** This team serves the domain name marketplace by supporting the registrars and registries in fulfilling their contractual obligations. With a global presence, the team collaborates with registrars and registries to ensure a secure, stable, and resilient domain namespace.

Each registrar has an assigned account manager who serves as its point of contact for matters of escalation. Account managers are the registrar's liaison within the ICANN org and represent registrars' needs throughout the organization. Through periodic communication via email, scheduled calls, or in-person meetings at ICANN events, account managers are able to remain aware of a registrar's business needs and challenges. By having an open line of communication, either directly with the registrar or with third parties representing registrars, account managers work proactively to address concerns and provide educational resources and opportunities. If you do not know who your account manager is, email globalsupport@icann.org for an introduction. The Registrar Accreditation Agreement defines the rights, obligations, and provisions for registrars. In circumstances where the registrar must inform or request consent or approval from ICANN, services have been developed to facilitate these processes. Service managers are responsible for the planning, design, implementation, and maintenance of these registrar services.

Additionally, the GDD Accounts and Services team implements ICANN Consensus Policies by creating implementation plans, engaging with the Implementation Review Team, providing training, and conducting outreach to the public and relevant stakeholders.

ICANN Contractual Compliance

The ICANN Contractual Compliance team monitors and enforces the requirements of the Registrar Accreditation Agreement, as well as Consensus and Temporary Policies. This team monitors and audits registrars, per Section 3.15 of the Registrar Accreditation Agreement, and responds to potential violations. It is imperative that registrars respond to ICANN Contractual Compliance inquiries and notifications immediately. Failure to do so in a timely fashion may lead to escalation and, if not cured, a breach of contract.

Organizations for Registrars

(alphabetical order)

Registrars have the option to participate in organizations that may be beneficial in keeping them aware of and helping to shape policies that affect registrar businesses.

- Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO) – The GNSO brings together smaller stakeholder groups, which in turn bring together constituencies and other groups to form Supporting Organizations to develop policies, form consensus, and make recommendations related to gTLDs to the ICANN Board.

- Registrar Stakeholder Group (RrSG) – A part of the GNSO, the RrSG facilitates communication among gTLD registrars and conveys the views of the RrSG to the GNSO Council, the ICANN Board, and other participants in the ICANN community. The primary role of the RrSG is to represent the interests of all registrars.

III. Ongoing Registrar Operations

Commonly Provided Registrar Services

◉ **Accreditation Agreement Renewals –** Registrar Accreditation Agreements have a five-year term. At the end of that term a registrar's contract is renewed unless either ICANN org or the registrar elects not to renew the agreement. ICANN may elect not to renew a registrar's RAA for any of the reasons listed in Section 5.2 of the RAA. For more information about the RAA renewal process, see Renewing an Existing Accreditation.

◉ **Application for Accreditation –** The process of becoming an ICANN-accredited registrar includes several steps. Prospective registrars and existing registrars who wish to obtain additional registrar accreditation(s) should consult the How to Become a Registrar webpage for detailed instructions.

◉ Bulk Transfers **–** As part of the Registrar Accreditation Agreement Termination service, ICANN org may facilitate bulk transfers of registrations from a terminating registrar to an accredited registrar, pursuant to the Transfer Policy. Bulk transfers may also be coordinated when a registrar terminates a Registry-Registrar Agreement and is thus no longer permitted to offer registrations in the relevant gTLD.

◉ **Data Escrow Agent (DEA) Change Request –** Registrars must comply with the data escrow requirements set forth in the Registrar Accreditation Agreement. To submit a DEA change, please review the instructions on the Registrar Data Escrow Agent Change webpage.

◉ **Registrar Acquisition –** An acquisition of a registrar is one type of change of control identified in the Registrar Accreditation Agreement. Refer to Purchasing an ICANN-Accredited Registrar for additional information on notifying ICANN about a registrar acquisition.

◉ **Registrar Accreditation Agreement Assignment –** Under the Registrar Accreditation Agreement, a registrar may assign its interest in the contract only with ICANN org's prior written consent. Refer to Transferring (Assigning) an ICANN Accreditation for additional information about notifying ICANN org of a proposed registrar assignment.

◉ **Registrar Accreditation Agreement Termination –** Under the Registrar Accreditation Agreement, either party may terminate pursuant to certain requirements in the contract, including but not limited to the following:

- Section 5.5 and its subsections – termination by the ICANN org.
- Section 5.4 – termination by the registrar.

- **Registrar Name Change –** If a registrar changes the name of its organization and/or adopts a fictitious or "d/b/a" name, and it is not the result of a change of control, the registrar must notify the ICANN org of the change using the Registrar Name Change service. The process for submitting a request can be found at the Registrar Name Changes page on the ICANN website.

- **Registrar Primary and Other Contact Updates –** ICANN-accredited registrars are required to provide ICANN org with accurate and up-to-date Primary Contact information. Registrars must notify ICANN org within five (5) days of any changes to Primary Contact details. For more information about this process, see Registrar Contact Updates.

- **Registry-Registrar Agreement (RRA) Amendment –** The RRA Amendment process was developed for consideration of proposed amendments to RRAs where the registry operator is required to obtain ICANN approval of such amendments. This process is designed to ensure an opportunity for registrar input (and public input, where appropriate) before ICANN approves or otherwise resolves changes to an RRA.

IV. Useful Tools, Registrar Resources, and Additional Information

Below are useful tools and resources for ongoing operations of an ICANN-accredited registrar.

Useful Tools

- **Naming Services portal –** The Naming Services portal (NSp) is the vehicle ICANN org uses to manage account information for registrars. Registrars are required to keep their contact information in NSp up-to-date. User Guides and an instructional demo are available in the registrar library and on the Naming Services Portal for Registrars page of icann.org.

Registrar Resources on icann.org

- icann.org **–** The icann.org website offers an abundance of resources and information covering everything from policy updates, registrar services, upcoming industry events, and more. Visit the Information for Registrars and the Registrar Library pages for helpful resources.

- Information for Domain Name Registrants – One of the primary goals of the ICANN Org. The Registrant Program is to educate registrants about their rights and responsibilities, the domain name ecosystem and how to navigate it, and the ICANN policies that impact them. Updated on an ongoing basis, the domain name registrant section of the icann.org website provides useful information (Blogs, FAQs, etc.) that might be helpful to registrars in interactions with registrants.

- Registrar Communications **–** The ICANN org provides communications to registrars and GDD stakeholders in various forms. Whether via legal notifications for updates to a policy or blogs and email communications for new initiatives, there is an abundance of available information. By consolidating the information in one location, the Registrar Communications section is a valuable resource for staying informed.

Additional Information

- **Trademark Clearinghouse (TMCH) Sunrise and Claims Period –** The purpose of the TMCH is to facilitate the Sunrise and Claims services as defined in Section 1, Specification 7 of the base Registry Agreement. The Sunrise Period provides trademark holders with an opportunity to register new gTLD domain names prior to general registration.

The Claims Period follows the Sunrise Period and runs for at least the first 90 days of general registration. During the Claims Period, anyone attempting to register a domain name matching a trademark recorded in the Trademark Database (TMDB) will receive a notification via the registrar. If the notified party registers the domain name, the TMCH will send a notice to those trademark holders informing them that a domain name that matches their trademark has been registered.

To access Trademark Clearinghouse data, registrars must first complete certification testing. More information about the certification process is available on the Trademark Clearinghouse for Registries & Registrars webpage. For additional information about the TMDB, refer to the Trademark Database Explained for Registrars presentation.

- Universal Acceptance (UA) **–** Universal Acceptance is the concept that all domain names should be treated equally. To achieve Universal Acceptance, Internet applications and systems must treat all TLDs, including new gTLDs and Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs), in a consistent manner. Specifically, systems and applications must accept, validate, store, process, and display all domain names. Visit the Universal Acceptance Steering Group (UASG) page for the latest information, as well as to report instances where an application or webpage is not UA ready. Additionally, questions or concerns about UA may be emailed to globalsupport@icann.org.

V. Registrar Obligations

Registrars are responsible for fulfilling specific ongoing obligations at all times in accordance with their Registrar Accreditation Agreement. Below is a general summary of these obligations. Some registrars may use the services of a third party to help manage some of these operational requirements. However, the obligations under the Registrar Accreditation Agreement ultimately rest with the registrar.

NOTE: "Daily" frequency means the task is initiated and completed at a certain time each day, e.g., submitting data escrow deposits. "Continuous" frequency means the task is ongoing with no particular time of initiation, e.g., comply with Consensus and Temporary Policies.

Continuous Obligations

- **Comply With Consensus & Temporary Policies: Specification 1 –** Consensus policies are developed through the multistakeholder process and become contractual requirements for registry operators and accredited registrars. The ICANN org will send notifications to registrars announcing the effective date and the requirements of each new policy. Additional information may be found on the Advisories, Consensus Policies, and Temporary Policies page on icann.org.

- **Publish Certain Registration Data –** Registration Data Directory Service Specification Registrars must operate a publicly available Registration Data Directory Service (RDDS) in accordance with the requirements of Registration Data Directory Service Specification of the Registrar Accreditation Agreement, as modified on 7 August 2023 via Global Amendment The RDDS refers collectively to the Registration Data Access Protocol, or RDAP, as defined in Section 1.1.1 of Registration Data Directory Service Specification and the WHOIS Directory Services (the WHOIS service available via port 43 and a web-based WHOIS service as defined in Section 1.1.3 of Registration Data Directory Service Specification).

- **Ensure All Contacts on Record Are Current –** As contacts change within the registrar's organization and supporting subcontractors, the registrar must ensure that its records are updated with ICANN org. The ICANN org relies on the integrity of this data for communicating in emergency situations, providing advance notifications, sending invoices, and other important functions. Failure to maintain current and accurate contact information could result in a breakdown of communication with the registrar.

- **Registrar Training Program –** Each registrar's primary contact or designee must complete a training course covering registrar obligations under ICANN policies and agreements. The course is provided by ICANN org on the ICANN Learn platform. Search for 601 and then select the Registrar Accreditation Agreement (RAA) Training in the language of your choice. You can also find additional training resources at Registrar Training Resources page.

Daily and/or Weekly Obligations

- **Submit Data Escrow Deposits –** Registrars must engage with an ICANN approved data escrow agent (DEA) to escrow their data with the service providers per the provisions in the Registrar Accreditation Agreement and the Registrar Data Escrow Specification on the schedule required by the registrar's quarterly gTLD transaction volume. Additional information about required data escrow deposit schedules and other specifications are available in the Registrar Data Escrow Specifications posted on the icann.org Registrar Data Escrow Program webpage.

Quarterly Obligations

- **Annual Accreditation –** Registrars must pay the annual registrar accreditation fee of USD 4,000.00. Registrars may pay once annually or elect to pay the fee once per quarter in USD 1,000 installments.

- **Transaction Fees –** Registrars are charged a flat fee for each new registration, renewal or transfer. This fee can be billed by the registrar separately on its invoice to the registrant but is paid by the registrar to ICANN.

- **Variable Fees –** Registrars are charged a variable fee once they begin registering domain names or the first full quarter following the registrar's accreditation approval, whichever occurs first. This fee represents a portion of ICANN's operating costs and because it is divided among all registrars, the amount varies from quarter to quarter.

- Fees will appear on quarterly invoices, issued at the end of the month following the close of each calendar quarter. Payment must be remitted within 30 days of the date on the invoice. Invoices are transmitted via email only, unless otherwise requested. To request paper invoices or to make updates to billing contacts, please email globalsupport@icann.org. For more questions about billing, please visit the Registrar Billing Frequently Asked Questions.

- Should your organization require updated vendor set-up documentation or require a purchase order be added to invoices, submit your request by contacting globalsupport@icann.org.

Annual Obligations

- **Submit Annual Certification and Internal Review Results –** Within twenty (20) calendar days following the end of each calendar year, registrars must complete and return an annual certification of compliance to ICANN org. Instructions for

completing and returning this form are available at the Annual Registrar Compliance Certificate page on icann.org.

- **Contractual Compliance Audit Program –** Registrars are required to comply with ICANN org's contractual compliance audit program. Contracted parties selected for an audit round will receive pre-audit notifications from ICANN org two weeks prior to the audit's commencement.