Dear ICANN:

The New gTLD Applicant Group (NTAG) is an Interest Group of the Registry Stakeholder Group (RySG). In only two months since its organization, NTAG already is comprised of 54 members, representing 801 of all 1,930 new gTLD applications. All applicants are eligible to join NTAG, and we have been actively recruiting new members and growing every week.

NTAG encourages ICANN to increase the communication with and support for New gTLD applicants during the application review and processing process. The addition of ICANN's New gTLD Updates and periodic webinars are a helpful start, but NTAG seeks to increase the effectiveness of communication between ICANN and applicants, and to further ICANN's support of applicants.

Accordingly, the NTAG membership has developed the following recommendations, intended to provide constructive ideas to further improve ICANN's communications and support:

1. In response to ICANN's request, the NTAG offers the following as feedback on ICANN's first webinar held on 9 August 2012:
    a. The addition of regularly scheduled webinars is encouraging. Updates provided in the webinar helped applicants understand ICANN's views on the status of several open items.
    b. The opportunity to ask specific questions is essential, so we request the webinar be lengthened, with more time for questions and answers.
    c. The webinars should be scheduled on a biweekly basis with at least three weeks notice.
    d. The webinars should be more interactive.
    e. The technical execution of the Q&A session should be improved.
    f. ICANN should publish program progress metrics (see #3 below) prior to the webinar.

2. Applicant comments should be taken into account prior to decisions being made. ICANN recently released a roadmap before receiving requested comments on batching and sequencing. ICANN should amend its roadmap based on applicant comments.

3. As NTAG recently requested, ICANN should publish and regularly update a dashboard or scorecard showing metrics including, but not limited to:

    a. Status of background checks
    b. String similarity review
    c. Initial evaluation reviews
    d. Number and name of withdrawn applications
    e. How ICANN is tracking against its program budget

f. Clarifying questions metrics

Applicants' ability to track ICANN's progress is consistent with its transparency and accountability principles.

4. NTAG recommends that ICANN conduct an applicant survey to gather additional information for refining remaining processes. This could include, for example, identifying applicants interested in opting out of early delegation. A formal proposal from the group is forthcoming. NTAG members are available to volunteer to assist ICANN in constructing a set of questions for the survey.

5. In light of the 1,930 applications from almost 900 different applicants, NTAG recommends that ICANN designate a New gTLD Applicant Liaison(s) to interact with the applicant community. The Liaison(s) would be responsible for providing support to applicants—similar to the support currently provided to Registries and Registrars by their respective liaison teams. The liaison role would be funded by the New gTLD budget.

6. NTAG understands that ICANN has developed specific internal guidance for ICANN Staff and Board members on appropriate forms of interaction with applicants. NTAG requests publication of these guidelines as soon as possible to assist applicants in understanding the appropriate restrictions and adhering to the requirements.

7. The NTAG has a bi-weekly teleconference for members to discuss New gTLD related issues, program and implementation statuses, and requests for comment from ICANN. It would be beneficial if ICANN's New gTLD Program Director would regularly attend our teleconference to provide updates on the program, answer questions, and exchange information. Our next teleconference is scheduled to occur at 1400 UTC on 12 September 2012. Staff is cordially invited to join the call.

Finally, NTAG expresses strong support for the letter submitted by the RySG on 1 September 2012 (subject line: Timelines and Milestones in New gTLD Program). It is vital to the success of this important and high profile program that ICANN uses its available resources to set and meet milestones and to communicate immediately if deadlines cannot be met.

NTAG welcomes the opportunity to discuss any comments or thoughts on the recommendations provided above and look forward to the efficient resolution of application processing.

NTAG