

26 June 2019

Dear Cherine,
Dear Göran,
Dear SO/AC Chairs,

This letter is to inform you that a further delay of the Second Security, Stability and Resiliency Review is unavoidable due to events outside the control of the SSR2 Review Team. The events described below, and resulting delays might also require increasing the budget of the SSR2 review.

Unfortunately, the SSR2 Team has a history of being under-supported and obstructed: our work was initially delayed by a lack of documentation regarding the incomplete implementation of the 2012 SSR1 recommendations; we were “paused” for about a year by the Board without prior communication with the Team; we saw considerable delays when asking questions to staff, and received multiple insufficient responses; and we have had professional writing and research support for only 15 days. In addition, the Board’s subsequent handling of the CCT Review Team recommendations further confused and deflated the enthusiasm of our Team.

Without prior discussion or notice, ICANN staff informed us on 31 May 2019 that they had dismissed the Team’s technical writer, and that the process for selecting someone else had begun. This unilateral dismissal happened about two weeks after the Team’s chosen writer was hired and productively working, and took place without any consultation with the leadership or Team. This was after the process of hiring this individual had taken considerably longer than indicated, and did not follow the procedure that was shared by staff at the onset. More information about engaging the writer is included below. We cannot adequately express our level of frustration, and some Team members seriously question ICANN’s stated commitment to support this community review.

After the dismissal of the technical writer, staff started searching for another individual to support the team, presenting the Team with only one candidate’s CV rather than enabling us to choose from qualified candidates, as agreed for the selection of the first technical writer. We accepted the qualified candidate, to avoid further delays. At this point in time, the new technical writer candidate has not been contracted, and the Team has not received an expected start date or timeline for this process. Again, the Team is left in the dark about what is going on. Furthermore, while this new candidate for the writer position has a useful background, they have had no involvement with ICANN, thus the Team is considering augmenting the writer with an additional research consultant to help us complete our report. Of course, the additional position has the potential for another lengthy hiring and contracting process by ICANN Org. After contracting is complete, the new consultant(s) will have to be onboarded, brought up to speed on content, and meet with the Team. Due to the fact that we currently have no indication of what steps and timeline are involved or when the process will be completed, we cannot yet adjust our workplan. However, it is clear that these events have again seriously affected the SSR2 review and that, as a result, our draft and final reports will be delayed by multiple months.

Our face to face meeting in Marrakech was spent predominantly on doing reorganizing and writing work our technical writer would have done. Our status is now similar to where we stood after the Brussels meeting.

As you know, the quality and substance of the Team’s report will be a function of the expertise and enthusiasm of the volunteer community members. With the past history and without assurances — and actions — of support and transparency going forward, we are formally apprising you of the increasing possibility that the Team’s report, and its associated accountability function, will fail to meet the necessary requirements of the existing bylaws. The Team’s morale is dwindling; we need support from the Board and Staff.

We ask that: 1) immediate action be taken to support quick on-boarding of (a) new consultant(s), using processes that are fully transparent to the Team; 2) the selection of the research consultant be left entirely to the Team and team leadership; 3) ICANN Org ensure substantive staff is available and engaged in the Team’s work, and that staff reply promptly and fully to the Team’s requests for information; 4) and the Board clarify and follow through on its responsibilities in supporting and implementing successful reviews.

Thanks for your attention to these matters.

Sincerely,
Russ Housley
Chair, SSR2 Review Team

Laurin Weissinger, Eric Osterweil, Denise Michel
Vice Chairs, SSR2 Review Team

Background on engaging a technical writer

At the ICANN meeting in Kobe in March 2019, the Review Team expressed the high-priority need to quickly obtain a consultant to provide critical technical writing support. The hiring and contracting process took considerably longer than expected. The Team agreed that staff would vet CVs for basic criteria and the Team's leadership would select a writer from among qualified candidates. After multiple weeks and requests for updates, the leadership team was told that only one candidate passed the assessment process. The Team's leadership then requested further information about the requirements and the interview process, as we were aware of two qualified technical writers who had applied. After this conversation, the Team was provided with two CVs.

The Team's leadership group, in consultation with the Team, selected a veteran ICANN consultant who had worked for ICANN for years on other reviews over a candidate with no ICANN, SSR, or Internet Governance experience (who was named the preferred candidate by staff). Despite this long ICANN consulting history, staff pursued a vetting and onboarding process for this candidate that resulted in finalizing the writer's contract two days before the team's face-to-face meeting in Brussels. The selected technical writer was able to make last minute travel arrangements and joined the Review Team for our May Brussels meeting, and she has worked very well with the Team. On the final day of the Brussels meeting, 19 May 2019, we learned that the technical writer's hours were capped at 10 hours per week (30 hours per week were needed at this point). The Team or leadership had no input into this number. We immediately wrote to ICANN staff asking for authorization of the necessary hours.

The technical writer reconfirmed with the Team's leadership that she was willing and eager to work. However, without discussion or notice to the Team or its leadership, staff informed us on 31 May 2019 that they had dismissed the Team's technical writer, and that the process for selecting someone else has begun. This dismissal happened about two weeks after the Team's chosen writer had finally been hired and was productively working. The unilateral dismissal took place without any consultation with the leadership or Team, and we cannot adequately express our level of frustration.

The SSR2 team and its work process has thus reached a new low. More than half the time of our face-to-face meeting in Marrakech – where we planned to make major progress on recommendations and report – was spent on picking up the pieces and re-doing steps we considered complete or near-complete during our Brussels face-to-face meeting. A lot of editing and organising that we expected to be done by now has, obviously, not been completed either. In addition to raising serious concerns about the accountability, transparency and independence of community reviews required by the ICANN bylaws, these unilateral and in transparent actions are extremely demoralizing to many Review Team members.