

Ref: /AL/ALAC/CO/0113/1

To: Sally Costerton - Senior Advisor to the President - Global Stakeholder Engagement  
CC: Steve Antonoff - Director of Human Resources  
CC: Sébastien Bachollet  
CC: At-Large Staff

Dear Sally,

I am writing about an ongoing issue of concern to ALAC, and in particular a current instance where we could benefit from your guidance and help.

The overall issue is travel support for ALAC and At-Large. This is an issue that has been the subject of unending discussion and negotiation, but regrettably, we keep on having to do battle on the same issues time and again. At-Large is the only ICANN stakeholder that, with very few exceptions, has no ability to fund our involvement and particularly our travel without support from ICANN. Almost none of our active participants are employed by the domain name industry and very few even by Internet-related organizations. We all give generously of our time, and often at a non-trivial loss of other income, in the interest of ICANN. But actual out-of-pocket expenses are generally beyond our capabilities.

Over the years, we have worked hard to convince ICANN management of this, and to a large extent, we have succeeded. We have not recently been threatened with reduction of funding for travel to ICANN meetings, and have even recently been funded for travel to the IGF meeting in Baku. For this we are grateful.

However, there are still regular occurrences where we feel that our needs are not being met.

We are finding that the rules for travel to Beijing are proving problematic for some of our participants, and although the savings to ICANN from these rules are minimal, the annoyance factor is sufficiently high that some travellers are considering not participating.

For several years, the ALAC Executive Committee (ExCom) has met after the end of the "formal" ICANN week. When the ICANN Board met on Friday morning, the ExCom met on Friday afternoon. The meeting used to end at 16:00 and our members who had started their week on the previous Sunday morning or earlier were allowed to leave on Saturday morning.

In Toronto, with no formal ICANN meetings scheduled for Friday, the ExCom met on Friday morning. Some attendees were given Saturday departures, but most were told they must leave on Friday, regardless of the schedule for reasonably departing flights. I for one ended up paying for my own Friday hotel to allow a less-rushed departure.

In Beijing, we are all being told that a Friday departure is mandatory. There is a provision by which we might ask for an "exception" which may or may not be accepted. The ExCom, which is arguably composed of the most dedicated At-Large contributors, and certainly those who put in the most time and effort, finds this process unacceptable. To have to effectively ask to be allowed a reasonable departure after a LONG week of work is just not right, especially mindful of the vast cultural diversity of our delegates.

Case by case exceptions have needed to be requested by ExCom members. In some cultures, such requests are seen as irritating but understood. In others, there comes a real shame with asking for such extension when the possibility of rejection is real.

ICANN staff members are often given the privilege of leaving the day after their work completes, or at least being allowed to keep their hotel rooms until their actual hotel departure, if later in the day (and not having to vacate them early in the morning prior to their first meeting). Clearly some flexibility is shown. Unpaid At-Large volunteers currently do not receive this same courtesy. Moreover, in the past when GNSO Council members were allowed to stay for the Friday sessions (a right often not given to ALAC), they always were allowed a Saturday departure.

Related to this is a recurrent problem of volunteers arriving in the evening or at night after a trip half way around the world in Economy Class, often getting to the hotel near or after midnight, and being expected to appear (presumably rested and ready to work) early the following morning. Again, ICANN sees the benefits of having its employees be well rested before starting a grueling ICANN week, but often volunteers are not afforded the same courtesy.

Our At-Large volunteers are a dedicated group, working untold hours at home and then spending 10+ hours a day in meetings for 5-6 days. There are no doubt some people who are looking for every loop-hole where they can get ICANN to fund their vacation. If staff feel that this applies to any At-Large people, I am freely available to work with them to ensure that this does not happen. Having to ask for special treatment does not replace being treated with respect as a professional. There is a strong feeling of resentment towards not being given just a modicum of flexibility regarding travel schedules and several members have therefore informed me that they will be unwilling to travel to the next ICANN meeting if this type of penny-pinching (yes, that is the term used) continues to occur.

Summarizing: please be so kind to consider a return to the rules to show flexibility for incoming members to have the discretion to allow for arrival on the Friday rather than the Saturday before their 10 hour day on Sunday at the beginning of the ICANN meeting week and for At-Large to travel the day after their last day of work at the end of the ICANN meeting week.

I look forward to your follow-up on the matter.

Best regards,

Olivier MJ Crépin-Leblond  
ALAC Chair