NCUC 20th Anniversary Issue Forum held at ICANN78 in Hamburg, Germany on Wednesday, October 25, 2023

ICANN78 Hamburg, a global meeting of internet governance and domain name industry stakeholders, saw fruitful discussions on key topics that are shaping the domain name industry and cited as current prime concerns for the civil society. These discussions, convened by the Non-Commercial Users Constituency (NCUC) and the Non-Commercial Stakeholder Group (NCSG), centered around "PICS/RVCs" (Registry Voluntary Commitments) and "Applicant Support," revealing challenges and potential solutions in this ongoing policy discussion.

Topic 1: **Registry Voluntary Commitments (RVCs)**
The discussions on PICS/RVCs primarily revolved around the nature and necessity of Registry Voluntary Commitments (RVCs) in the context of new generic top-level domain (gTLD) registry agreements. The key points from this discussion include:

- The debate revolved around the nature and necessity of RVCs in the context of new generic top-level domain (gTLD) registry agreements. Some participants raised concerns that RVCs might lead to significant variations in contracts, potentially causing ICANN to enforce policies beyond its core mission.
- To address these concerns, participants emphasized five key principles for RVCs. They called for RVCs to adhere to principles such as legal compliance, a clear connection to specific gTLD strings, consistency with established policies, enforcement by ICANN, and the need for a transparent review process.
- Attendees expressed worries about the subjectivity and arbitrariness in domain allocation due to RVCs. They highlighted the influence of governments and special interest groups as potential drivers of specific conditions.
- Participants underscored the necessity of standardized, objective, and well-defined criteria for accepting TLDs to avoid creating unique agreements for each domain.
- The significance of transparency and public review of RVCs was highlighted. Participants stressed the importance of conducting stress tests to evaluate potential consequences.

Topic 2: **Applicant Support (for the new gTLD round)**

Discussions on "Applicant Support" aimed to address the high application fees for securing new gTLDs and explore potential solutions to make the application process more accessible and affordable. Key takeaways from these discussions included:

- High application fees were recognized as a substantial barrier to entry for new gTLDs, especially for underrepresented regions.
-
- Participants reached a consensus on the necessity of an applicant support program that extends beyond financial assistance.
-
- A proposal was presented regarding an "Incubator Model." Under this model, regional entities, termed incubators, would coordinate support services for qualified potential gTLD applicants.
- The support services outlined in the proposal encompassed various aspects of gTLD application and operation, including business model advice, operational guidance, financial advice, technical support, marketing and branding counsel, legal assistance, application preparation, evaluation response support, and post-delegation guidance.
- Potential funding sources for the program, including the ICANN Foundation or auction proceeds, were considered.
- Collaboration, clear guidelines, and various service models were deemed vital elements in addressing the challenges of applicant support.
- These discussions underscored the industry's commitment to lowering barriers to entry for new gTLD applicants, ensuring transparency in registry agreements, and offering effective guidance and support to potential gTLD operators.

About NCUC and NCSG:
The Non-Commercial Users Constituency (NCUC) and the Non-Commercial Stakeholder Group (NCSG) play a pivotal role in shaping ICANN policies and representing the interests of non-commercial users in the domain name industry. These constituencies actively engage in discussions, proposing solutions that safeguard the global public interest.

About ICANN:
ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) is a nonprofit organization responsible for maintaining and coordinating the unique identifiers of the internet, including domain names and IP addresses.

Disclaimer:
This news report provides a summary of key discussions at the ICANN78 Hamburg meeting and does not reflect the official stance or policies of ICANN, NCUC, or NCSG.