



87

ANNUAL
GENERAL
MEETING



New gTLD Program: 2026 Round String Evaluation Stage Overview

21 OCTOBER 2026

Presenters

George Sarkisyan

New gTLD Program, Stage Lead

Francisco Arias

Vice President, GDS Technical
Services

Sarmad Hussain

Senior Director, IDN and UA Programs

Pitinan Kooarmornpatana

IDN Programs Director

Readiness Content Disclaimer

The authoritative source for all information about New gTLD Program: 2026 Round rules, evaluations, restrictions, processes, and systems is the English version of the [New gTLD Program: 2026 Round Applicant Guidebook](#). All New gTLD Program: 2026 Round readiness and training content is supplementary to the Applicant Guidebook, and has been developed to provide a high-level summary of key topic areas of interest to prospective applicants and the broader ICANN community. In case of discrepancy, the Applicant Guidebook prevails.



2026 Round Sessions at ICANN87

New gTLD Program sessions at ICANN87 provide a detailed view of the **upcoming stages of the Applicant Journey** and related systems and processes. All times are in local time.

ICANN87 SESSIONS

TOPICS:

AUDIENCE:

SUN 18 OCT
16:30-17:30

**Pre-Evaluation
Stage Overview**

Applicants and Community
Members

MON 19 OCT
13:15-14:30

**2026 Round Timeline Overview
and What's Next**

Applicants and Community
Members

TUE 20 OCT
09:00 - 10:00

**Application Community Input
Stage Overview**

Applicants and Community
Members

ICANN87 SESSIONS

TOPICS:

AUDIENCE:



WED 21 OCT
16:30-17:30

**String Evaluation
Stage Overview**

Applicants and Community
Members

THU 22 OCT
09:00-10:00

**2026 Round Wrap Up and Open
Question/Answer**

Applicants and Community
Members

New gTLD Program Booth

**Information and Demonstrations
on Systems and Processes**

Applicants and Community
Members

NEW gTLD PROGRAM: 2026 ROUND

01

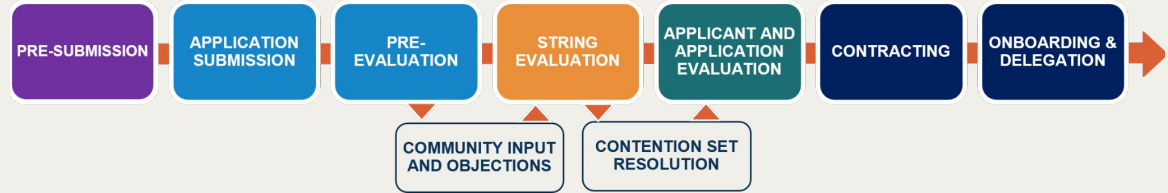
Introduction

Agenda

-
- | | | | |
|----|---|----|-----------------------------------|
| 01 | Welcome and Introduction | 05 | String Similarity Evaluation |
| 02 | String Evaluation Stage Overview | 06 | Safeguard Assessment |
| 03 | Geographic Names Identification | 07 | Name Collision Initial Assessment |
| 04 | Singular/Plural Notification Evaluation | 08 | Resources, Wrap Up, and Questions |

02

String Evaluation Stage Overview

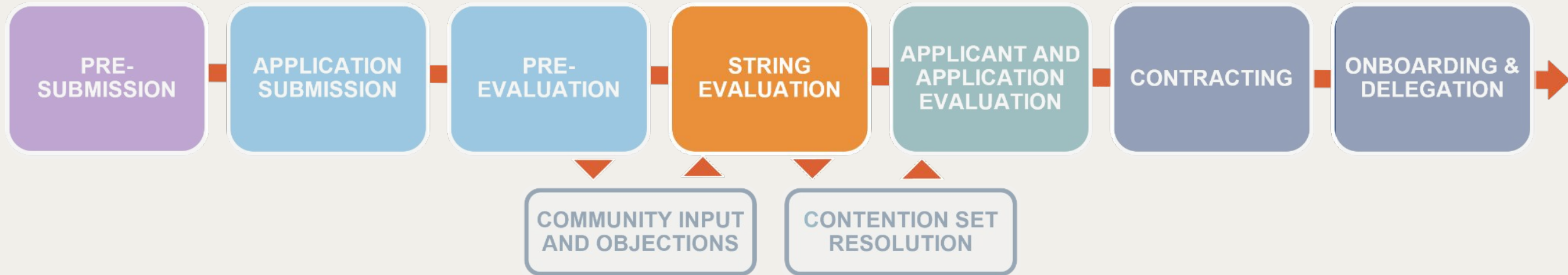


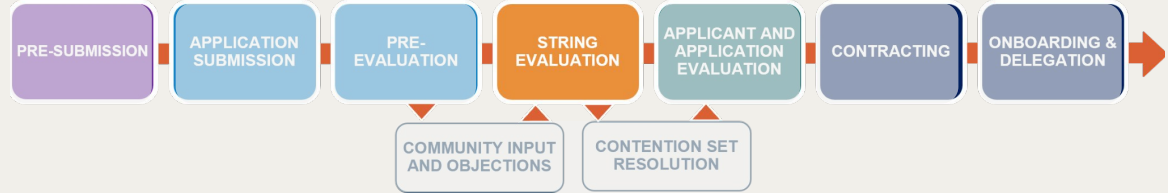
Where We Are in the Journey



The beginning of String Evaluations

The String Evaluation stage marks the start of the string level evaluation processes. On String Confirmation Day, the String Evaluation stage begins to ensure that each applied-for string is technically sound, safe, and compliant with policy.





String Evaluation

String Evaluation ensures that each applied-for string is secure to use and compliant with policy.

Geographic Names Identification

Purpose

Confirms whether applied-for strings are geographic names.

Applies to?

All applied-for strings

Outcome

Three possibilities 1) Geographic Name Review, 2) no additional evaluation*, 3) application will not proceed

Singular/Plural Notification Eval.

Purpose

Determines if an applied-for string represents the singular or plural form of the same word in the same language as another applied-for string, an existing gTLD, a string being processed from a previous new gTLD round, or a Blocked Name.

Applies to?

Applications flagged with a singular/plural notification

Outcome

Three possibilities 1) No impact, 2) Contention 3) Application termination

String Similarity Evaluation

Purpose

Identifies if any applied-for string is visually similar to any existing TLDs or Blocked Names or with any other applied-for strings.

Applies to?

All applied-for strings

Outcome

Three possibilities 1) No impact 2) Contention 3) Application termination

Safeguard Assessment

Purpose

Determines if an applied-for string requires safeguard public interest commitments in their Registry Agreement related to areas such as consumer protection, sensitive uses of strings, and regulated industries.

Applies to?

All applications

Outcome

Two possibilities 1) Include relevant Safeguard PICs in applicable RA, 2) No impact

Name Collision Initial Assessment

Purpose

Identifies applied-for strings at high risk of name collision.

Applies to?

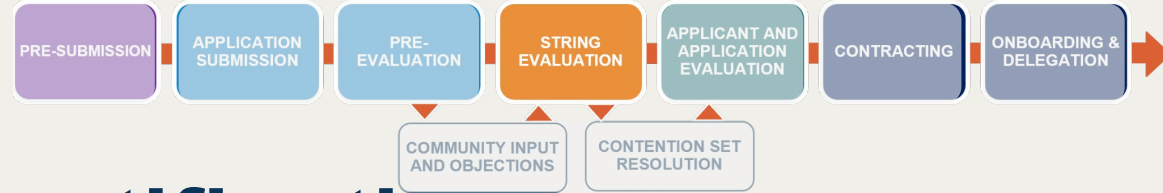
All applied-for strings

Outcome

Three possibilities 1) Proceed to temporary delegation 2) Applicant submits Mitigation Plan for Evaluation during Application Evaluation 3) Application does not proceed

03

Geographic Names Identification



Geographic Names Identification

What is it?

String-level evaluation of **all** applied-for gTLD strings against the Geographic Names criteria in the Applicant Guidebook (AGB) - Section 7.5 Geographic Names.

When does it happen?

Conducted by Geographic Names Panel (GNP) during String Evaluation, before Geographic Names Review.

Who is involved?

Applicant: Identified whether its applied-for string is a Geographic Name and provided applicable documentation at time of application submission. No role during Geographic Names Identification.

Community: No role in Geographic Names Identification.

Evaluator: Panel reviews all applied-for strings and identifies those that meet the Geographic Names criteria.

How does it impact an application?

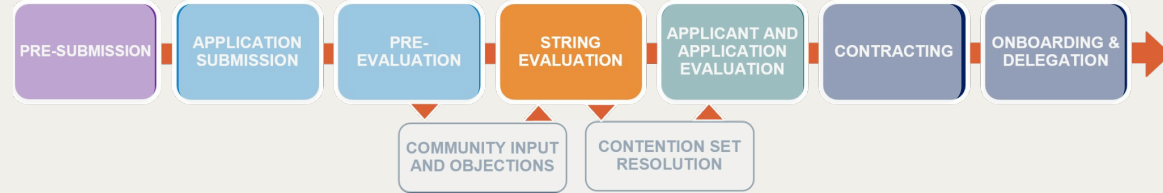
Not identified: No Geographic Names Review required.

Identified as a Geographic Name: Proceeds to Geographic Names Review.

Identified as a Country or Territory Name: Application is not eligible to proceed.

04

Singular/Plural Notification Evaluation



Singular/Plural Notifications Eval: Overview and Filing

What is it?

As per [AGB](#) Section 4.4, a process that allows anyone to notify ICANN that an applied-for gTLD string may be the singular or plural form of the same word in the same language as: another applied-for string in the 2026 Round, an existing gTLD, a string being processed from a previous new gTLD round, or a Blocked Name.

When does it happen?

The filing window is open for 30 days immediately following String Confirmation Day.

How to File?

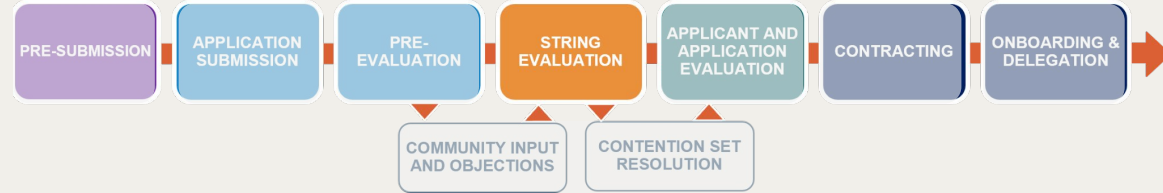
Use the Singular/Plural Notification form available on the New gTLD Program website and follow the instructions provided.

Include supporting evidence from an authoritative dictionary, consistent with the requirements in [AGB Section 4.4.1](#). Also see [Singular/Plural Notifications FAQs](#).

Publication

Notifications will be published on the [Singular/Plural Notifications Wiki page](#) throughout the filing window.

After the filing window closes, the final list of notifications will be published on the 2026 Round website.



Singular/Plural Notifications Evaluation: Outcomes

Evaluation

ICANN reviews the notification and supporting dictionary evidence to determine whether the identified strings are singular and plural forms of the same word in the same language. If a determination impacts applicant(s), all relevant applicants will be notified.

Possible Outcomes

No Impact on the application – The application(s) continue without a change resulting from the notification.

Strings Placed In Contention Set – If two applied-for strings in the 2026 Round are determined to be singular/plural versions of the same word in the same language, they are placed in a contention set.

Application Cannot Proceed – If an applied-for string is determined to be the singular/plural version of an existing gTLD, a string being processed from a previous new gTLD round, or a Blocked Name, the application cannot proceed.

Challenge Mechanism

An affected applicant has **21 days** after being notified of the determination to submit a challenge.

Each applicant has **one opportunity to challenge** the determination.

Challenges are evaluated under the “**clearly erroneous**” standard described in [AGB Section 4.4.4](#).

Singular/Plural Notification Form

NEW gTLD PROGRAM: 2026 ROUND

Singular/Plural Notification Form

Singular/Plural Notification Requirements

The [Applicant Guidebook \(AGB\), Section 4.4](#) provides the requirements for submitting a Singular/Plural Notification. For additional information on Singular/Plural Notifications, for details on the required information, process, and timelines for notification and evaluation, please carefully read the relevant FAQs:

- [The Singular/Plural Notification FAQs](#)
- [The Singular/Plural Notification Evaluation FAQs](#)

For regular updates throughout the Singular/Plural Notification submission window, please check the [Singular/Plural Notification Wiki page](#). Once the submission window closes, the final list of submissions will be published on the New gTLD Program: 2026 Round website.

How to Submit

Download the PDF and fill in all **required fields**. Email the completed form and attachments to 26r-singular-plural-notifications@icann.org. The total size of an email, including all attachments, **should not exceed 25 MB**. If attachments exceed the 25 MB limit, please submit a second email with the same subject line including part 1 of 2 and 2 of 2 (see example below). Please do not submit sensitive personal information. **Incomplete submissions will not be considered.**

You must include additional attachments or supporting materials with your submission. For attachments in response to specific questions, include the question number and field name in the name of the attached document.

For example: "7-place-of-publication.jpeg"

Where appropriate, a URL may be provided to identify or access supporting material, in addition to the required supporting images. For each of the fields below, provide the information requested, upload image(s) of the relevant page, and if applicable, the URL. **General Note:** For supporting images from a printed dictionary, please attach clear photos. For supporting images from an online dictionary, please attach screenshots and provide the relevant URL. **Email Subject Line:** Please submit the form with this Subject Line in your notification email: "Singular/Plural Notification, String1, String2".

Standard example: "Singular/Plural Notification, cactus, cacti"

Example of multiple emails: "Singular/Plural Notification, cactus, cacti, part 1 of 2" and "Singular/Plural Notification, cactus, cacti, part 2 of 2"

NEW gTLD PROGRAM: 2026 ROUND

Singular/Plural Notification Form

Singular/Plural Notification Details

1. I am submitting a singular/plural notification about the following strings:*

String 1:*

A. Please select one of the following options. This is a(n):*

- ☐ Existing gTLD.
- ☐ String being processed from a prior application round.
- ☐ Blocked Name.
- ☐ New gTLD application.

B. If new, add Application ID #s (Optional):

C. Number (singular or plural):*

String 2:*

A. Please select one of the following options. This is a(n):*

- ☐ Existing gTLD.
- ☐ String being processed from a prior application round.
- ☐ Blocked Name.
- ☐ New gTLD application.

B. If new, add Application ID #s (Optional):

C. Number (singular or plural):*

2. Name of the dictionary:*

- A. Dictionary name:*
- B. Filename for image of dictionary name (attach image file):*
- C. URL of dictionary name (if applicable):

3. Language in native script:*

Please provide the name of the language of the pair of strings in of the pair of strings in this notification:

- A. Language name (in native script):*
- B. Language (in English):*

4. International Standard Book Number (ISBN):*

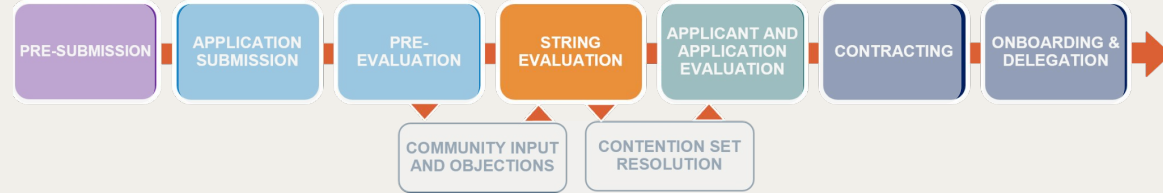
- A. ISBN:*
- B. Filename for image of ISBN (attach image file):*
- C. URL of ISBN (if applicable):

Helpful Resources:

- [Singular/Plural webpage](#)
- [Singular/Plural Notification FAQs](#)
- [Singular/Plural Notification Evaluation FAQs](#)
- [Applicant Guidebook \(AGB\), Section 4.4](#)

05

String Similarity Evaluation



String Similarity Evaluation: Overview

What is it?

The String Similarity Evaluation (SSE) is a part of the New gTLD Program: 2026 Round evaluation as per the details found in the [AGB Section 7.10](#).

The objective of this evaluation is to prevent user confusion and loss of confidence in the Domain Name System (DNS) resulting from delegation of visually similar strings.

When does it happen?

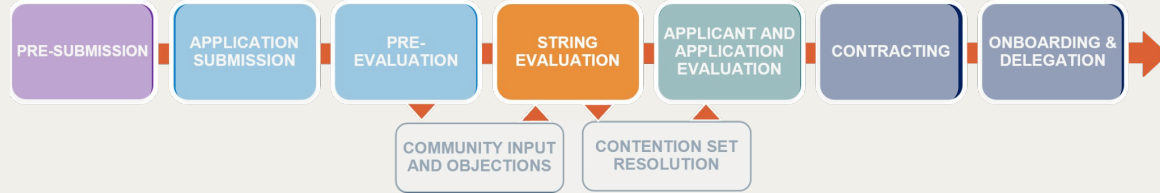
Occurs during the String Evaluation stage.

How is it evaluated?

The SSE is conducted by comparing strings along with their variant strings. This is accomplished through a **manual** review process conducted by the SSE Panel.

As the scope covers all top-level domains, Blocked Names and their variant strings, the number of comparison can be large. The SSE tool and [SSE data](#) were developed to generate a pre-screening report to assist SSE Panel.

The SSE Panel will use pre-screening report and other resources to evaluate and made decision following the [SSE guidelines](#), latter required by the policy and finalized after public comment.



String Similarity Evaluation: Outcome and Challenge

Results

If applied-for strings and their allocatable or blocked variants are identified as visually similar to the following, including all of their allocatable and blocked variant strings:

- Existing delegated gTLDs.
- gTLD strings applied for in previous gTLD rounds that are still in process.
- Existing successfully evaluated or delegated ccTLDs.
- Strings currently requested as IDN ccTLDs.
- Other applied-for gTLD strings in the current application round.
- A subset of Blocked Names.
- All other two-letter ASCII strings.

Outcomes

(1) No Impact on the application, (2) Strings Placed in Contention Set, (3) Application Cannot Proceed, (4) Application Put on Hold

Challenges

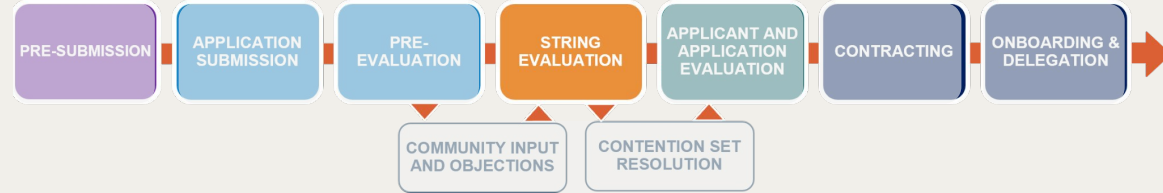
A challenge can be filed within 21 days from the date of transmission of the SSE determination.

The SSE Panel will communicate the result within 30 days of filing such challenge.

Challenges are evaluated under the “clearly erroneous” standard described in [AGB Section 7.10.4](#).

06

Safeguard Assessment



Safeguard Assessment: Overview

What is it?

Determines whether an applied-for string requires Safeguard Public Interest Commitments (Safeguard PICs) as contractual obligations in the Registry Agreement.

When does it happen?

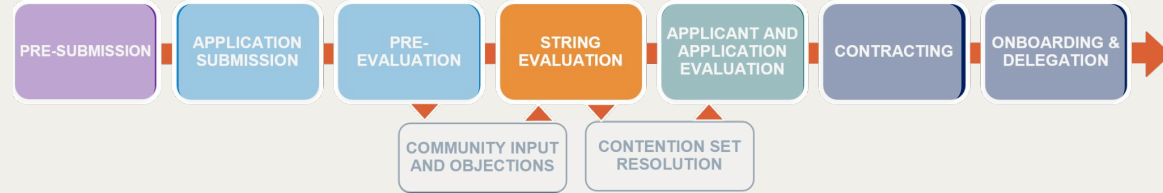
Occurs during the String Evaluation stage.

What is assessed?

Whether the applied-for string falls into one or more risk-based groups, such as regulated sectors, cyberbullying/harassment potentials, or government functions.

Key Takeaway

Applicant-provided materials inform the evaluation, but they are not automatically determinative; the evaluation panel makes the determination based on the meaning and context of the string as a whole, and with consideration of relevant community input.



Safeguard Assessment: Roles & Impact

Applicant Role

Provides responses to Safeguard Assessment questions and relevant contextual information, string meaning, variant meaning (if applicable), mission and purpose, intended registrants/users/activities.

Community Role

May submit application comments and other community input for the evaluators to consider.

Evaluator Role

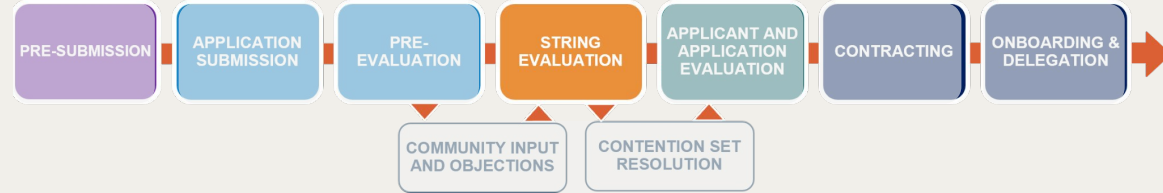
Reviews applicant responses and relevant community input to determine whether Safeguard PICs apply and, if so, the applicable risk-based group(s) for the applied-for string.

Impact on application

If Safeguard PICs are required, they are expected to be included in **Specification 11** of the Registry Agreement if the application proceeds to contracting. Safeguard Assessment determinations are not subject to Extended Evaluation or Evaluation Challenge, and have no impact on application progression.

07

Name Collision Initial Assessment



Name Collision Initial Assessment

What is it?

A structured, expert-driven assessment of every applied-for string, including variant strings, to identify high-risk strings.

What is the purpose?

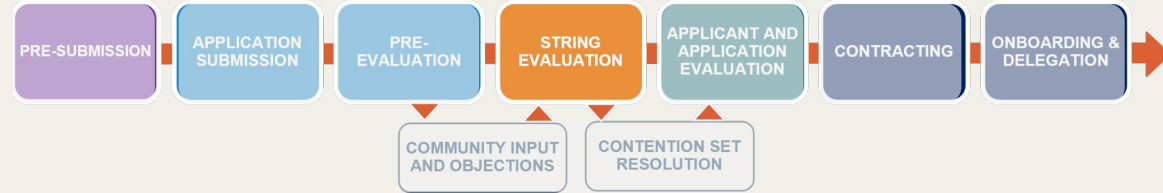
To identify strings that could cause name collisions with severe negative consequences if delegated from the global DNS root. Such a string is classified as high-risk.

Who is involved?

The assessments are carried out by an external provider. The Technical Review Team, made up of experts from ICANN, oversees the assessments and reviews the results.

When does it happen?

During the String Evaluation phase, starting after String Confirmation Day. The assessment is expected to be concluded by the end of the String Evaluation phase.



Name Collision Initial Assessment

What are the outcomes?

Not identified as high-risk: the string is approved to proceed to Temporary Delegation.

High-risk string: the string is placed on the Collision String List, and the application will not proceed until a High-Risk String Mitigation Plan has been developed, evaluated, approved and implemented, as applicable.

Publication of results

After all strings have been through the procedure, ICANN compiles them into a single Initial Assessment report and publishes it for Public Comment. ICANN will consider all available information before adopting the report.

What can an applicant do?

ICANN has published datasets showing historical DNS query patterns and volumes for strings which can help applicants gain insights into the extent to which name collisions may occur for a certain string. The data is available in the Name Collision Observatory, and is one of several factors considered in the assessment. An applicant can also take part in the Public Comment proceeding on the Initial Assessment report, to submit feedback on the findings before the final determination is made.

08

Wrap Up, Resources, and Next Steps

Key Applicant Resources

New gTLD Program: 2026 Round Applicant Guidebook

- The authoritative document outlining the rules and procedures of the 2026 Round.

New gTLD Program: 2026 Round Website

- Source of 2026 Round news, announcements, information, and resources.

2026 Round Resources Page

- Content, training, and more resources organized along the Applicant Journey.

2026 Round Applicant Journey

- Follow the stages of the Applicant Journey from pre-submission to delegation.

2026 Round FAQs

- Frequently asked questions, organized by category.

General Questions to Global Support

- Dedicated ICANN team available to answer inquiries and provide support.
globalsupport@icann.org

Application Inquiries via TAMS

- Application-specific questions can be submitted via the *Create Inquiry* button in TAMS.

Question and Answer



Q&A

Submit further questions to: globalsupport@icann.org

Evaluation Survey

We kindly request you to take a few minutes to complete this brief feedback form.

A graphic consisting of two overlapping speech bubbles. The front bubble is dark blue and contains the word 'Survey' in white. The back bubble is purple and is partially obscured by the blue one.

Survey

gTLD

Thank you for your participation.

Visit us at <https://newgtldprogram.icann.org>



@icann



flickr.com/icann



facebook.com/icannorg



linkedin.com/company/icann



youtube.com/icannnews



instagram.com/icannorg

