

NEW gTLD PROGRAM: 2026 ROUND

Community Priority Evaluation

What is Community Priority Evaluation?

Community Priority Evaluation (CPE) is an optional contention resolution mechanism available to those applying for a Community gTLD. If there are multiple applicants seeking the same string, Community Applicants can choose to participate in CPE for an additional fee. This evaluation is conducted by a third-party evaluator who assesses the application against specific criteria designed to determine the applicant's relationship with the identified community.

Evaluation Criteria:

1. The evaluator assesses the applicant's relationship with the identified community and examines how that community is organized and structured.
2. The evaluator determines whether the applied-for gTLD string is strongly and specifically related to the identified community in a meaningful way.
3. The evaluation includes a review of whether the applicant has proposed dedicated registration policies for registrants that are commensurate with the purpose of the identified community.
4. The evaluator verifies that the applicant has received written endorsement from one or more established institutions that legitimately represent the identified community.

If the Community Applicant successfully passes the evaluation, they are awarded priority status and can proceed to the next steps in the New gTLD Program. It is possible that there may be more than one Community Applicant for the same string. If both elect to go through CPE and prevail, they would proceed to an ICANN Auction. If the Community Applicant(s) choose not to participate in CPE or do not pass the evaluation, they must proceed to an ICANN Auction along with the other contending applicants in order to resolve contention. Applicants for new generic Top-Level Domains (gTLDs) must decide whether to apply for a **general** or **specialized** gTLD. A general gTLD application is one that does not fall into one of the specialized application categories and is subject to a standard set of defined requirements. Applications for specialized gTLDs have specific requirements based on the application, string, or applicant type.

Key concepts and takeaways

CPE Fee: Community applicants should understand that CPE requires an additional fee, which is determined by the evaluation panel, and must be paid prior to participating in the evaluation process. ICANN will provide fee invoicing as a pass-through mechanism for the vendor.

Timeline impacts: Applicants must be prepared to complete both RCE and CPE, which together can take approximately nine months, extending the timeline of their application journey.

RESOURCES

[Applicant Guidebook Module 5.4](#)

[CPE microsite](#), from 2012 round for reference

Registry Commitments Evaluation (RCE) Topic Overview (coming soon)

[New gTLD Program: 2026 Round Resources](#)

Application requirements: Applicants that identify their applications as representing a community will be asked to answer additional questions about the community and provide evidence that addresses all four evaluation criteria to assist the evaluation panel in making its determination.

Evaluation: CPE does not determine or validate "community status" in general terms. Any applicant can self-identify its application as a Community gTLD. CPE is a contention resolution mechanism and specifically determines whether that particular Community Application should receive priority over other applications contending for the same string. This is an important distinction that applicants must take into account when developing their strategy.

Community objections: CPE is a separate process, distinct from community objections, which can occur at an earlier stage in the application timeline. The outcome of any community objections may determine whether an application can continue in the New gTLD Program as a Community gTLD; however, this is distinct from CPE.

Why is CPE offered?

CPE serves as a crucial mechanism to protect community interests in the domain name system while ensuring fair competition. The evaluation process recognizes that certain communities have stronger claims to specific domain strings than commercial entities seeking the same names purely for profit. This process promotes the public interest by giving priority to applicants that show a clear connection to an established community linked to a particular string.

CPE establishes rigorous standards that applicants must meet and ensures that only applicants with demonstrated community relationships and governance structures can claim community priority, preventing abuse of the community designation for competitive advantage.

What kinds of organizations can participate?

Any applicant that has identified its application as a Community gTLD and finds itself in contention with other applications for the same string is eligible to participate in CPE. This includes a diverse range of community types and organizational structures because Community applications may also qualify as Geographic Names, Brand gTLDs, or government-related gTLDs.

The evaluation is particularly relevant for established institutions, cultural organizations, professional associations, religious groups, and other entities that represent clearly defined communities with shared interests, characteristics, or purposes. These applicants must demonstrate authority to represent the identified community and propose relevant policies for managing the domain.

How does CPE fit into the application process?

Evaluation Process and Timeline:

- CPE takes place after string evaluation is completed, when Community Applicants find themselves in contention.
- Community Applicants may choose to undergo CPE or proceed to an auction.
- In the event an applicant chooses to undergo CPE and fails, they will proceed to an auction.
- Before participating in CPE, applicants must complete the Registry Commitment Evaluation (RCE), which typically takes two to three months.
- RCE ensures that the applicant's proposed Community Registration Policies can be approved for inclusion in the Registry Agreement if the string proceeds to delegation.
- Following successful completion of RCE, the CPE process is expected to take approximately six months. During this period, the third-party evaluator conducts a comprehensive review of the application against the four main evaluation criteria cited above.

Interactive Evaluation Elements:

- Throughout the evaluation process, the panel may send clarifying questions to the applicant, which has twenty-one days to provide comprehensive responses.
- The panel may also conduct limited independent research deemed necessary to evaluate the application according to the criteria and verify the information provided by the applicant. As part of this research, the panel may consult with relevant experts to gain insight into highly specialized or localized communities.
- When such research occurs, the panel must disclose their findings to the applicant, which then has thirty days to respond before a final decision is rendered.

Post-Evaluation Procedures:

- Applications that successfully pass CPE and are no longer in contention can proceed directly to the next steps in the New gTLD Program applicant journey, including contracting and delegation.
- If multiple Community Applicants with the same string elect to go through CPE and prevail, they would proceed to ICANN Auction.
- Applications that do not pass CPE proceed to ICANN Auction along with other members of the contention set.
- Applications that fail CPE have the opportunity to file an evaluation challenge; note this is limited to demonstrating factual or procedural errors with appropriate documentation.