

NEW gTLD PROGRAM: 2026 ROUND

String Contention and Its Resolution

What is String Contention?

String contention occurs when multiple applicants apply for identical or confusingly similar generic top-level domain (gTLD) strings, including their allocatable variants. This situation creates competition between or among applicants for the same top-level domain name and requires formal resolution to ensure that only one application per contention set proceeds to delegation. The contention resolution process serves as a critical safeguard for avoiding user confusion in the gTLD space while maintaining Domain Name System (DNS) stability and integrity.

String contention can manifest in two forms: Direct contention and indirect contention.

1. Direct contention refers to strings that directly conflict with each other, such as two applications for the exact same string or variants thereof.
2. Indirect contention involves applications that become linked through a chain of conflicts, where if Application A conflicts with Application B, and Application B conflicts with Application C, then Applications A and C are considered to be in indirect contention even if they do not directly conflict with each other.

The ICANN Board introduced the concept of Replacement Strings to help reduce the likelihood of contention by allowing gTLD applicants to switch to an alternative string early in the process if their original string is found to be in contention. ([See Topic Overview on Replacement Strings.](#)) Additionally, the 2026 Round includes a singular/plural notification period, during which applications for singular and plural versions of the same word in the same language will be placed in contention if ICANN is properly notified and can verify the linguistic relationship. ([See Topic Overview on Community Input, Objections, and Appeals.](#))

Key concepts and takeaways

- Applicants must understand the concepts of direct and indirect contention, how and when contention sets are identified, and the implications to their gTLD applications.
- Applicants should understand contention resolution strategies and plan accordingly to use a Replacement String, opt for Community Priority Evaluation (fees apply), or submit a Brand String Change Request, as appropriate.
- Contention sets that are not resolved following withdrawals, CPE, a Brand String Change, or replacement string mechanisms will be subject to an ICANN New gTLD Auction to determine the prevailing application for a given contention set. Evidence that addresses all four evaluation criteria to assist the evaluation panel in making its determination.

RESOURCES

[Applicant Guidebook Module 5](#)

Contention Resolution FAQs (coming soon)

Challenges, Extended Evaluation, Clarifying Questions Topic Overview (coming soon)

[CPE Topic Overview](#)

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

What kinds of applications does String Contention apply?

All new gTLD applicants may potentially be subject to string contention regardless of their application type or intended use of the domain.

How are Contention Sets formed in the application process?

Contention sets may be identified at several checkpoints throughout the application process.

- **Reveal Day:** Applications are published publicly and applications for identical strings are placed in contention with each other.
- **String Confirmation Day:** Applied-for strings are published and identical strings remain in contention, though no new contention sets can be created at this stage due to the replacement string mechanism. (See Replacement String Topic Overview.)
- **Singular/Plural Notifications:** These may create new or updated contention sets if ICANN receives and subsequently confirms notification that two applied-for strings are singular and plural forms of the same word in the same language. If ICANN confirms that an applied-for string is the singular or plural version of an already delegated string, the new applied-for string cannot proceed.
- If an applicant files a **String Confusion Objection** against another application and the panel finds in favor of the objector by determining that user confusion is probable, both applications are placed in direct contention and referred to the resolution procedure. These objections can be based on visual similarity, audible similarity, or similarity in terms of the strings' meanings.
- **String Similarity Evaluation:** A panel assesses visual similarity across all applications and places strings that are evaluated to be visually confusingly similar into contention sets.

How are Contention Sets resolved in the application process?

Once contention sets have been firmly established, the applicant may voluntarily withdraw or seek resolution through one of several mechanisms.

- **Brand String Change:** Permits .Brand TLD applicants to append a term from their trademark registration to their applied-for string, provided that the term appears in the description of goods and services of the applicant's Trademark Registration or equivalent document, and the revised string does not create new contention or expand an existing contention set. This mechanism allows brand holders to proceed with an application for a desired string while avoiding contention.

- **Community Priority Evaluation (CPE):** Available only to qualifying Community Applications. Note that if multiple applicants in the same contention set pass CPE, they must proceed to an ICANN auction. (See CPE Topic Overview.)
- **ICANN New gTLD Auction:** Serves as the last-resort mechanism when other resolution methods are not available or were unsuccessful. This process uses an ascending-clock, second-price auction format where applicants submit increasingly higher bids. The winning applicant pays the amount of the second-highest bid rather than their own winning bid amount, and then moves forward to applicant review and, if successful, the contracting phase.

What are the communication restrictions?

- From Reveal Day until contention resolution is finalized, applicants are prohibited from discussing or negotiating settlement agreements or post-auction transfer arrangements in any manner with another applicant in contention for the same string regarding any contending strings.
- This prohibition extends to both direct communication and indirect communication through intermediaries, agents, or third parties.
- These restrictions are designed to prevent private resolution attempts, including private auctions, joint ventures, or any form of compensation agreements to influence withdrawal or alteration of competing applications.