



THE LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES

General Secretariat

Request for Information

**Management of the Internet Generic Top-Level
Domain: “.arab” and "عرب."**

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Deadline for submissions: Thursday 17 June 2010, 4:00 pm GMT

The address to submit responses to this document is:

The General Secretariat
The League of Arab States (LAS)
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In addition, all responses should be sent by e-mail to the following address:

ArabDomains@las.int

Responses should include:

1. The name of the responding entity
2. The name of the principal contact person
3. Full contact details (physical address, telephone number, fax number and email address)

The deadline for submissions is **4pm (GMT) on Thursday 17 June 2010**

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Any and all information obtained throughout the tendering process, which starts with this Request for Information, will be the sole property of the League of Arab States.

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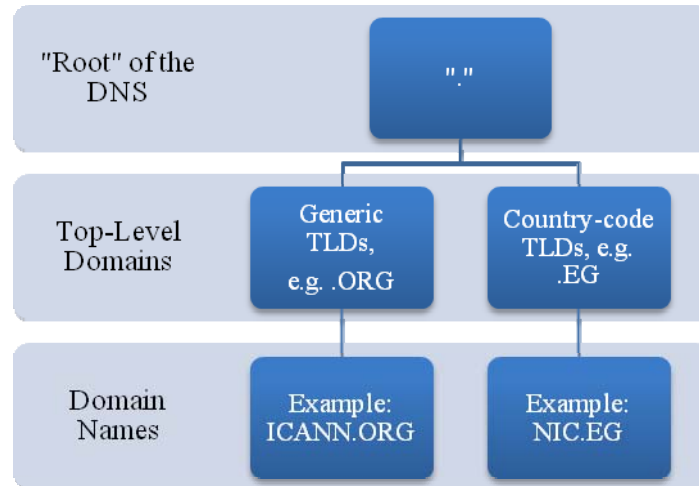
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I. OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

1. The League of Arab States (LAS) is currently finalizing its plans to apply for the generic top-level domains (gTLDs) “.arab” and “عرب.” and establish the registries pertaining to those gTLDs. This will facilitate Internet use for those who cannot deal with Latin script and will encourage and increase the Arabic content on the Internet.
2. The purpose of this Request For Information (RFI) is to gather ideas and validate proposed concepts to establish and run the domains in an appropriate way. LAS has decided to involve individuals, companies, organizations or government bodies and other interested parties to participate in enriching existing ideas and approaches that help in establishing the high-level organizational, structural, management, marketing, technical and financial functions of the intended registry for the “.arab” and “عرب.” TLDs.

II. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

3. Since the 1990s, accessing information on the Internet has been done through the use of domain names. A domain name is essentially a text string composed of the letters of the standard Latin script (the 26 letters “a” to “z”, the numbers “0” to “9” and the hyphen “-”). It is merely a user-friendly method of directing users to specific addresses on the Internet, using the Domain Name System (DNS). At the end of the 1990s, the management of, amongst other things, the DNS infrastructure has been entrusted to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), a not-for-profit organization having its headquarters in Marina del Rey, California.
4. The DNS is structured in a hierarchical manner, with at the top of the hierarchy the top-level domains or TLDs (such as “.ORG”, “.COM”, “.NET”, “.EG” and “.AE”), in which domain names can be registered at the second level (such as “ICANN.ORG”). Two types of top-level domains exist: generic TLDs (or gTLDs for short – essentially any TLD with three characters or more) and country-code TLDs (ccTLDs, attributed in accordance with the International Standardization Organization’s 3166 list). Where ICANN has policy-making authority in the gTLD space, such authority for the ccTLDs remains with the countries to which these TLDs are allocated.



5. From the beginning of DNS till now, 21 gTLDs have been approved by ICANN, about 18 whereof are actively managed. These gTLDs are:

| Initial gTLDs (as of 1985) | “2001” Round | “2003” Round |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •.COM •.NET •.ORG •.MIL •.EDU •.INT •.GOV | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •.INFO •.BIZ •.PRO •.NAME •.AERO •.COOP •.MUSEUM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •.ASIA •.TEL •.MOBI •.CAT •.TRAVEL •.JOBS •.POST |

In June 2008, the Board of Directors of ICANN has decided to liberalize the generic top-level domain space, allowing a potentially unlimited number of additional gTLDs to be added to the DNS.

6. Despite the wide adoption of the Internet by all cultures and languages, domain names (and domain name suffixes in particular) have preliminary continued to use the Latin script. This has led to various concerns and obstacles for many millions of Internet users who do not use the standard Latin script in their native language and who wish to access the Internet by using their own script. However, recently it became technically possible to use other scripts than standard Latin script in a domain name (both at the top and at the second level), by making use of so-called Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs).
7. In order to accommodate the above needs and requirements, ICANN’s Board of Directors has decided (i) to allow countries where an official language is not using standard Latin script to apply for their equivalent in their official script (which process is generally referred to as the IDN ccTLD Fast Track process) and (ii) to allow any entity or organization to apply for one or more generic TLDs, in standard Latin script or IDN (This process is generally referred to as the New gTLD process).

8. The draft requirements imposed by ICANN for the New gTLDs have been laid down in the Draft Application Guidebook (“DAG”), which is currently in its third iteration. ICANN is expected to release the fourth version of the DAG before its meeting in Brussels at the end of June 2010 and the final Applicant Guidebook by the end of this year.
9. During 2008-2009, LAS’ Arab Working Group on Domain Names and Internet Issues, conducted an initial assessment of the viability of establishing a domain name registry for the “.arab” and “عربي.” TLDs. See bibliography of relevant publications and Web sites at the end of this document.
10. In October 2009, the Executive Office of the Arab Telecommunications and Information Council of Ministers (EO-ATICM) at the League of Arab States (LAS) decided to apply for the allocation of the “.arab” gTLD and its equivalent in Arabic script “عرب.” (hereinafter referred to as the “Arab gTLDs”).¹
11. To this end, EO-ATICM decided to establish a Steering Committee, which will (i) develop a process whereby interested parties are invited to submit their proposals in order to execute some or all of the critical domain name registry operator’s functions, (ii) oversee the process for applying for the Arab gTLDs as soon as the Application Guidebook is finally approved and (iii) advise LAS in structuring and establishing the actual domain name registry operator under LAS’ supervision.
12. The General Secretariat and the Steering Committee, will be regularly in contact with ICANN, and other relevant bodies as necessary to ensure that LAS successfully applies for and acquires the Arab gTLDs and will be responsible for overseeing the management thereof to one or more suitable parties (or a consortium thereof).

III. SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

13. The Arab gTLD project involves the preparation for, the actual acquisition by LAS, and the implementation and management of the Arab gTLDs during the forthcoming New gTLD round, organized by ICANN.
14. The project has four stages:
 - (1) The **preparation stage**, which has already commenced and will end with the approval by ATICM of the Request for Proposal (RFP) document that will be drafted by the Steering Committee. The input to this RFI will be vital, as this will assist the Steering Committee to make a final recommendation to the LAS with respect to the high-level organizational, structural, management, marketing, technical and financial requirements successful candidate(s) need to comply with. As indicated above, the Steering Committee estimates that the RFP will be issued in Q3 of 2010;
 - (2) The **selection stage**, which will start with the issuance of the RFP document and will end with the execution of an agreement between LAS and the successful candidate(s), which is likely to take place between Q4 of 2010 and Q1 of 2011. As from the execution of such an agreement, the successful candidate(s) will become the “Arab gTLD Manager(s)” for

¹ The Executive Office approved ITU’s proposal to support LAS in the ICANN process of applying for the Arab gTLDs.

the purposes of this document (as it is possible that LAS will award the management of the two Arab gTLDs to two different parties);

- (3) The **gTLD acquisition stage**, which will start with the preparation of the application(s) for the Arab gTLDs, up until the execution of a final agreement between ICANN and LAS. However, LAS does not guarantee and/or warrant that ICANN will award any of the Arab gTLD(s) to LAS;
- (4) The **operational stage**, which will start immediately upon completion of the acquisition stage and will end at the time the agreement between ICANN and LAS for the respective Arab gTLD(s) is terminated by ICANN, or the agreement between LAS and the (respective) successful candidate is terminated in accordance with the terms and conditions to be laid down in such agreement.

15. This Request for Information (RFI) must be viewed as a critical step in the first phase: ensuring that LAS obtains sufficient information on how it should structure, govern, implement and supervise the management of the Arab gTLDs. Considering the fact that the main requirements that ICANN will impose upon future registries of gTLDs are more or less clear, the Steering Committee has decided – in the interest of time – to launch a Request for Information (RFI) process, whereby the Steering Committee aims to obtain:

- (i) an in-depth overview of the capabilities of the respondents to this RFI, who have shown an interest in participating in the establishment of the Arab gTLD domain name registry or registries within the framework of LAS;
- (ii) further guidance on the challenges of domain name registries in the context of ICANN’s New gTLD Program and how to overcome these challenges, considering the organizational model envisaged by LAS for the Arab gTLDs;
- (iii) an overview of the opportunities and risks, from an operational, marketing, technical and financial perspective, for the entity, entities or consortium of entities that will ultimately be selected by LAS to manage the Arab gTLDs, how to mitigate these risks and maximize these opportunities; and
- (iv) in particular, confirmation of, or suggested alternatives to, the operating, financial, marketing and business models currently envisaged by the Steering Committee.²

16. Furthermore, with this RFI, the Steering Committee intends to establish a communications channel with industry experts to bring to LAS’s attention any pertinent information or elements of policy that may affect the course of LAS’s gTLD project. It will also serve as a means to provide sufficient information to LAS and the Steering Committee in order to make an initial non-binding selection of potential candidates that may want to respond to the actual Request for Proposals (RFP) that will be issued by LAS and the Steering Committee in Q3 of 2010. In this respect, not only RFI respondents can bid for the RFP.

17. Although some relevant information and suggested responses are already available in the current third version of the DAG, the Steering Committee seeks to obtain practical input

² These have been described in greater detail in the “Preliminary Feasibility Study for the establishment of the domain name registry for the “.arab” and “عربي.” generic top level domains” that was published by UN-ESCWA, in 2009.

from the respondents with the objective to make the Arab gTLDs a success. This goes beyond the specific requirements laid down in the DAG, which are, in fact, baseline requirements. Therefore, the Steering Committee welcomes any input from respondents to this RFI to any specific question that may require additional care and attention by LAS and the Steering Committee.

18. Interested parties are requested to provide answers to all or part of the questions below in the best manner possible. For each category of questions below, interested parties are encouraged to state their reasoning as much as possible and are welcome to provide LAS with any available supporting data. The responses should follow the section titles and questions numbering as listed in this RFI. With no obligation from LAS side, parties who provided substantial input to this RFI within the timeframes set out above may possibly be invited to a meeting during Q3 2010 for this purpose, at which they will have the opportunity to engage in an open dialogue with the Steering Committee and receive further information on how LAS is going to proceed with the project.

IV. VISION AND STRATEGIC POSITIONING

19. The New gTLD Program will create a number of opportunities for consumers, businesses, organizations and governments within the Member States of the LAS and beyond to underline their identity using their own language and script. However, in order to effectively implement a successful and sustainable domain name registry operation, a number of hurdles and issues need to be overcome.
20. In particular, the Steering Committee would like to have the respondent's vision on the following aspects:
21. **Question 1:** What will be, in your view, the major challenges for new gTLD registries in general and for LAS in particular?
22. **Question 2:** How do you think these issues should be addressed by LAS, the future registry operators and parties involved?
23. **Question 3:** Which actions should the Arab gTLD Manager undertake in order to enhance its application for and the promotion and management of gTLDs, given the fact that potentially hundreds of New gTLDs will be approved in the next round of New gTLDs?
24. **Question 4:** What should the appropriate positioning of the Arab gTLD Manager and the Arab gTLDs be vis-à-vis the current ccTLDs of the member states? Should it provide for an alternative or an add-on? Please state the reasons for your answers and, depending on your answer, provide further insights on how such relationship should be handled?
25. **Question 5:** Should the Arab gTLD Manager work together with the ccTLDs in the region and, if so, why, how and on which issues? Please elaborate and justify your answers.

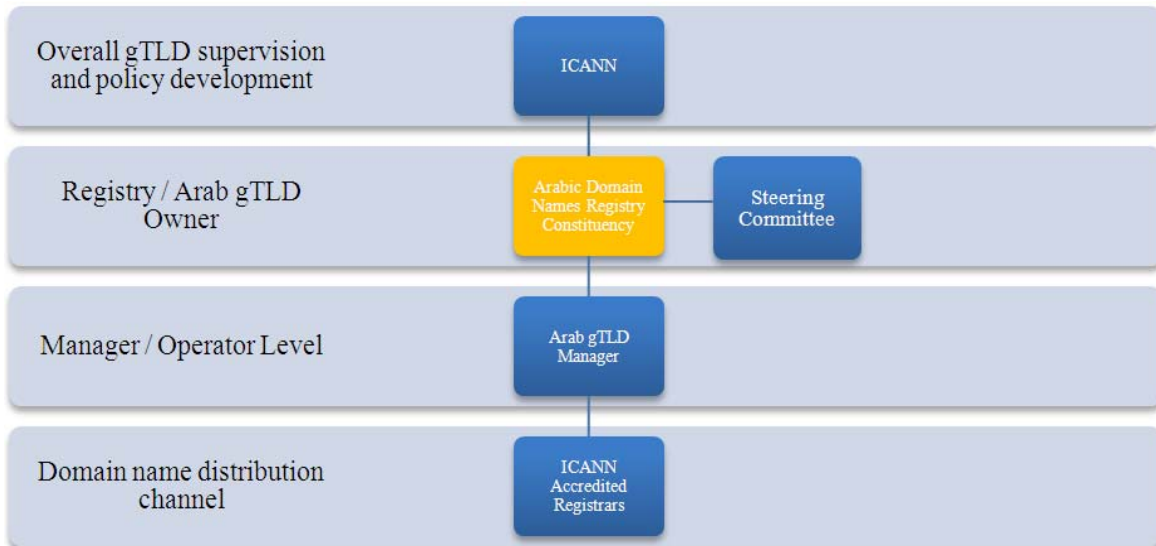
V. GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

26. In accordance with the decisions taken by the EO-ATICM, the LAS will be the entity that will enter into an agreement with ICANN following the award of one or both of the Arab gTLDs. The LAS will not be involved in the actual management of the domain name registry operator / manager, but will (i) set high-level policies for the Arab gTLDs following the recommendation of the Steering Committee, (ii) ensure that the Registry Operator / Manager acts in compliance with the contract entered into between ICANN and LAS and (iii) report to its Member States on all important aspects with respect to the operation of the Arab gTLDs and the achievement level of the objectives which would be set for the Arab gTLDs, at all levels : development of the TLDs, quantitative indicators, revenues, etc.
27. The role of the Steering Committee will be to advise the LAS with respect to the strategic vision regarding the Arab gTLDs and the selection of the successful candidate(s) and to advise both the LAS and the successful candidate(s) on the strategic, policy and management aspects of the Arab gTLDs.
28. The successful candidate must be an entity – commercial or not-for-profit – that either has already been established at the time of award of the gTLD(s) to LAS, or will be established shortly following this award. The successful candidate can carry out all the important management functions of the registry (administrative, technical, marketing, business, financial, compliance, etc.) by itself, or outsource some of these functions to one or more third parties.

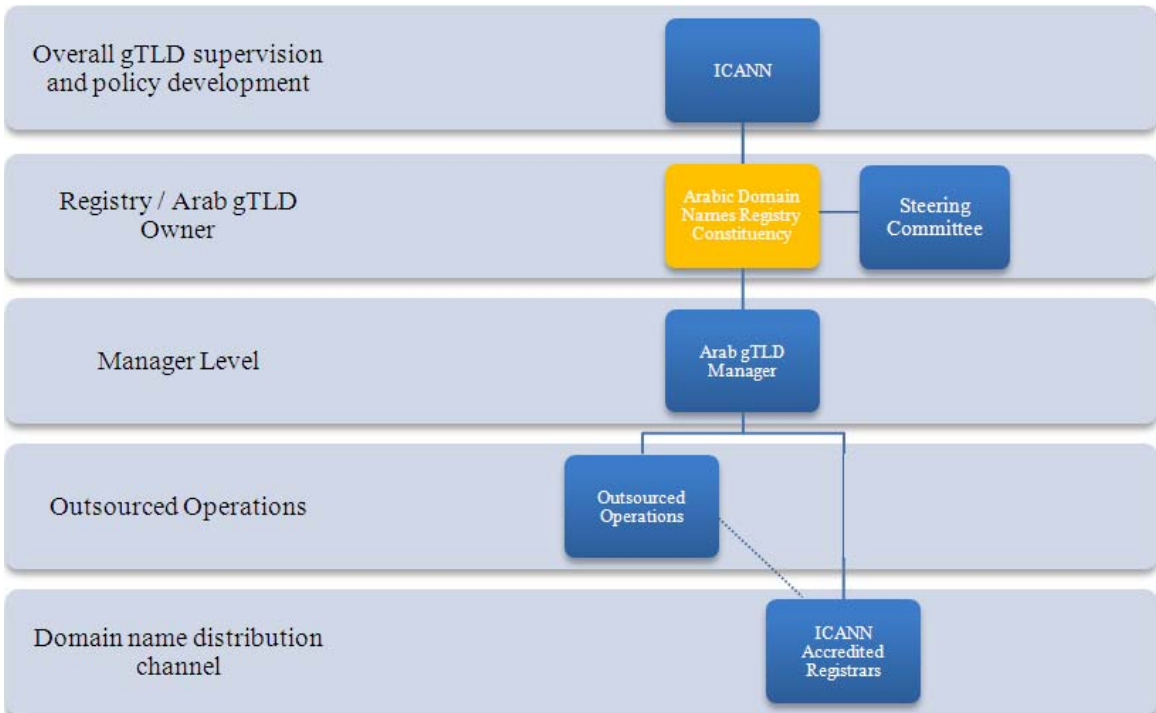
In any case, the successful candidate must (i) assist LAS and the Steering Committee in drafting and finalizing the application(s) for the Arab gTLDs in collaboration with ITU, (ii) meet all the requirements laid down in the final Applicant Guidebook and (iii) be able to make the necessary investments and fund its own operations.. In addition, the successful candidate(s) will be able to rely on the reasonable assistance provided by the Steering Committee in any other strategic, policy and management advice it may require throughout this project.

29. Currently, the Steering Committee is considering a number of options for managing and operating the Arab gTLDs, which includes, for example, the following two options:

Option 1:



Option 2:



30. **Question 6:** The respondent is required to provide its views on the above options for governance structures and suggest other alternatives where appropriate.
31. **Question 7:** A majority of core domain name registry functions may be entrusted to the Arab gTLD Manager, under a contract with LAS. Please provide your views on each of the above structures, considering this baseline requirement, please state the level and extent of involvement you would require from (i) the LAS and (ii) the Steering Committee, and (iii) the reasons for these recommendations. Furthermore, do you advise or recommend that the LAS would take one or more positions on the Board of Directors of the Arab gTLD Manager, and elaborate on the reasons for your recommendation. Furthermore, please advise on which (additional) roles you would see for the LAS and the Steering Committee.
32. **Question 8:** From governance, management and operational perspectives, each of the following groups (LAS Registry Constituency, Steering Committee, TLD Manager) should have a number of critical tasks in the structure proposed by the respondent. Define the proposed governance structure and operating model by indicating to whom of those parties do you propose to allocate the following tasks (please provide reasons for your answer, indicate which tasks should be a shared responsibility, and, if so, indicate how they should interact, you can add more tasks to the list if needed):
- a. Provision of overall oversight;
 - b. Policy development and implementation;
 - c. Technical operation of the domain name registry;
 - d. Marketing and promotion of the Arab gTLDs;
 - e. Contact with accredited registrars (including the obligation to encourage new entrants from the Arab region to become accredited by ICANN);
 - f. Signing contracts with registrars;
 - g. Administration of the domain name registry;
 - h. Operational aspects of running the domain name registry;
 - i. Reporting to ICANN;
 - j. Reporting to the representatives of the Member States of the LAS;
 - k. Documentation (in detail) of all the procedures concerning registry management (including the establishment phase and the operating phase).
 - l. Domain name dispute resolution;
 - m. Disputes between registrars;
 - n. Disputes between registrants and registrars; and
 - o. International representations and relations.

It is advisable to use a table representing a sort of a matrix to indicate the allocation of the above tasks to the three above-mentioned groups.

VI. POLICIES

33. Considering the fact that LAS intends to apply for “community-based” gTLDs (as defined in the DAG), a number of policies needs to be developed. The Steering Committee envisages the introduction of the following policies in the context of the Arab gTLDs:

34. **Question 9 - Eligibility Policy:** the Steering Committee envisages that domain names in the Arab gTLDs can be registered by any individual, company, organization or government body that is residing, established, or has its principal place of business or operations in one of the Member States of the LAS. Registrants that do not meet this requirement are entitled to appoint another individual, company, organization or government body that meets one of the above requirements, in which case such representative will be directly bound by any and all terms and conditions laid down in the registration terms and conditions for the respective TLD. From a technical perspective, this means that at least one of the three contacts of the domain name (registrant, technical, administrative) must meet the above eligibility requirements and an additional contact will be made available for this particular purpose.

The respondent is invited to provide its views on the above eligibility criteria and provide for suitable alternatives, if any, as well as for the reasons for such alternatives.

35. **Question 10 - Eligibility Enforcement Policy:** The Arab gTLD Manager will be required to perform regular verifications (on a sample basis) on whether domain name registrants actually comply with the above eligibility requirements, in accordance with the requirements of the DAG for community-based gTLDs.

The respondent is invited to provide practical guidelines and recommendations on how the Arab gTLD Manager should implement this policy and provide examples where necessary.

36. **Question 11 - Acceptable Use Policy:** Registrants will be required to use the domain names registered in the Arab gTLDs, as well as the content that is made publicly available thereunder (in the form of web pages or otherwise) in accordance with the Acceptable Use Policy. For instance, it will not be allowed for a “.arab” domain name to resolve into a website that is contrary to morality or public order.

Which role do you see for the Arab gTLD Manager to verify whether or not domain names in the Arab gTLDs are used in accordance with the Acceptable Use Policy? How do you propose this might be implemented from a practical perspective? Provide suggestions for other rules that could be included in such an Acceptable Use Policy, as well as the reasons for their inclusion along with overall recommendations in this respect.

37. **Question 12 - WHOIS Policy:** In accordance with the recommendations made by the ICANN’s Implementation Recommendation Team, the Arab gTLD Manager should operate a “thick” database, disallow proxy registrations, and display all contact information of the registrants and their designated representatives.³

³ See <http://www.icann.org/en/topics/new-gtlds/irt-final-report-trademark-protection-29may09-en.pdf>.

Please provide your views on the above requirement and provide recommendations on which measures (if any) the Arab gTLD Manager should put in place to respect the privacy / data protection rights of registrants.

38. **Question 13 - Restricted / Reserved Names:** the Steering Committee suggests the Arab gTLD Manager to put in place a list of Restricted and Reserved Names. Restricted Names are domain names that cannot be registered (for instance, because they are considered defamatory, or contrary to morality or public order); Reserved Names are domain names that are only to be allocated to one particular party prior to the opening of the registration of domain names (for instance, the <las.arab> domain name will be reserved to the League of Arab States).

How should the Arab gTLD Manager establish such lists? Which criteria are to be used? How should the Arab gTLD Manager ensure that all governments of the Member States have the ability to provide their input on these lists? What steps should be taken in order to protect geographical names at the second level (considering the recommendations made by the ICANN Government Advisory Committee in this respect)?⁴

39. **Questions 14 - Launch Policy:** The Steering Committee has suggested that the Arab gTLD Manager should establish a launch policy, whereby governments and holders of intellectual property will obtain the opportunity to register the names that correspond with the names of government bodies, geographical names, and names that are protected by an intellectual property right before the general availability of domain name registrations.

Which practical and policy issues do you see for the Arab gTLD Manager in this respect? How should these policies and domain name registration systems interact with other systems, such as the Trademark Clearinghouse proposed by the ICANN Board? Please provide reasons for your answer and suggest the approach to be taken by the Arab gTLD Manager.

40. **Question 15 - Registration Policy:** The LAS, the Steering Committee and the Arab gTLD Manager will work together in establishing a detailed domain name registration policy.

Please provide your views on how the following issues should be addressed in such policy: (i) the domain name allocation mechanisms (auction; first-come, first-served, etc.); (ii) representations and warranties by the domain name registrant and its registrar (considering the fact that the Arab gTLDs will be community-based gTLDs or possibly geographic TLD if appropriate); (iii) any potential restrictions to domain name trades and transfers; (iv) representations and warranties by the Arab gTLD Manager; (v) how should the Arab gTLD Manager deal with the possibility of user confusion if there would be no restrictions on the registration of very similar domain names, and in particular with character bundling in IDNs, or any other measures, should be adopted by the “.arab” gTLD Manager; (vi) any other important elements to be included in such policy.

41. **Question 16 - Dispute Resolution Policy:** Currently, the Uniform Dispute Resolution Policy (UDRP) governs disputes relating to domain names as an ICANN Consensus Policy. In addition, the ICANN Board has decided to implement a so-called Uniform Rapid Suspension mechanism.

⁴ See http://gac.icann.org/system/files/gTLD_principles_0.pdf.

Do you consider these policies to be sufficient, or do you think that additional dispute resolution mechanisms should be made available by the Arab gTLD Manager? Please provide reasons for your answer.

42. **Question 17 - Policy Development:** The ICANN DAG proposes that the registry of a community-based gTLD should develop its policies by using a consultative model.

How do you propose to set up, implement and manage such a consultation process in order to ensure that maximum input is obtained by the community the Arab gTLDs aim to represent?

VII. TECHNICAL ASPECTS

43. The DAG provides for baseline requirements regarding the technical systems of a gTLD domain name registry. Considering the fact that there are quite a number of back-end registry operators offering domain name registry services on the market, the Steering Committee has decided to go into more detail on the technical aspects in preparing the RFP.
44. **Question 18:** Which additional technical aspects do you deem necessary in order to make the Arab gTLDs a success, apart from the requirements laid down in the DAG, and to increase the chances of LAS proposal to secure the registration of the Arab gTLDs by ICANN?
45. **Question 19:** Which interfaces should be made available, apart from EPP (Extensible Provisioning Protocol) in order to facilitate the registration and/or management of domain name registrations and to whom should such interfaces be made available?
46. **Question 20:** Hosting of the technical platforms will need to be located in one or more of the LAS member countries. Does the location of the Arab gTLD Manager and/or the back-end registry operator (Option 2) matter and if so, why? Would it make a difference in your opinion if one or both of these functions are carried out inside or outside of the Arab region?

VIII. MARKETING

47. The new gTLDs will require significant marketing to raise users' awareness and to obtain a significant share of the new gTLD marketplace as well as the new IDN ccTLDs in the region. This is a new direction for the Internet and domain names and will also require various educational efforts for users to fully understand the potential of an IDN. LAS invites comments from interested parties regarding the marketing activities that should be carried out for the new Arab TLDs and IDNs in particular.
48. **Question 21:** Which types of domain names (“.arab” or the IDN equivalent "عرب.") will, in your view, appeal most to the Arabic Internet user?
49. **Question 22:** Do you think the LAS should apply for other gTLD strings as well (in other characters) and why?
50. **Question 23:** Since user adoption of new TLDs is key to its success, which efforts should be undertaken by LAS and the Arab gTLD Manager to raise awareness of the existence of the Arab gTLDs? Which channels should be used, and what budget need to be made available, etc. in order to raise such awareness?

51. **Question 24:** How should domain name registrations in the Arab gTLDs be launched in order to maximize their potential? Which parties, apart from domain name registrars, should be involved in order to maximize user adoption (*e.g.* governments, telecommunications companies, ccTLD operators, etc.)? What added value can they bring and why?
52. **Question 25:** What framework do you propose for sales channels? And given the limited number of registrars in the region, should the TLD Manager help in creating or support the creation of a network of registrars?

IX. FEES/PRICING

53. The new gTLDs must be priced in a manner that is both fair and competitive. The domain names must be priced attractively to ensure market adoption. The overriding goal of LAS in applying for these gTLDs is more cultural and social than commercial; therefore the Steering Committee currently envisages the Arab gTLD Manager will implement a cost-oriented fee schedule with a scheme based on revenue-split between LAS and the gTLD manager. LAS invites comments from interested parties regarding the pricing methodology of the new gTLDs.
54. **Question 26:** Should there be a pricing structure taking into consideration differences between Arab countries?
55. **Question 27:** Which business and revenue sharing models should be developed and implemented by the Arab gTLD Manager? Please provide details, including benefits and downsides.
56. **Question 28:** What do you think the likely range of prices and the costing structure of the Arab gTLD Manager will be and what level of funding will need to be secured by the Arab gTLD Manager in order to make the management of the Arab gTLDs sustainable and stable for the years to come?
57. **Question 29:** Which pricing models should be adopted by the Arab gTLD Manager in the different phases of the launch of the Arab gTLDs? *i.e.* Sunrise, Land Rush, General Availability, etc.
58. **Question 30:** Which price incentives should be given to registrars in order to make the Arab gTLDs competitive in the future gTLD marketplace (if any)?

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RELEVANT DOCUMENTS AND WEBSITES

1. “Preliminary Guidelines for the selection of the corporation/organization to establish the “.arab” registry and manage its functions”, LAS meeting of the Arab Working Group on Domain Names and Internet Issues, August 2009,
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2. “Preliminary Feasibility Study for the establishment of the domain name registry for the “.arab” and "عربي." generic top level domains”,
<http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/ictd-09-tech2.pdf>
3. Website of the Arabic Domain Names Pilot Project, <http://arabic-domains.org/>;
4. “Linguistic Guidelines for the Use of the Arabic Language in Internet Domains”,
<http://tools.ietf.org/html/rfc5564>

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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