

### Crowdsourcing internet governance: The case of ICANN's Strategy Panel on Multistakeholder Innovation

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#### 1. Introduction

Internet governance issues are diverse in scope and transnational in scale, making issue awareness and consensus building among relevant stakeholders a logistical leviathan. Historically, the identification and resolution of internet governance issues have remained within the purview of technical bodies (lead primarily by the private sector) and governments. Lack of centralized control over the internet created a situation where no single player has ultimate jurisdiction over the technical and political regulation of the web. This shift in power has resulted in creation of a range of multistakeholder forums to promote both discourse among various actors about internet governance issues and potential solutions, as well as binding decision-making. On the one end of the spectrum are non-binding organizations, such the Internet Governance Forum (IGF). Established in 2006, the IGF seeks to encourage deliberation about internet governance that embodies “international cooperation, collaboration, and implementation” among diverse stakeholders, albeit without binding or prescriptive outcomes (Napoli, 2008, p. 3).<sup>1</sup> On the other end of the spectrum are organizations that produce concrete binding rules and regulations, such as the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). Founded in 1998, in response to the growing complexity and escalating international criticism of informal, US-centric mechanisms for the management of internet names and number, ICANN remains one of the primary internet governance organizations, and also one that seeks to rely on multistakeholder processes (Mueller, 2002).

From their inception the legitimacy of multistakeholder forums has been questioned through criticism of stakeholder inequality, reification of hierarchies and corporate dominance, and, in non-binding settings, lack of impact on real-world decision-making (Raymond & DeNardis, 2015). Indeed participation in those, often technical, meetings around the globe requires both human and financial capital, and the need to put in these resources is often questionable, given that many multistakeholder deliberations lack tangible outcomes (Epstein, 2011; Mueller, 2010; Nonnecke, 2016). As such, multistakeholder forums dedicate substantive time and resources to the debate about the multistakeholder arrangements themselves and to hashing out policy language and the politics of participation (i.e., how stakeholders interact and their goals for participating; see Mueller, 2010, pp.114-122). In other words, questions of

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this manuscript, when used generically, the terms “stakeholders” refers to representatives from academia, civil society, government, intergovernmental organizations, and the private sector.

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openness, legitimacy, and accountability are part of both the form and the outcome of multistakeholder engagements around internet governance. Thus, forums such as the IGF and ICANN continue to seek improved processes that better ensure inclusive discourse, consensus building, and translation of internet governance discourse to legitimate real-world decisions (Auchard, 2014). As part of those efforts, there is growing interest in using online collaboration and crowdsourcing platforms for remote participation, ideation, and deliberation.

In order to better understand the value and impacts of crowdsourcing platforms in internet governance, we provide a case study of ICANN and its use of the IdeaScale platform to crowdsource strategies to support multistakeholderism within its organization. Conceptually, we contextualize our analysis in discussion of crowdsourcing and internet governance. First, we discuss the politics of participation and multistakeholderism. Then, we unpack the ideas behind recent attempts to utilize online collaboration and crowdsourcing platforms in internet governance deliberation. Empirically, we discuss the case of IdeaScale implementation by ICANN's Strategy Panel on Multistakeholder Innovation. We present our methods, data, and analysis of the design of the process and the platform used by ICANN in this engagement. We apply Aitamurto and Landemore's (2015) framework of five design principles to evaluate the processes and impacts of the design of IdeaScale on participant engagement, dynamics, and outcomes. We conclude with analyses and design recommendations for crowdsourcing systems used in internet governance deliberation.

### **2. Crowdsourcing Internet Governance**

Internet governance offers great potential for the use of technological means to enhance decision-making activities. First, the scope of internet governance issues is substantively broad (i.e., ranging from questions of management of critical internet resources, through questions of cybersecurity and intellectual property, to questions of privacy and online cultural expression) and it is inherently global. Thus, participation in internet governance requires both substantive knowledge of the issues as well as literacy and ability to engage in international deliberation (including funding for participation in physical meetings). Second, the complicated and interconnected nature of internet governance pushed its decision-making mechanisms from state-centric to a more distributed, multistakeholder model. The emergence of different multistakeholder forums, including the IGF, ICANN, and NetMundial, mark this shift. Ideally, these spaces require broad public participation for the sake of their own legitimacy, but their current practices are often criticized for lack of inclusiveness, replication of hierarchical relationships, dominance of corporate actors, and, as a result, avoidance of highly contested internet governance issues (Nonnecke, 2016; DeNardis, 2010, 2014). Finally, when it comes to multistakeholder engagement in internet governance, there is the question of legitimacy of various actors and their decisions. On the face of it, multistakeholderism is based in meritocracy. Yet, as criticism of multistakeholderism suggests, there is another layer of legitimation of both the actors and the arguments. This layer is rooted in the core

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of the internet governance community being an epistemic community with social, linguistic, and other barriers to participation that span beyond pure merit (Epstein, 2013).

Adding online modes of participation in internet governance deliberation could potentially scale and enhance participation. Hosting at least parts of the discussion online lowers the physical and financial barriers to participation, and the design of online participatory platforms also can lower the barrier of participatory literacy, both of which can potentially increase inclusivity and guide people through complex participatory processes (Shirky, 2008; Towne & Herbsleb, 2011). Digital tools also have the capacity to synergize disparate information streams and layer information, thus making it easier to follow the global discussion and delve into the intricacies of diverse substantive topics (Farina, Epstein, Heidt, & Newhart, 2014). Crowdsourcing platforms such as IdeaScale and AllOurIdeas allegedly level the playing field and enable historically underrepresented stakeholders (e.g., civil society stakeholders, developing country stakeholders) the opportunity to voice their concerns and influence public dialogue on policy framing and implementation.

### **2.1. Multistakeholderism & the Politics of Participation**

Despite their democratizing promise, appropriate design of crowdsourcing platforms for policymaking remains a challenge (Farina et al., 2014). The utility and effect of such platforms on policy decision-making hinges not only on best practices for their technical design, but also on how these design choices interact with existing participatory structures, practices, and goals. This is particularly challenging in multistakeholder environments, where participatory structures, practices, and goals are in continuous flux and are often the very subject of deliberation. For example, if the relationships and contributions of stakeholders are inherently hierarchical or stakeholders differ in their understanding of “rules of engagement,” utilization of a crowdsourcing platform may strengthen these inequalities and disconnects (Epstein, Newhart & Vernon, 2014). Thus, it is imperative to understand the politics of participation in these forums to ensure that design choices are adequately synced with the target objectives of multistakeholder engagements.

Multistakeholderism has become the dominant model for internet governance decision-making—at least in principle. The idea can be most directly linked to Paragraph 34 of the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society (ITU, 2005), which defines internet governance as “the development and application by governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet.” This is a broad and rather vague definition—a result of a diplomatic compromise. In its idealized interpretation, multistakeholderism refers to equal participation of state and non-state actors in internet-related policy deliberation and standard setting activities. The practice of multistakeholderism, however, has been criticized as lacking in

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transparency and inclusivity. Some claim it disguises established hierarchies (Nonnecke, 2016; DeNardis, 2014), Western (particularly US) and corporate dominance (Hill, 2013), and diverts resources from addressing critical internet governance questions (DeNardis, 2010). Others challenge the notion of equality of stakeholders, suggesting that some actors, especially nation states, are the ultimate policy decision-makers, which may fulfill their multistakeholder obligation through consultation with other actors (Doria, 2013).

The criticism of multistakeholderism is rooted in how politics of participation play out in multistakeholder environments. Discussion of participation, as Croft and Beresford (1992) argue, is part of a broader debate about the changing nature of democracy, particularly the shift from representative to direct and participatory forms. This is particularly emphasized in the multistakeholder approach, which at least in theory, views all stakeholders as legitimate participants in policy deliberation. Here, participation is not merely access to decision-making processes, but also to existing knowledge and expertise (Croft and Beresford, 1992). This is an important distinction to make if one aspires to move from equating access to democratic processes (such as voting) with effective engagement in often technocratic and expertise-intensive processes of governance and policymaking (Farina, Newhart & Heidt, 2012). By focusing primarily on access, participatory processes in policymaking continue to marginalize actors from the geographical, political, and ideological peripheries (Croft and Beresford, 1992).

Fundamentally, politics of participation are about power. Effectively engaging in policy deliberation implies the ability of influencing decision-making processes; more broadly, it affects institutional arrangements that enable or inhibit certain forms of inclusion, exclusion, and participation. Similarly, lack of voices and engagement that expand, question or challenge practices, discourses or institutional arrangements—all facets of politics of participation—reify existing arrangements of power. Taken together, those politics are often viewed as a zero-sum game where opening up decision-making processes to broader participation is viewed as threatening to established power arrangements, institutions, and individual powerbrokers (Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; Croft and Beresford, 1992). Such perception is unfortunate, given growing evidence that increased public participation may yield better policy outcomes (McCubbins, 2006) and stronger polity (Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; Cramton, 1972)

In his analysis of the IGF, Mueller (2010) dissected politics of participation in consultative multistakeholder environments into politics of representation, politics of agenda setting, and politics of principles. Here, politics of representation play out through each stakeholder group trying to maximize its nominal presence in the deliberative or a decision-making process; politics of agenda setting focus on priming and framing policy issues for deliberation; and politics of principles are at the core of a struggle over the nature of internet governance and public participation in it. While Mueller's typology is based on analysis of the IGF, it

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highlights trends transferable to other internet governance deliberation environments.

In fact, Mueller's (2010) typology demarcates at least two layers for short-term empirical investigation—that of participation and that of agenda setting (with politics of principles lending themselves to longitudinal analysis). Indeed, apparent balance across stakeholder groups became one of the most efficient mechanisms of legitimation in an environment where multistakeholderism is one of the main organizing principles, even though using sector specific stakeholder groups as a basis for representation plays into the zero-sum game view of participation (Epstein, 2013). Focusing on participation metrics, however, obscures a harder-to-measure aspect of plurality of ideas in multistakeholder deliberations. After all, the drive for inclusivity is aimed not only at increasing buy-in, but also at increasing the range of considered concerns and solutions. The focus on agenda setting is a focus on short-term tangible outcomes of a deliberative process—outcomes that eventually grow into institutionalized forms of allowing some forms of participation and stifling others.

Online tools in this context can play a mediating role by encoding principles of participation into technical and procedural artifacts. On the one hand, the emerging question is to what extent online tools can increase participation by traditionally underrepresented stakeholder groups and actors. More specifically, do online tools, such as IdeaScale, recreate existing hierarchies and help maintain the boundaries of a community of practice? Or do they help level the playing field and push the boundaries of what is considered possible and legitimate participation? On the other hand, there is an important question about the role of online engagement arrangements in facilitation of the flow of new ideas, beyond what is available through already established face-to-face meetings and crude online tools such as listservs. Do participatory platforms contribute to reinforcement of echo-chambers that amplify already dominant voices? Or do they enable presentation of a new agenda, unavailable to the community through other means? In answering these questions, discussion of the platform design features is probably the most overlooked in the mainstream internet governance literature.

### **2.2. Crowdsourcing Platforms in Internet Governance**

Despite limited attention being paid explicitly to questions of the impacts of process and platform design, there is growing experimentation in the use of crowdsourcing tools in internet governance debates. In 2013, ICANN utilized the crowdsourcing platform IdeaScale to crowdsource strategies to promote multistakeholderism (IdeaScale, 2016). NetMundial used AllOurIdeas to crowdsource priority policy issues in preparation for its face-to-face meeting in April 2014 and to inform its position paper presented to the IGF in 2015 (NETMundial, 2014). In 2015, Diplo Foundation used Conceptboard to

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crowdsource feedback on e-participation tactics in internet governance (Diplo, 2016).

Crowdsourcing platforms for policymaking come in primarily two versions: platforms that seek inclusive, large-scale collection of ideas and platforms that are targeted toward deliberation on a specific issue (Aitamurto & Landemore, 2015). Platforms seeking large-scale ideation may be more inclusive in their ability to gather a wide variety of ideas across stakeholder groups (e.g., IdeaScale, AllOurIdeas), while deliberation platforms may be better positioned to enable in-depth analysis on a particular topic by requesting participants justify their position with evidentiary support (e.g., Deliberatorium). An ideal crowdsourcing platform for policymaking would combine aspects of both: inclusivity and deliberation (ibid.)

During the 2014 IGF in Istanbul, Turkey, a dedicated workshop was held to explore how crowdsourcing platforms should be designed to help the IGF “overcome rather than increase barriers to inclusion” (IGF, 2014). Panelists expressed concerns that crowdsourcing platforms may not be inclusive and may not enable necessary deliberation to translate dialogue into tangible outcomes. Since crowdsourcing systems are online, stakeholders with limited or no internet connectivity will be at a disadvantage in fully engaging in the crowdsourcing process. Further, once participants have submitted their feedback through an online platform, concerns were raised on how the information is validated, synthesized, and presented back to key decision-makers. The panel called for the formation of a “human rights-based approach” to internet governance crowdsourcing whereby real and full participation is enabled among all stakeholders, pointing out that some aspects of the crowdsourcing process may need to be conducted offline and that procedures of engagement should be clearly defined.

Radu, Zingales, & Calandro (2015) evaluated the impacts of two crowdsourcing platforms for internet governance: ICANN’s use of the IdeaScale platform to crowdsource new tactics for multistakeholder participation in internet governance and NetMundial’s use of AllOurIdeas on a dedicated crowdsourcing website (netmundial.br) to collect public feedback on the “Principles of Internet governance” and to co-create a “Roadmap for the evolution of the internet governance ecosystem” (p. 371). In their study, Radu, Zingales, and Calandro focused primarily on participation using a framework consisting of three main factors affecting full, equitable crowdsourcing: (1) existence of substantial community interest to leverage wide expertise; (2) establishment of a legitimate structure for the evaluation of contributions; and (3) institutionalization of the modes of crowdsourcing within internet governance. Their paper offers an interesting, albeit preliminary, analysis of the two crowdsourcing activities highlighting the need for a comprehensive design of the participatory process, including definition of rules for collecting and prioritizing feedback and identifying technical and design structures of online crowdsourcing platforms to decrease

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barriers of inclusion. The analysis also highlights the digital divide as a major barrier to participation in terms of both access and skills. As such the recommendations of the authors are mostly for institutional change and of the generic character, such as the need for transparent processes for evaluation of contributions, continuous communication with participants, and establishment of organizational functions dedicated to facilitation of public engagement. At the same time, the paper does not engage in discussion of affordances and configuration of the tools used for crowdsourcing. Our analysis in this paper aims to fill that gap.

Aitamurto and Landemore (2015) offer a useful framework for assessing both the social and the technical aspects of crowdsourcing in policymaking. They outline five design principles that impact the effectiveness of crowdsourced policymaking processes and platforms, including: accountability, inclusiveness, transparency, modularity, and synthesis. *Accountability* refers to the ability to communicate and justify decisions and actions emerging from crowdsourcing processes and platforms. *Inclusiveness* is evaluated on ability to engage participants from diverse backgrounds and *transparency* is contingent on the openness of processes and platforms for collecting, synthesizing, and evaluating participant contributions. In order to ensure participants understand the crowdsourced policymaking process, the *modularity* of policymaking processes (i.e., the sequence of tasks) must be clearly communicated and the *synthesis* of these tasks should be presented to participants during and after implementation. In other words, in terms of politics of participation, politics of representation play out through enactment of the principle of inclusiveness, politics of agenda setting through enactment of principles of modularity and synthesis, and politics of principles play out through enactment of principles of accountability and transparency.

### 3. Methods

In this paper we employ a single case embedded case study design (Yin, 1994) to analyze the process of crowdsourcing strategies to support multistakeholderism within ICANN and the use of the IdeaScale platform for that purpose. Our rationale for choosing a single case design is two-fold. First, within the context of internet governance multistakeholder engagements—particularly within ICANN—the constellation of the use of a dedicated platform and the presence of a team of researchers, who are outsiders to ICANN's community, to think through, design, and conduct the ideation process, constitutes a unique case. Second, being the first systematic attempt to experiment with forms of online and hybrid engagement within ICANN, at least in its recent history, this engagement offers a revelatory case for introducing a rather radical innovation into an organization with established participatory practices. Our decision to focus on an embedded design stems from our focus on a number of units of analysis. While our macro goal is to characterize the engagement process as a

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whole, we aim to do that through the analysis of procedural elements and the technical design and configuration of the IdeaScale platform.

In the analysis presented below we rely primarily on formal documentation of the process. Those include (a) transcripts of five ICANN meetings that took place between November 2013 and May 2014 where the topic of multistakeholder innovation was explicitly addressed; (b) the final report of the Strategy Panel on ICANN Multistakeholder Innovation and (c) supplemental materials that were published during the Panel's work;<sup>2</sup> (d) the setup of the consultation on IdeaScale and the comments received in the process;<sup>3</sup> and (e) blogposts published by the organizers throughout the consultative period and the preparation of the final report.<sup>4</sup> All the texts were read both inductively and through the lens of Aitamurto and Landemore's five design principles of crowdsourced policymaking process and platform design, which we also use for the presentation of our results. We utilize qualitative document analysis to enable "discovery and description, including searching for contexts, underlying meanings, patterns, and processes" (Altheide, Coyle, DeVriese, & Schneider, 2008, p. 128).

### 4. The case: ICANN & IdeaScale

#### 4.1. Overview of ICANN & the Politics of Participation

Since 1998, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), a U.S.-based non-profit corporation, has overseen the management of critical internet features, including the domain name system (DNS) and internet protocol addresses (often referred to as the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority—or IANA functions). The United States Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) formally provided oversight over ICANN's role in the IANA functions—an arrangement that ended in October 2016. From the beginning, ICANN has faced criticism and questions regarding its legitimacy both from its own community and from the outside world. ICANN's community voiced criticism of the lack of transparency, accountability and the undue influence of the board and individual state and private sector actors. Critics from the outside questioned the legitimacy of the organization because of IANA functions falling contractually under the purview of the U.S. government, and for its reliance on the multistakeholder model or the way it was implemented within the organization, which they viewed as dominated by the private sector at expense of sovereign states. (Mueller, 2002; Dutton, 2016). The latter criticism grew in importance as the agreement between ICANN and the U.S. government approached its expiration (Hill, 2016).

While ICANN's primary role is to oversee technical IANA functions, overseeing these functions gave ICANN control over not only technical but also public policy decisions. For example, ICANN has the authority to determine whether and how generic top-level domain (gTLD) names (e.g., .apple, .amazon, .xxx, .halal)

2 Transcripts, reports, and supplemental materials are available at: <https://www.icann.org/resources/pages/multistakeholder-innovation-2013-10-11-en>

3 The archived version of the IdeaScale implementation can be found at: <http://thegovlab.ideascale.com/>

4 The posts are aggregated on the organizers' blog under the tag #WeCANN: <http://thegovlab.org/tag/wecann/>

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should be added or how to handle complaints of trademark infringement on second-level domain names (e.g., the singer Madonna’s dispute over madonna.com) (Weinberg, 2000). Because of the blurred lines between technical and public policy decision-making, ICANN has sought to bolster its legitimacy through public consultation on proposed decisions, inclusion of the public in voting for its At-Large Directors, and independent reviews of its decisions.

Even though ICANN has sought multistakeholderism and inclusivity, it has been criticized in terms of politics of representation and agenda setting for not exercising better representation, more openness, and incorporation of community feedback (Palfrey et al., 2003; ICANN, 2014). ICANN hosts public forums during its meetings in order to provide its community with “the opportunity to make comments and ask questions on the main topics at each meeting directly to the Board and in front of the rest of the community” (ICANN, 2015). These public forums have been found to provide “an unfair advantage to those participants who have the time and resources to attend ICANN meetings” and tend to favor “incumbent” participants who have a longstanding role within ICANN, leaving little to no room for alternative or new voices (ICANN, 2014). The public forums have utilized remote participation tools (e.g., Twitter, Adobe Connect, Facebook), but these tools have been found to be ill equipped to foster dynamic engagement between all participants, which, again, exacerbates the influence of incumbents.

When in March 2014, NTIA announced its decision to relinquish control over ICANN and the IANA functions, support and enhancement of the multistakeholder model, was one of the four main contingencies for such transition (NTIA, 2014). In fact, NTIA requested ICANN convene stakeholders to develop a proposal for the transition of NTIA’s oversight to a multistakeholder governance model (NTIA, 2014). On the one hand, such request affirmed the multistakeholder approach as a pivotal principle for the politics of participation in ICANN, but at the same time, it left the organization and the ICANN community to sort out the norms and practices that would underpin and enact this principle. Earlier, in September 2013, Prof. Beth Noveck, Director of the Governance Lab (GovLab)<sup>5</sup> at New York University, was appointed to chair the ICANN Strategy Panel on Multistakeholder Innovation. The Panel launched a public crowdsourcing process through the IdeaScale platform to capture insights on best practices for ensuring multistakeholder governance within ICANN. In the following section we discuss implementation of the IdeaScale platform within ICANN’s crowdsourcing experiment for multistakeholder engagement.

**4.2. ICANN Crowdsourcing Experiment for Multistakeholder Engagement**  
Launched in November 2013 through the ICANN Strategy Panel on Multistakeholder Innovation, the IdeaScale platform was utilized to crowdsource ideas and feedback on proposals for increasing multistakeholder engagement in ICANN (see Figure 1). The IdeaScale implementation sought “suggestions for

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<sup>5</sup> The GovLab seeks to “strengthen the ability of institutions – including but not limited to governments – and people to work more openly, collaboratively, effectively and legitimately to make better decisions and solve public problems” (see <http://www.thegovlab.org/about.html>)

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new and innovative techniques, strategies, tools, technologies, platforms and structures that ICANN should or should not adopt” (GovLab, 2013a). In her November 19, 2013 initial announcement and call for participation, Beth Noveck described the process as consisting of three stages: the first stage included online idea solicitation via IdeaScale; the second stage included gathering more in-depth public evaluation, comments, and reviews on proposal ideas submitted through IdeaScale; and the third stage facilitated collaborative drafting and editing of proposals on a GovLab Wikipage before submission to ICANN (GovLab, 2013a).<sup>6</sup>

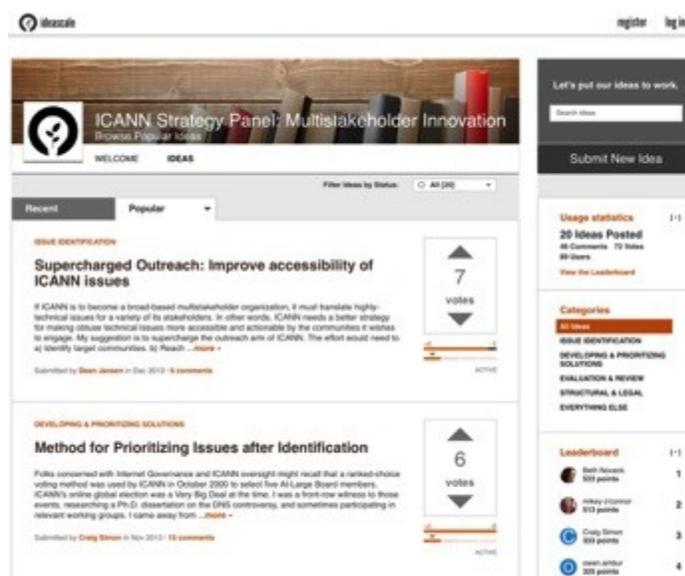


Figure 1. User Interface of IdeaScale ICANN Strategy Panel: Multistakeholder Innovation (Source: thegovlab.ideascale.com)

In stage one, proposals for how ICANN could increase multistakeholder processes were collected through IdeaScale from November 19 to December 31, 2013. While the utilization of IdeaScale was meant to garner widespread global participation over the six-week period, only 20 proposals were posted, receiving 46 comments and 72 votes out of a total of 89 participants. It appears that the majority of the 20 proposals were submitted by members of the Panel or by individuals who were already strongly affiliated with ICANN. The top-rated proposals included suggestions for creating clear and concise methods for communicating complex technical issues to a broad range of stakeholders, utilizing voting systems to enable issue prioritization, and employing collaborative drafting platforms for crowdsourced policymaking (ICANN, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> According to the formal documents submitted by the ICANN Strategy Panel on Multistakeholder Innovation, the collaborative drafting and editing of proposals was conducted on the GovLab Wikipage before submission to ICANN, but from available documentation it is not clear whether this stage was implemented.

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In stage two, 16 proposal ideas were presented through the GovLab Blog to gather public feedback from late January to late February 2014. The 16 proposals received 9 comments on the GovLab Blog, all from the same individual. The GovLab Blog also indicated that participants could make line-by-line annotations via a plug-in; however, this feature does not appear to have been utilized on the 16 proposals posted to the GovLab Blog or has since been disabled, hiding the comments from public view. A final summary proposal was presented to ICANN in May 2014 outlining the 16 proposals drawn from the initial 20 proposals posted to IdeaScale, the expertise of the ICANN Strategy Panel, and from “interviews and conversations conducted with ICANN insiders and through independent research” (ICANN, 2014, p. 11). Furthermore, the conveners did gather feedback on the 16 proposals from domain experts and five other ICANN committees/councils. Comments from the five ICANN committees/councils were provided for each of the 16 proposals in the final public report to ICANN (see ICANN, 2014).

### 5. Analysis

The ICANN Strategy Panel on Multistakeholder Innovation sought to gather broad feedback on ways ICANN could innovate with tools and process of stakeholder engagement to improve its decision-making and increase the legitimacy and acceptance of its decisions and processes (ICANN, 2013). In this section we apply Aitamurto and Landemore’s (2015) framework to assess both the social and the technical aspects of accountability, inclusiveness, transparency, modularity, and synthesis to evaluate the crowdsourcing process and design of the IdeaScale platform as a vehicle of engagement in policymaking. In our analysis of each of principle we separate its application to the process of engagement and to the affordances and configuration of IdeaScale as a tool. We are maintaining this separation for analytical purposes, but it is important to note that the two are inherently interrelated and should be considered together.

#### 5.1. Accountability

Accountability refers to the ability to communicate and justify decisions and actions emerging from crowdsourcing processes and platforms. In this context, we evaluate whether the process and platform enabled open communication and evaluation of proposals and clearly communicated the process by which final recommendations were achieved.

*Process:* The crowdsourcing of multistakeholder ideas for ICANN sought accountability by communicating emerging insights on the GovLab blog and encouraging continued participation through IdeaScale. The Panel held five public consultations through ICANN and allowed the public to comment on the proposals via the GovLab Blog. The 16 proposals were evaluated by five ICANN committees and two domain experts: Prof. Sam Lanfranco (York University) and Chuck Gomes (Vice President of Policy and Compliance at Verisign and liaison to ICANN) (see ICANN, 2014). The conveners, however, did not clearly

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communicate how they evaluated and edited the 20 IdeaScale proposals into the final report of 16 proposals presented in their final report.

*Platform:* The IdeaScale platform enabled horizontal accountability between participants. Each participant could see and evaluate all proposals submitted to the system as well as the commentary received from the public. The ability to see and evaluate all other proposals, coupled with the availability of historical record of the online consultation, contributes to both transparency and accountability of the engagement process. At the same time, accountability was limited by the fact that participants on the platform were able to use pseudonyms, thus anonymizing their interventions.

### 5.2 Inclusiveness

The inclusiveness of process and platform is evaluated on whether participants from diverse backgrounds were engaged. In the case of evaluating the IdeaScale implementation, we evaluate whether the process and platform enabled meaningful contributions from typically underrepresented stakeholders in ICANN processes (e.g., civil society and developing country stakeholders).

*Process:* The ICANN crowdsourcing experiment sought widespread involvement from diverse stakeholders. An initial consultation was held during the ICANN 48 meeting in Buenos Aires, Argentina where the three-stage process of the multistakeholder engagement process was discussed (GovLab, 2013b; Radu Zingales, & Calandro, 2015). Additionally, outreach campaigns including social media, videos, and a blog post published to Govlab.org were developed to encourage widespread participation over a six-week period. However, only 20 proposals were submitted on IdeaScale, most of which were posted by the Panel members themselves or by individuals affiliated with ICANN. The proposals received 46 comments and 72 votes out of a total of 89 participants. The IdeaScale platform does not collect demographic information (e.g., gender, age, location, occupation) nor does it require participants to use their real names. Thus, complete insight into who participated in the IdeaScale implementation is limited. Additionally, more information on outreach efforts to gather participants is needed in order to better understand the inclusive nature of the process as a whole.

*Platform:* There are two main facets of the IdeaScale platform that contribute to the principle of inclusiveness. First, in terms of a physical accessibility of the platform, IdeaScale is cross-platform (i.e., mobile, tablet, desktop) and cloud-based. As such it allows participation across devices, but requires internet connection in order to participate. Since proposal ideas could be captured during the face-to-face ICANN 48 meeting, there was opportunity for individuals with limited or no internet access to contribute their ideas. In addition, engagement on an online platform requires a degree of digital literacy. While one could expect the community affiliated with ICANN to have greater than average online skills, there is no data to support or undermine this assumption.

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Second, in terms of linguistic accessibility, while the implementation was intended to be transnational in scope and open to stakeholders across geographic boundaries, the platform interface, all the proposals, instructions, as well as comments submitted to IdeaScale, were in English. The platform itself supports concurrent use of up to 36 languages, but it was not configured to do so and only some of the input documents were translated. Taken together, these observations call into question whether non-English speaking stakeholders were indeed included in the consultation. And lastly, concerns were voiced during the Panel's consultation that ICANN processes tend to be hierarchical and that the IdeaScale consultation process and platform itself may in fact strengthen the power and influence of incumbents on policy discourse and decision-making (ICANN, 2013).

### 5.3. Transparency

The level of transparency afforded by the process and platform is evaluated on the clear communication of how the Panel and the IdeaScale platform conducted the collection, synthesis, and evaluation of participant contributions.

*Process:* Drawing on the Panel's final report and transcripts from public consultations and reporting through ICANN, the ICANN crowdsourcing experiment for multistakeholder engagement sought transparency at all levels. The experiment started with a public discussion at ICANN 48 in Buenos Aires, Argentina and the processes for collecting, analyzing, and communicating insights from the crowdsourcing were provided on the ICANN website and the GovLab Blog. At the same time, the Panel indicated in their final report that they utilized their own expertise and "interviews and conversations conducted with ICANN insiders and through independent research" to construct the final 16 proposals submitted to ICANN (ICANN, 2014, p. 11). This latter part is opaque and the process could have had greater transparency if the use of the Panel's and ICANN insiders' expertise was clearly articulated and the evaluation criteria were presented from the outset (e.g., evaluation on practicality of proposal, novelty, potential for widespread impact).

*Platform:* The configuration of the IdeaScale platform used in this consultation offered a comprehensive and openly accessible capture of the online exchanges around proposals. As such, it enabled both horizontal and vertical transparencies. All participants could see and evaluate each other's contributions and there was no visible or functional distinction between conveners and participants in their interactions on the platform. The platform does allow private communication among participants, but we have no data to assess the extent to which this feature was utilized. At the same time, transparency was inhibited in part because participants did not need to use their real names or indicate which stakeholder group they represented.

### 5.4. Modularity

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Establishing and communicating the modularity of a crowdsourcing implementation enables the clear communication of steps and expectations of the process and platform. Understanding the sequence of tasks enables participants to know when and how to participate and allows newcomers to contribute in meaningful ways later in the process.

*Process:* The process encompassed three stages that were clearly communicated on the ICANN website and the GovLab Blog. Stage one included crowdsourcing ideas on IdeaScale for multistakeholder processes that should be implemented in ICANN; the second stage included gathering more in-depth public evaluation, comments, and reviews on proposal ideas on the GovLab Blog and through review by five ICANN committees and two external reviewers; and the third stage facilitated collaborative drafting and editing of proposals on a GovLab Wikipage before submission to ICANN. It is unclear, however, whether all stages were implemented as planned. Such lack of clarity may be detrimental in future attempts to communicate the process and expectation of similar processes in the future.

*Platform:* The IdeaScale platform fundamentally lacks affordances for modularity. In its current form, the platform is well suited for collection of ideas and feedback on those ideas, but it does not have ways of communicating how those ideas and evaluations feed into the broader process of decision-making (and its designers may not have such aspirations). This particular implementation did not clearly communicate the three-stage crowdsourcing process that was presented in the face-to-face meetings. Despite its limited affordances, the explanations of the process on platform could have included an outline of the three stages as well as recommendations to participants on how to evaluate others' proposals (e.g., practicality, novelty, impact) and how to comment on those proposals effectively. Furthermore, stage one was conducted on IdeaScale and stages two and three were conducted on the GovLab Blog. More clarity about the integration between the tools and stages could have enabled more effective participation and engagement among diverse participants throughout the three stages.

### **5.5. Synthesis**

Crowdsourcing processes require synthesis of insights to better ensure applicability and implementation. We evaluate the process by which the conveners synthesized suggestions submitted to IdeaScale and whether the platform enabled participants to synthesize ideas and communicate emerging topics.

*Process:* After the conclusion of each stage, the conveners analyzed, synthesized, and publicized the findings on the ICANN website and on the GovLab Blog. While the formal documents do not offer clarity about the actual process, procedures, and criteria used in synthesizing the input, the periodic reports and blog posts offer participants the opportunity to comment on emerging insights. We do not know, however, the extent of outreach conducted at those

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stages (e.g. whether commenters on IdeaScale were invited to review and comment on conveners' understanding and interpretation of the original proposals).

*Platform:* The IdeaScale platform enabled keyword identification from proposals posted. The keyword tags were displayed in a word cloud on the right-hand side of the platform with larger words representing a more frequently discussed theme (see Figure 2). Participants could also tag their own proposal within five predetermined categories: (1) issue identification, (2) developing & prioritizing solutions, (3) evaluation & review, (4) structural and legal, and (5) everything else. The platform also displayed the popularity of each proposal by displaying the up- and down-votes each had received. The platform also allowed easy viewing of the top-rated proposals. One drawback is that comments, which could have been a synthesis of an idea or further explanation, could not receive an up- or a down-vote. The platform also clustered similar proposals together and showed the current popularity ranking and comment count.

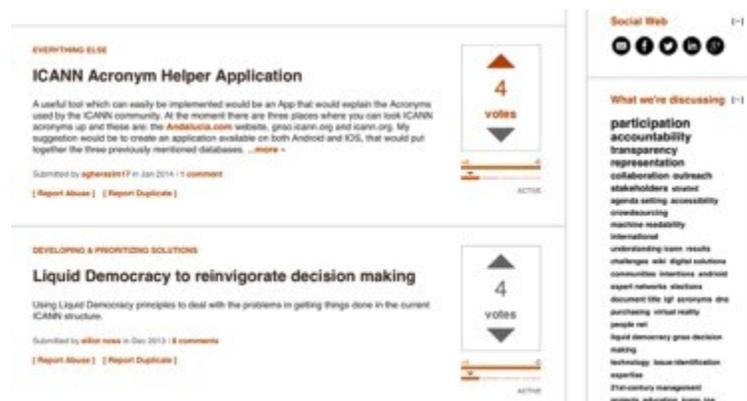


Figure 2. Word cloud displaying emerging themes to the right of participant proposals on IdeaScale.

## 6. Discussion and Future Work

The ICANN Strategy Panel on Multistakeholder Innovation sought to gather broad feedback on ways ICANN could innovate with tools and process of stakeholder engagement to improve its decision-making and increase the legitimacy and acceptance of its decisions and processes (ICANN, 2013). Our initial analysis reveals that both the social (i.e., the process) and the technical (i.e., the IdeaScale platform) dimensions of the engagement were transparent and supported accountability by presenting emerging findings through numerous public consultations and synthesized reports presented via the GovLab blog and ICANN meetings. The three-stage modularity of the process and platform presented a clear description of engagement expectations and outcomes, creating an enabling environment for diverse participation at any point during the duration of the experiment.

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However, one could not engage with this process effectively by only participating on the IdeaScale platform as that constituted only one step in a much richer process. To get the big picture and to engage effectively, one would need to either participate in the face-to-face meetings in addition to online engagement or to spend resources on studying the transcripts and the reports prior to online engagement. Clearer communication of the integration of the various tools and meetings, as well as articulation of criteria and procedures for final decision-making, could also help strengthening the process. Similarly, more comprehensive use of affordances of IdeaScale as a tool (e.g., multilingual support) could potentially increase inclusivity. Equitable multistakeholder engagement is incredibly difficult. Thus far, it appears that the main contributors to the process and platform were members of the Panel or were already strongly affiliated with ICANN. More diverse stakeholder engagement could have led to more informed insights and contributions.

We will build upon this research by conducting interviews and surveys with organizers and participants of the 2013-2014 ICANN multistakeholder evaluation process on IdeaScale and with individuals who are actively engaged in ICANN. We will utilize insights from these interviews and surveys to evaluate the interconnections between the politics of participation in ICANN, the affordances of the IdeaScale platform, and the evaluation of engagement, dynamics, and outcomes by both participants and organizers.

### **7. Conclusion**

With the growing use of crowdsourcing in internet governance debates, empirical analysis of the effects of system design choices on politics of participation becomes critically important. Systematic comparative evaluation of the ongoing crowdsourcing efforts is an essential first step. In this paper we applied Aitamurto and Landemore's (2015) five design principles for crowdsourced policymaking in the unique context of multistakeholder governance. Our analysis highlights the importance of a systemic consideration of the consultative process as a whole. No single tool can offer an adequate solution for an accountable, inclusive, transparent, modular, and clearly synthesized process. Both analysts and conveners of participatory policymaking deliberations, should consider the process as a whole and clearly demarcate and explain the role of participation and input solicited through the online platform. The context of each engagement should be given close consideration, as in our example, for multistakeholder engagements, politics of participation are pivotal and play a central role in perception of legitimacy of both processes and their outcomes. Moreover, while our analysis affirms the usability of Aitamurto and Landemore's (2015) framework for the evaluation of the engagement process itself, it also highlights that while the process itself is important, consideration of the outcomes should be included to understand crowdsourcing processes as a whole. Through our interviews and surveys with participants of the IdeaScale implementation and with participants of ICANN processes, we will build on this analysis to offer recommendations to

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increase the effectiveness of crowdsourcing processes and system design in multistakeholder policy forums.

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