



Interview with Sean Copeland (.vi) about the work of the ccNSO Guidelines Review Committee (GRC)

Joke Braeken: : Today I am having tea with Sean Copeland. We're not only having tea: we're also talking about the Guidelines Review Committee (GRC), what happened at ICANN78 and what is coming up next. Sean is chair of the ccNSO GRC. What does the Committee do, Sean?

Sean Copeland: The ICANN Bylaws govern ICANN. The Guidelines Review Committee, from an organizational perspective, is our rules and procedures group. We help shepherd and create or adjust the rules and procedures that we use internally within the ccNSO.

Joke Braeken: So it is all about the the ccNSO internal governance and how to make it more efficient and and effective?

Sean Copeland: Correct. We are a small group, but a very dedicated one. Sometimes rules and procedures can cause people to get intensely interested in what's going on. We try to do work that is beneficial and helps guide individual members when navigating within the ccNSO.

Joke Braeken: Do you have an example?

Sean Copeland: I do! The ccNSO Conflict of Interest (COI) procedures for Council and the Statement of Interest (SOI) Procedures for community members that participate in ccNSO. They are going live, literally right now. Those procedures are near and dear to my heart because I have experienced conflict of interest in different environments. Those procedures are important: they go to the legitimacy of the organization and how people interact when there is a difficult topic. As mentioned previously, COI is for Council only, the SOI is broader.

Joke Braeken: You will be able to read more about the procedures in the November 2023 edition of the ccNSO Newsletter. Why were they implemented, and what is it all about. During working group and committee meetings, you will soon notice that the chair will ask whether there are

any updates to the statements of interest, such as updated affiliations or representations.

Let's talk about the recent ICANN meeting in Hamburg. Guidelines Review Committee had a long on site working session on continuous improvement. Can you tell a little bit more about what what happened there? Why was that topic chosen?

Sean Copeland: Sure, let me let me backtrack a little bit. GRC has a lot of topics to bring to the table at any given time. Continuous improvement is of importance within ICANN org, so we started exploring it from a ccNSO perspective in August 2023. The idea of an Open Space Technology (OST) meeting was put to the floor. I will admit: I was a bit nervous about the concept, because I had never seen this type of format. But after about 24 h looking and reviewing documentation, thought, okay, this actually might be a very intriguing and different way for us to approach issues! And it might lead to a better and faster work product, that also allows for more dynamic involvement of people. Therefore, the meeting format was a good match with the topic of continuous improvement. Together with Segun (Note: Segun Akano, GRC Vice Chair) and Bart and Kimberly from the ccNSO Secretariat, we spent an awful lot of time behind the scenes working out the how and the what for Hamburg. GRC talked a lot about how much information should be given to participants beforehand. We were also not sure how many people would show up on a Saturday morning, first day in Hamburg. But we did it, and it was surprisingly a much more dynamic and for me personally more comfortable session than I had anticipated. Trying new things could be beneficial! I think we got the work product that we were looking for out of it. People that are usually quiet, or people that are in the background really stepped up and and participated. They felt heard.

By just shifting things a little bit, the whole concept of continuous improvement could be brought to the organizational structure that we've been doing and could be a a valuable tool in our toolbox.

Joke Braeken: You mentioned that this particular technique was chosen to have more engagement. It showed in Hamburg: those that typically do not speak up feel more comfortable doing so in smaller groups.

At the same time, it was a little bit "scary", since the topic was known to to everybody, but nobody knew how the agenda looked like. It was a surprise for the participants, and it was interesting to see that they contributed to the agenda setting and how they decided where to focus their discussions during the four-hour session.

Sean Copeland: Absolutely! You might wonder what will happen next? The idea is to have a fully virtual follow-up from the ICANN78 meeting. The same concept and the same topic of continuous improvement, but this time virtual only. Due to time constraints, some suggestions from Hamburg were not yet fully addressed. Typically, an Open Space session takes several days. We had a full morning session in Hamburg, and now we want to explore how to run this virtually. The creator of the Open Space Technology concept stated that it can run very effectively online. Let's see.

Joke Braeken: Another experiment coming up!

Sean Copeland: Indeed! Let's try to replicate the natural dialogue.

Joke Braeken: The ccTLD community should stay tuned, as there is more to come!

We spoke about continuous improvement, but what are the other next topics that GRC will focus on?

Sean Copeland: There are several items on our to do list, including for instance the Board Recall procedure, which has been pushed down on our list of priorities for a while now.

Joke Braeken: Each working group or committee prepares monthly updates about latest achievements and upcoming work items. Here is a reminder to regularly consult the written updates in the monthly ccNSO newsletter.

On a different topic: You mentioned the group is rather small. If there is one thing you could ask the ccNSO membership, what would that be?

Sean Copeland: If you have an interest in in policy and perhaps aim to be a Council Member one day, join GRC! You learn a lot regarding the ins and outs of the ccNSO. You will get more exposure to ICANN bylaws and the inner workings of things. We might meet at ICANN meetings, but most of the work is done online. Rules and procedures are dry, but you need them.

Joke Braeken: Despite rules and procedures being dry, they have a direct and concrete impact on the governance of the ccNSO. If people are interested in joining the GRC, they can always reach out to the Secretariat or to you?

Sean Copeland: Absolutely! We managed to get a lot of work done the past few months. GRC typically meets every 2 weeks.

If I would win the lottery, I would bring us all together in one place for a couple of days and get

a lot of work done in a shorter amount of time. The GRC workplan is largely shaped by Council, who defers certain topics to GRC.

Joke Braeken: Interesting work ahead for the Guidelines Review Committee! Not only on simplification and harmonization of guidelines, but also on the continuous improvement framework that you just referred to, including how to involve the membership and the ccTLD community in those processes. It is good to know the committee is flexible to adjust.

Sean Copeland: We are happy to experiment! Perhaps we could even explore the option of an Open Space type of meeting during for instance a Policy Forum, having different working groups and Council working on a theme of common interest? It is challenging to combine the virtual and onsite components, consider translation services, inclusiveness in participation etc. I'm very excited by it. But first let's focus on the results from ICANN78 and get ready for ICANN79.

Joke Braeken: Before we get to ICANN79, there will be a fully virtual follow-up of the ICANN78 workshop on continuous improvement.

Sean Copeland: Yes, more news to follow.

Joke Braeken: Was there anything else that I should have asked you, Sean?

Sean Copeland: Thank you for the opportunity! It is still early morning for me, and I am confident I will be more awake in a couple of hours. 😊 But it's all good! Hope people enjoyed listening to - or reading - our conversation.

9 November 2023