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Whois Services

WHOIS services provide public access to data on registered domain names, which currently includes contact information for Registered Name Holders. The extent of registration data collected at the time of registration of a domain name, and the ways such data can be accessed, are specified in agreements established by ICANN for domain names registered in generic top-level domains (gTLDs). For example, ICANN requires accredited registrars to collect and provide free public access to the name of the registered domain name and its nameservers and registrar, the date the domain was created and when its registration expires, and the contact information for the Registered Name Holder, the technical contact, and the administrative contact.

Periodic reviews of policies relating to WHOIS are undertaken through ICANN's bottom-up, consensus-seeking policy development processes (PDP). WHOIS issues are being addressed by the Generic Names Supporting Organisation's (GNSO's) policy development process, which includes numerous opportunities for public review and comment, and results in non-binding recommendations to ICANN's Board. WHOIS issues are at the midpoint of this process, and many steps still remain before recommendations are put forward for the ICANN Board's consideration and decision. The GNSO's PDP involves creating an Issue Report, launching a PDP, notifying the public, forming task forces or other mechanisms to gather information and seek input from all stakeholders, posting reports for public comment, and continuing to seek advice and deliberate in an effort to work towards achieving a consensus policy recommendation that will be considered by ICANN's Board.

A detailed description of the steps in the process can be found in ICANN's bylaws .

WHOIS Policy Development Process (PDP)

For several years, ICANN's GNSO has been investigating various issues associated with the public display of WHOIS data relating to gTLDs. The GNSO currently has a policy development process that commenced in June 2005, to consider how to improve the effectiveness of the WHOIS service in maintaining the stability and security of the Internet's unique identifier systems, while taking into account, where appropriate, the need to ensure privacy protection for the personal data of natural persons. This policy development process will not result in a change to the amount of information collected from Registered Name Holders at the time of registration. Rather, the GNSO is considering what data should be available for public access in the context of WHOIS services.

More information is available in the "terms of reference" for the WHOIS policy process.

As the first step in the terms of reference, the GNSO Council agreed in its meeting on 12 April 2006 to a working definition for the purpose of the public display of information via the WHOIS service.

The next step is to determine what data should be available for public access in the context of the working definition of the purpose of WHOIS. For any data that is removed from public access, the task force will determine how to ensure that organisations that are responsible for the stability and security of the Internet (including law enforcement) still have access to the data they need to perform their roles. As the work progresses, there will be an opportunity to refine the definition of "purpose" agreed to in April 2006.

The GNSO will produce a final policy recommendation for consideration by the ICANN Board that is based on 1) the definition of the purpose of the public display of information about the Registered Name Holder, and 2) the definition of the purposes of the various data elements collected at the time of registration, as agreed upon by the GNSO Council. The GNSO's final policy recommendation will include:

- A definition of what data must be available for public access;

- Descriptions of processes (and possible software protocols) for organisations responsible for the stability

and security of the Internet to access any necessary information that is not made public; and

- Measures designed to improve accuracy of WHOIS.

As the GNSO works to develop this recommendation, public comment will continue to be solicited, and additional input will be sought from ICANN's Government Advisory Committee (GAC), At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC), and Security and Stability Advisory Committee (SSAC). Public comments also will be solicited by ICANN's Board prior to their consideration of any WHOIS policy recommendation.

Background Material

12 April 2006

The GNSO Council recommends that the WHOIS task force use the following **definition**:

> "The purpose of the gTLD Whois service is to provide information sufficient to contact a responsible party for a particular gTLD domain name who can resolve, or reliably pass on data to a party who can resolve, issues related to the configuration of the records associated with the domain name within a DNS nameserver."

as a working definition to allow the task force to proceed on terms of reference (2), (3), and (4) (see terms of reference at <http://gnso.icann.org/policies/terms-of-reference.html>).

IETF WHOIS Protocol Specification (RFC-3912, September 2004)

Terms of Reference for the WHOIS policy process

GNSO WHOIS privacy issues web page

Task Force report on purpose of WHOIS

Current mailing list for GNSO WHOIS Task Force

Public Forums

Public Forum on WHOIS Task Force preliminary report, Vancouver 2 December 2005

Public Comments received on preliminary WHOIS Task Force Report

Public Forum on WHOIS Task Force report, Wellington 28 March 2006

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