

# The Collaborative Governance Project

## A Multistakeholder Initiative of the Internet Society



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### Introduction

Consistent with the long-standing commitment of the Internet Society to collaborative or multistakeholder Internet governance, the 2018 Action Plan of the Internet Society identifies the importance of "promoting collaborative governance as a tool to address a range of important issues." Collaborative or multistakeholder approaches to governance have grown in understanding and acceptance over the past several years. The most notable recent success of the approach was the process engaged in by the global Internet community to develop the plan that allowed the United States government to end its stewardship of the Internet's Domain Name System in 2016. At the same time, more traditional legislative and regulatory processes, especially those of international multilateral organizations, have failed to solve pressing public policy issues. The challenges and conflicts of increasingly cross-border Internet issues, combined with rising nationalist policies and digital sovereignty claims, have undermined the ability to resolve issues through traditional processes. This is an opportune time for the Internet Society to explore whether we can significantly expand the use of collaborative processes globally.

Accordingly, the Internet Society announces the creation of the Collaborative Governance Project, a multistakeholder initiative of the Society. The project will undertake three key activities:

1. Convening stakeholders to solve concrete problems and develop norms on a consensus basis;
2. Training stakeholders on how to be effective in collaborative governance discussions; and,
3. Building and promoting academic research and writing on collaborative governance approaches.

In 2018, the Project will concentrate on developing the concept of utilizing collaborative governance approaches globally. The Project will build a community of support and advice to the project with the goal of ramping up the project over time once the concept is proven.

## Mission Statement

The mission of the Collaborative Governance Project is to expand the global knowledge and use of collaborative governance processes to solve problems and develop norms.

This Project acknowledges that there is no one single, standard definition of "collaborative" or "multistakeholder" approaches. Instead there are numerous models currently in use today. For purposes of expanding the global knowledge of collaborative governance, this Project will embrace variations of the model. However, for purpose of convening collaborative discussions, the Project will champion processes with the following attributes:

- **Stakeholder-driven:** Stakeholders determine the process and decisions, from agenda setting to workflow, rather than simply fulfilling an advisory role;
- **Open:** Any stakeholder may participate and the process includes and integrates the viewpoints of a diverse range of stakeholders;
- **Transparent:** All stakeholders and the public have access to deliberations, creating an environment of trust, legitimacy, and accountability; and
- **Consensus-based:** Outcomes are consensus-based, arrived at by compromise, and are a win-win for the greatest number or diversity of stakeholders.

The Project will not compete with existing multistakeholder organizations such as ICANN and the IETF or the IGF but rather aim at strengthening them.

## Activities

The Project will undertake three activities: (1) convening collaborative, multistakeholder discussions; (2) providing training on the skills needed to be successful in collaborative discussions; and (3) building a network and developing an agenda for academic research and writing on collaborative governance.

### Convening.

First and foremost, the Project will develop the capability to convene open and transparent collaborative, multistakeholder discussions on key issues. The Project will emphasize the need for these convenings to develop concrete and actionable outcomes that will be implemented by the parties to the discussions in determining which issues are most suitable for convening.

The Project will apply the following criteria for selecting topics for convenings:

- **Actionable.** The desired outcome of the process should be one that the parties to the process can implement, e.g., new business processes or best practices. The Project does not expect to convene discussions to propose national legislation or an international treaty when there would be no assurance the governments would accept or be guided by such an outcome, if they even took action.
- **Timely.** The issue needs to be at a point of development, neither too early or too late, where collaboration has the best chance to deliver the most benefits to stakeholders.

## Training.

Providing training on how to be an effective participant in collaborative processes serves two important functions. First, the presence of trained stakeholders improves the efficiency of collaborative convenings and increases the likelihood that a convening will result in a successful consensus outcome. Second, providing training around the globe will help build a cadre of stakeholders with the skills and confidence to organize their own multistakeholder discussions in their locality or region.

The training will focus on how to organize and participate in collaborative, multistakeholder convenings. The training will be very practical and focus on helping participants acquire the skills to define outcomes for convenings, set agendas for discussion, develop rules of engagement and definitions of consensus and learn and practice strategies for dealing with impasse and dissent. We will explore a variety of delivery mechanisms for the training, ranging from in-person, group “classroom” courses to online training modules for individual learning.

The Project's training curriculum will respect and not conflict with training offered by existing Internet schools around the world, such as the European Summer School on Internet Governance (EuroSSIG), the South School of Internet Governance, the Africa School on Internet Governance, or the Asia Pacific Internet Governance Academy, to name a few.

## Academic Research.

The multistakeholder approach, while it has received substantial press attention in recent years within the global Internet community, is not well-known beyond that community. Moreover, even within the community, the approach is not well-understood among all constituencies, especially in less developed countries. At the same time, there is a tremendous amount of study and thought being dedicated to collaborative governance approaches in a wide variety of institutions located throughout the world. Accordingly, the Project will work to develop a network of academic experts in the field of collaborative governance and to create an agenda of academic research that could be funded in subsequent years.

## Ensuring Broad Global Participation

A key goal of the Project is to ensure broad global participation in collaborative governance. To do so will require a concerted effort to engage stakeholders around the globe. The inclusion of underrepresented groups is critical to the success of collaborative governance, and this Project will need to address this disparity between well and under-resourced stakeholders in a number of proactive ways. First, the initiative will provide training on a global basis to teach the skills that will enable new or less experienced participants to be effective advocates. The Project will endeavor eventually to offer training courses in all regions of the world, and in a variety of languages, to make them as accessible as possible. Second, the Project will actively recruit participation in convenings from stakeholders in developing countries to increase their level of engagement in these discussions. Third, the Project will need to provide financial assistance for travel and training costs to participants from developing countries who otherwise would not have the resources needed to participate effectively.

## Role of the Internet Society

As an active and sustained supporter of collaborative, multistakeholder governance, the Internet Society will serve as an incubator for the project. The Society is funding one year of the Project to determine if this concept can develop and grow and engage stakeholders across the globe. In its first year, the Project will seek strategic partnerships with leading universities and other institutions around the globe. Such partnerships could provide additional legitimacy to the effort and facilitate the efforts to establish and encourage more academic research and writing on collaborative governance.

## Community Engagement

The Project will not have a dedicated board of advisors. Instead, in the spirit of bottom-up multistakeholder collaboration, the Project is exploring how to engage all interested parties as "advisors" to the project. The Project is committed to engaging as many stakeholders as practicable to ensure geographic diversity and representation of the full range of stakeholder interests, including civil society, businesses, academia, technical expertise and the public sector.

## Conclusion

The ultimate success of this initiative depends on working closely with stakeholders to identify and define issues to which they are willing to devote the time and effort to address. That is not an easy task but it is a manageable one. Reaching consensus on important policy issues requires a lot of work, often from interested volunteers, a lot of good faith, and a strong willingness of participants to compromise because the urgency of the need for a decision outweighs the status quo. Nonetheless, with expert facilitation and preparation and the careful curating of issues to be discussed, there is reason to be optimistic that this Project will successfully deliver concrete, positive outcomes and will create capacity around the world for stakeholders to make greater utilization of collaborative, multistakeholder approaches.

