

Frequently Asked Questions New gTLD Program: 2026 Round String Confusion and Legal Rights Objections

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A. Objection framework

What objection grounds are available in the 2026 Round?

An objection may be filed only on one of four grounds established for the 2026 Round:

- String Confusion
- Legal Rights
- Limited Public Interest
- Community

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.1; ICANN Objection Procedure, Article 2(f).

Which objection proceedings are administered by WIPO?

WIPO administers String Confusion Objections (SCOs) and Legal Rights Objections (LROs). Limited Public Interest and Community Objections are administered by the International Chamber of Commerce. SCO and LRO proceedings are governed by the ICANN Objection Procedure together with the WIPO Rules for New gTLD Dispute Resolution.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.3; ICANN Objection Procedure, Articles 3 and 4.

What is a Legal Rights Objection?

A brand owner may file a Legal Rights Objection where it believes that an applied-for gTLD string, or one or more applied-for allocatable variant strings, infringes its existing legal (trademark) rights. A panel considers the applicant's potential use of the relevant string under the Legal Rights criteria described below.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, sections 4.5.1.2 and 4.5.10.2.

What is a String Confusion Objection?

A party may file a String Confusion Objection where it believes that an applied-for primary string, allocatable variant string, or blocked variant string is confusingly similar visually, aurally, or in meaning to a relevant existing or applied-for string. The objection complements the String Similarity Evaluation, which is limited to visual similarity.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, sections 4.5.1.1 and 4.5.10.1.

Can an objector raise both Legal Rights and String Confusion in the same objection?

No. An objector wishing to challenge an application on more than one ground must file a separate objection for each ground and pay the applicable filing fee for each objection. Accordingly, a Legal Rights claim and a String Confusion claim cannot be combined in a single objection. Objections based on different grounds also may not be consolidated.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.8.2; ICANN Objection Procedure, Articles 7(c)(i) and 11(c).

B. Standing and scope

Who has standing to file a Legal Rights Objection?

The following may have standing:

- A (trademark) rights holder. The filing must identify and document the existing legal rights alleged to be infringed, such as rights in a registered (or unregistered) trademark.
- An intergovernmental organization that meets the criteria for registration of a .INT domain name. Specialized agencies of the United Nations and organizations having observer status at the United Nations General Assembly are also recognized as meeting the criteria.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.2.2.

Who has standing to file a String Confusion Objection?

Depending on the comparison asserted, standing may be available to:

- An existing gTLD operator.
- An existing ccTLD operator or a Significantly Interested Party in the relevant country or territory.
- An applicant in the 2026 application round.

An applicant does not have standing to object to another application with which it is already in a contention set. Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.2.1.

C. Filing and early case administration

When may an objection be filed?

The 2026 Round provides the following objection filing windows:

- A 104-day window for all objection grounds, beginning on String Confirmation Day – November 17, 2026 to March 16, 2027 (excluding a closure period from December 19, 2026 to January 4, 2026).

- A further 30-day window for String Confusion Objections only, following publication of updated contention sets after String Evaluation.
- A 30-day window for all objection grounds following a successful .Brand String Change, beginning when the relevant String Evaluation Reports are published.

Objections must be filed before the published deadline for the applicable window. Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.8.1; ICANN Objection Procedure, Article 7(d).

How is an objection filed?

String Confusion and Legal Rights Objections must be filed electronically, in English, by the published deadline. They should be filed with WIPO using lro@wipo.int or sco@wipo.int (as applicable) and the applicable model objection document ([LRO](#); [SCO](#)). The objector must provide the applicant with copies of submissions to WIPO.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.8.2; ICANN Objection Procedure, Articles 5–7.

Must separate objections be filed?

Yes. As a general rule:

- A separate objection is required for each objection ground.
- A separate objection is required for each application challenged.
- An objector challenging several applications for the same identical string through String Confusion may proceed against one, some or all applications for that string, with each affected applicant entitled to respond and the same panel reviewing the associated materials.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.8.2; ICANN Objection Procedure, Article 7(c).

What must an objection contain?

At minimum, an objection must include:

- The objector's name and contact information.
- A statement explaining the objector's basis for standing.
- The specific objection ground.
- A detailed explanation of the validity of the objection and why it should be upheld.
- Copies and a description of supporting or official documents on which the objection relies.
- Evidence of payment of the applicable filing fee ([LRO](#); [SCO](#)).

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.8.2; ICANN Objection Procedure, Article 8.

Are there language or word limits?

All submissions and proceedings are in English. Supporting evidence may be provided in its original language if accompanied by a certified or otherwise official English translation of all relevant text, subject to the panel's authority. The substantive portion of an objection or response is limited to 5,000 words, excluding attachments. Attachments may not be used to add argument or circumvent the word limit.

Applicant Guidebook: ICANN Objection Procedure, Articles 5, 8(b), and 15(d).

What happens during administrative review?

WIPO reviews the objection for administrative compliance, including whether it was filed with the correct provider. The review is generally completed within 14 days after transmission of the objection and filing fee. If the objection is compliant, it is registered for processing. If it is deficient, WIPO may allow five days to correct the identified administrative deficiencies. Uncorrected deficiencies result in dismissal, subject to the filing-deadline rules.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.8.3; ICANN Objection Procedure, Article 9.

What objection information is published?

After an objection is registered, WIPO posts identifying information, including the relevant application and string, the objector and applicant, the objection ground, and the relevant transmission date. ICANN separately publishes an Objection Announcement listing admissible objections. Unless the panel decides otherwise, the final Panel Determination is published in full on WIPO's website.

Applicant Guidebook: ICANN Objection Procedure, Articles 9(e), 10, and 22(g).

Can related objections be consolidated?

Yes, in appropriate circumstances. A party may propose consolidation within seven days of publication of the Objection Announcement. WIPO may also propose consolidation and will weigh benefits such as time, cost, and consistency against possible prejudice or inconvenience. Objections on different grounds may not be consolidated. For String Confusion, objections involving applications in direct contention may be consolidated and addressed in a single determination explaining the contention.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.8.5; ICANN Objection Procedure, Article 11.

D. Panel, Quick Look Review, costs, and response

Who are the expert panelists available for appointment?

WIPO has posted a list of experts available for appointment prior to the start of the objection filing period. This list ([LRO](#); [SCO](#)) takes into account requirements of professional expertise and may be subject to additional development by WIPO in light of case needs. As part of the process of appointment to an actual case, experts are required to affirm their neutrality by signing a Statement of Acceptance and Declaration of Impartiality and Independence.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.8.6; ICANN Objection Procedure, Article 12.

How is the objection panel appointed?

The default is a one-person panel. The parties may jointly agree to a three-person panel and must notify WIPO within the applicable time limit. WIPO will appoint independent and impartial panelists with the qualifications specified for the objection ground. For both String Confusion and Legal Rights Objections, panelists should have experience in Legal Rights disputes; for String Confusion, at least one panelist should also know the relevant script or scripts.

What is the Quick Look Review?

The Quick Look Review is the panel's first substantive task, generally completed within 30 days of appointment. It is designed to identify and eliminate objections that are manifestly unfounded, an abuse of the right to object, or both. The panel considers, among other matters, whether:

- The objection invokes an accepted ground.
- The objector has standing.
- There is sufficient supporting evidence.
- The objection is intelligible and not far-fetched or manifestly contrary to common sense.
- The objection does not constitute prohibited hateful content or harassment through repetitive filings.
- Other facts clearly demonstrate that the objection is manifestly unfounded or abusive.

A dismissal at this stage is a Panel Determination and ends the proceeding before full advance costs are paid or a Response is submitted. Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.8.7; ICANN Objection Procedure, Article 13.

How are filing fees and advance costs handled?

The applicable WIPO Rules establish the amounts and payment instructions. Fees are split between non-refundable filing fees and advance payments of the estimated costs of the proceeding.

- The objector pays a filing fee (USD 2,000 for a Single-person Panel) when filing the objection. If it is not paid within the period allowed by the Procedure and Rules, the objection is dismissed.
- After an objection passes Quick Look Review, WIPO estimates the total costs and requests both parties to pay the full advance. Each party generally has 20 days from notification of the Quick Look Review outcome to make that payment.
- If the objector does not pay the advance, the objection is dismissed. If the respondent (the TLD applicant) does not pay, the objection is deemed sustained. If neither party pays, the objection is dismissed.
- After the Panel Determination, the prevailing party receives a refund of its advance payment of costs. Filing fees are not refunded.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.6 and section 4.5.8.8; ICANN Objection Procedure, Articles 8(c) and 14.

Must the applicant file a response?

To contest the objection, the applicant must file a compliant response within 30 days after being informed of the Quick Look Review results. The response must be electronic, in English, filed using WIPO's model form, copied to the objector, and accompanied by the applicable filing fee. It must identify the respondent and provide a point-by-point response, with supporting documents as appropriate. The substantive portion is limited to 5,000 words, excluding attachments.

- If no timely response is filed, the respondent is in default and the objection is deemed successful.
- If the response filing fee is not paid within the applicable period, the response is disregarded and the objection is deemed successful.
- WIPO may provide five days to correct administrative deficiencies in a response.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.8.9; ICANN Objection Procedure, Article 15.

E. Conduct of the proceeding

Will there be a hearing?

Proceedings are ordinarily decided on the written record. A panel may hold a virtual hearing only where exceptional circumstances make one necessary. No in-person hearing is permitted. A virtual hearing may be conducted by videoconference and normally is limited to one day. Should a virtual hearing occur, WIPO would not charge any fees for the hearing.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.8.10; ICANN Objection Procedure, Article 19.

Can the parties negotiate, mediate, or settle?

Yes. The parties are encouraged, but not required, to negotiate or mediate at any time. WIPO may administer mediation under its Mediation Rules, and a mediator may not later serve as a panelist in the same dispute or another proceeding concerning the same gTLD between the parties. ICANN does not participate in the mediation. If the parties settle, they must inform WIPO, which will terminate the proceeding once payment obligations are satisfied.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.8.11; ICANN Objection Procedure, Article 20.

What is a cooling-off period?

A cooling-off period is a period during which filing and other deadlines are paused to allow negotiations, mediation, or related settlement efforts. It is not automatic. The parties must make a joint request, and WIPO or, once appointed, the panel decides whether to grant it.

- It may be requested after the respondent has filed a response and before the Panel Determination is issued.
- Absent exceptional circumstances, it may not exceed 30 days.
- The parties remain responsible for costs incurred before the cooling-off period.
- A longer suspension may apply where the parties jointly agree that the applicant will submit an Application Change Request.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.8.11.2; ICANN Objection Procedure, Article 20(d)–(e).

F. Substantive principles and outcomes

What principles apply to a String Confusion Objection?

The panel considers whether the relevant strings are likely to result in string confusion. String confusion exists where one string so nearly resembles another that it is likely to deceive or cause confusion. The likelihood must be probable, not merely possible, from the perspective of the average, reasonable Internet user. Mere association, where one string simply brings another to mind, is not sufficient. Similarity may be visual, aural, or in meaning.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.10.1.

What core test applies to a Legal Rights Objection?

The panel determines whether the applicant's potential use of the relevant string would:

- Take unfair advantage of the distinctive character or reputation of the objector's registered or unregistered mark, or IGO name or acronym.
- Unjustifiably impair the distinctive character or reputation of the objector's mark, or IGO name or acronym.
- Otherwise create an impermissible likelihood of confusion between the relevant string and the objector's mark, or IGO name or acronym.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.10.2.1.

What factors apply to a trademark-based Legal Rights Objection?

The panel considers non-exclusive factors including:

- Similarity in appearance, phonetic sound, or meaning.
- Whether the objector's acquisition and use of rights were bona fide.
- Recognition of the sign as identifying the objector, applicant, or a third party.
- The applicant's intent and knowledge of the objector's mark, including any relevant pattern of conduct.
- The applicant's bona fide use or preparations to use the sign.
- The applicant's own intellectual property rights and whether they were acquired and used bona fide.
- Whether the applicant has been commonly known by the sign.
- Likelihood of confusion as to source, sponsorship, affiliation, or endorsement.
- For a common dictionary term that is also a trademark, whether the intended use takes advantage of the common meaning or targets the trademark.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.10.2.2.

What factors apply to an IGO-based Legal Rights Objection?

The panel considers non-exclusive factors including similarity to the objecting IGO's name or acronym, historical coexistence, the recognition and duration of the entities, relevant public historical evidence, the applicant's bona fide use or preparations to use the sign, whether the applicant is commonly known by the sign, and whether the intended use would create confusion as to source, sponsorship, affiliation, or endorsement.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.10.2.3.

What determinations and remedies are available?

A written Panel Determination identifies the prevailing party and gives reasons. The potential outcomes differ by objection ground.

- String Confusion, objector is another applicant: the relevant application strings and variant strings are placed in a contention set.
- String Confusion, objector is an existing gTLD operator, existing ccTLD operator, or Significantly Interested Party: if the objection prevails, the application is ineligible to proceed.
- Legal Rights: if an objection to the primary string prevails, the application is ineligible to proceed. If an objection prevails only against one or more applied-for allocatable variant strings, the primary string and unaffected variants may continue without the ineligible variants.
- If the objection does not prevail, the application may continue unless another process prevents it.

- In extraordinary circumstances, a determination may provide that the application cannot proceed unless a new or modified Registry Voluntary Commitment approved by ICANN is included in the Registry Agreement.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, sections 4.5.8.13 and 4.5.8.14; ICANN Objection Procedure, Article 22.

How quickly is a Panel Determination expected?

A determination is expected within 45 days after receipt of the response, any additional written submissions, or the hearing, if any. A brief extension may be allowed in specific circumstances, such as consolidated cases or significant additional documentation requested by the panel.

Applicant Guidebook: ICANN Objection Procedure, Article 22(a).

G. Appeals

Can a Panel Determination be appealed?

Yes. The non-prevailing party has a one-time opportunity to appeal a Panel Determination under the ICANN Objection Appeal Procedure and the applicable Appellate Rules ([LRO](#); [SCO](#)). WIPO administers appeals arising from String Confusion and Legal Rights Objections. The appeal is not a general rehearing on the merits; it is reviewed under the clearly erroneous standard described below.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.9; ICANN Appeal Procedure, Articles 1 and 3.

On what grounds may an appeal be brought?

The appellant must claim that the objection panel:

- Failed to follow the established procedure.
- Failed to consider or solicit necessary material evidence or information submitted by the parties.
- Committed both types of error.

The appellant must also show that, as a result, it should have prevailed in the objection proceeding. The appellant bears the burden of proof. Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.9.9; ICANN Appeal Procedure, Articles 1(d) and 18.

What are the principal appeal filing deadlines?

The non-prevailing party has 15 days from issuance of the Panel Determination to notify WIPO of its intent to appeal. The Notice of Appeal must identify the portions challenged and briefly state the basis. The appellant then has 15 days from filing the Notice of Appeal to file the appeal and pay the required fee. Separate appeals are required for determinations from separate objection proceedings.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.9.1; ICANN Appeal Procedure, Article 7.

What must an appeal contain?

The appeal must identify the appellant and the underlying objection, state the permitted appeal ground or grounds, and explain why the appeal is valid and should be upheld. The substantive portion is limited to 5,000 words, excluding attachments. The appellant must pay the applicable filing fee.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.9.1; ICANN Appeal Procedure, Article 8.

Is there a Quick Look Review on appeal?

Yes. The Appellate Panel first reviews whether the appeal is manifestly unfounded, an abuse of the right to appeal, or both. Relevant considerations include whether the appellant is the non-prevailing party, whether sufficient evidence supports the appeal, whether it is intelligible and not far-fetched, and whether it constitutes prohibited hateful content or harassment. The review must generally be completed within 30 days of appointment or resolution of conflict issues. A dismissal is an Appellate Panel Determination.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.9.6; ICANN Appeal Procedure, Article 13.

Is a response to an appeal required?

No. The respondent may file a response within 30 days after the Quick Look Review outcome. If no response is filed, the Appellate Panel presumes that the respondent takes no position. A filed response must provide a point-by-point reply, comply with the 5,000-word limit, and be accompanied by the applicable filing fee.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.9.8; ICANN Appeal Procedure, Article 15.

What can the Appellate Panel decide?

The Appellate Panel may either reject the appeal and uphold the original Panel Determination, or substitute its own determination. It may not order a new objection proceeding or remand the matter to the original panel for correction or further review. The Appellate Panel Determination is published in full unless otherwise decided and becomes final, with no further appeal under the Appeal Procedure.

Applicant Guidebook: Module 4, section 4.5.9.10; ICANN Appeal Procedure, Articles 19 and 20.

H. Additional procedural points

What is WIPO's role?

For String Confusion and Legal Rights Objections and related appeals, WIPO acts as the designated DRSP. Its administrative functions include receiving filings, conducting administrative reviews, issuing procedural notifications, appointing panels, administering communications and payments, publishing specified case information and determinations, and otherwise administering proceedings under the ICANN Procedures and applicable WIPO Rules. The appointed panel, not WIPO as case administrator, determines the merits.

Guidebook references: Module 4, sections 4.5.3 and 4.5.8; ICANN Objection Procedure and Appeal Procedure.

I. Questions

For more information about the String Confusion and Legal Rights Objection procedure, please direct any inquiries by email to lro@wipo.int or sco@wipo.int, or by telephone to +41 22 338 8247. More detailed information can be found in the [ICANN Applicant Guidebook](#).