

April 7, 2010

Mr. David Gift  
Chair, Board of Directors, Merit Network, Inc.

Dr. Donald J. Welch  
President, Merit Network, Inc.

David and Don,

Since its inception in 1994, the North American Network Operators Group (NANOG) have had its meetings and activities organized under the auspices of Merit, providing an incredible service to the North American region, and in fact, to the global Internet engineering community. The value of this work can not be easily overstated – it is likely that, absent Merit’s involvement, the pace of global Internet development would have significantly slowed and that the high levels of Internet performance that we all enjoy today would not have come to pass.

Several periods of evolution have marked the Merit/NANOG relationship. The most significant inflections have been the sharp growth in NANOG attendance in the late 1990s, the increasing importance of the NANOG mailing list as a method of inter-carrier communication, the utilization of NANOG meetings as a conduit of communications between major government entities and the Internetworking community, and the 2004-2005 Charter Process where NANOG took a significant step towards self-governance while remaining a Merit activity.

Through the successive evolutions, Merit has stayed loyal to the ideals of NANOG, providing staff to administer conferences; administer servers to host presentations, mailing lists, and archives from the early days of the Internet; funds to pay for all of NANOG’s activities; and, equally as important, entering into contract obligations on NANOG’s behalf for meeting venue hotels, at times taking on significant contract liability. Since the beginning of this relationship, one constant has been the gratitude of NANOG’s membership and governance communities towards Merit for their dedication, hard work and financial commitment.

Starting from the ratification of the 2005 NANOG Charter, the membership of NANOG has worked hard to establish self-governance institutions including our Steering Committee, Program Committee, Communications Committee, and Marketing Working

Group. These institutions have acquired experience and resilience over the past five years and matured to the point of self-governance.

While Merit's core mission and strategic direction is to provide services to its member institutions and while NANOG has acquired the ability to self-govern, we believe both organizations would benefit from re-structuring our relationship to allow each to focus on the direct needs of its respective constituency.

The elected members of the NANOG Steering Committee believe the time has come to begin a new evolution in the NANOG/Merit relationship which would pave the way towards an independent NANOG, organized as a tax-exempt entity with an educational mission. This new NANOG entity would produce NANOG conferences, administer the NANOG mailing list, and expand our educational mission.

Our intention is to work jointly with Merit to devise a transition plan and a transition timeline before NANOG 49 in June. The transition plan would cover the following paramount goals:

- The incorporation of a new NANOG entity as a 501(c)(3) association or similar structure, with appropriate bylaws and regulations;
- The transfer of existing NANOG governance committees to the new entity;
- A continued formal relationship with Merit to provide conference support activities;
- A gradual transition of NANOG resources, data, intellectual property and trademarks held in trust by Merit towards the new entity for the continued support of NANOG activities;
- The assumption of any future NANOG contractual liability by the new NANOG entity itself, rather than by Merit.

Given the nature of this discussion, we have chosen to keep it confidential amongst the group of signatories and would request that you extend the same confidentiality. We would appreciate your acknowledgement and initial feedback in the next two weeks. Soon enough, we will be obligated to communicate our intentions to our respective constituency and our preference is for a clear self-governance message with a coherent transition plan and timeline.

Steve Feldman will be our NANOG Leadership spokesperson. Please feel free to contact him directly about this evolution, as we would like to engage the conversation at your earliest convenience. We want to assure you of our entire collaboration and welcome the opportunity of a teleconference or in person meeting.

One thing that won't change throughout the course of this next evolution is the gratitude of the NANOG membership for the hard work and support that the Merit board, staff, and member institutions have provided to us over the course of the last 16 years. We look forward to continued ties of affection and shared interests in the years ahead.

For the NANOG leadership,

Steve Feldman (Steering Committee chair)

Patrick W. Gilmore (SC member)

Sylvie LaPerrière (SC member)

Joe Provo (SC member)

Robert Seastrom (SC member)

Duane Wessels (SC member)

David Meyer (Program Committee chair)

Tom Daly (PC vice chair)