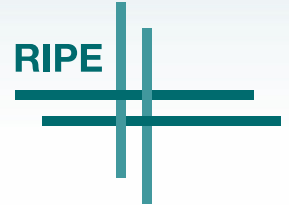




RIPE

RIPE Accountability Task Force

William Sylvester, Chair



Overview

- Task force established Fall of 2016 at RIPE 73
 - RIPE community-initiated process
 - Community driven review
- 12 community members and 4 RIPE NCC staff
- Scope and more info on task force here:
 - <https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/tf/ripe-accountability-task-force/>
- Recently published our draft report on RIPE-list:
 - <https://www.ripe.net/ripe/mail/archives/ripe-list/2018-October/001431.html>

Why Review RIPE Accountability?

- RIPE has grown – has trust and accountability scaled?
- Helps both the outside world and newcomers to understand RIPE
- Records intent for historical purposes
- Greater attention on the accountability of Internet communities after the IANA transition

Our Approach

- Regular task force discussions
- Documentation-based review of RIPE structures
- Sought input from community at different stages
 - Plenary presentation feedback
 - Mailing list discussion
 - BoF at RIPE 76

Structure Of Our Report

- First part describes RIPE, accountability and other elements based on our own discussions and community input (pages 3-16)
- Second takes a document-based approach looking at components of RIPE accountability and transparency:
 - Focuses on structures, roles and documentation (pages 17-23)
- Recommendations (page 24)

How Do We See Accountability In RIPE?

- Internet relies on coordination – RIPE is a forum for this coordination
- But it only works if there's buy-in from the community
- Participants have to trust that:
 - Contributions will be considered honestly, on their merits
 - Decisions are made on the basis of expert opinion
 - Even if they don't agree, they can trust that the community's decisions (policies, etc.) are legitimate

Who Is RIPE Accountable To?

- RIPE is accountable to itself as a community
- And the individuals that participate within RIPE
 - Making sure their voices are heard
 - **Individuals** rather than constituencies or stakeholder groups
- RIPE can't solve every problem on the Internet – other forums may be more appropriate
- Participating in RIPE doesn't mean you'll get what you want

Benefits Of Accountability

- Preserves trust of participants
- Ensures RIPE remains an effective venue for Internet coordination and policy development
- Prevents capture
 - Avoids self-serving outcomes at the expense of wider community
 - Even if groups could capture key positions in the community – RIPE would not allow them to make significant unilateral decisions

RIPE Community Values

- RIPE values are “process values”
 - Open, transparent, bottom-up, consensus-based decision making
- We initially suggested “substantive values” (more higher-level/abstract)
 - Community stated that there are none that can/should be agreed on
- Process values are enough – can address any substantive issue

A Note On *CONSENSUS*

- Consensus plays a central role in RIPE decision-making
- Therefore felt that we had to describe certain aspects it
- Report does not give a definition – merely outlines observations
- *In no way do these observations create rules or obligations!*

What Consensus Is Not

- Unanimous agreement
 - Can exist when people have objections... provided they are “invalid”
- Winning a vote
 - A process rather than a singular event
- A majority opinion
 - Even if *most* people agree – unanswered objections can prevent consensus
- A super-majority
 - Even if *almost all* people agree – it's about the nature of objections

The Role Of Chairs Within Consensus

- Crucial role within almost all community structures
- Key role in consensus process
- Sorting input into categories
 - Statements of support
 - Valid/invalid contributions
- Responsible for declaring consensus

What Are Invalid Objections

- Lack of good faith
 - Disruptive, dishonest, or attempting to game process
- Out of scope
- Asked and answered
 - Objection has already been addressed (either answered or proposal has already modified to take this into account)
- Self-serving
 - Focuses too heavily on the interests of individual/group at expense of wider community

Dealing With Low Engagement

- Wider participation is always valuable and preferred... but not always achievable
- How do you manage a consensus process when you are not getting enough statements to give you a clear direction?

“Silence As Consensus” & “Rational Ignorance”

- Relatively low participation not necessarily an issue – participants may have rationally concluded that:
 - Based on the expected impact – not worth the effort to learn about the issue and engage with it
 - Happy to defer to others who are more qualified
 - Trust that community members will produce an acceptable outcome
 - They have no strong objections (and therefore remain silent)
- The chair must judge the situation appropriately

How We See Documentation

- Documentation supports core RIPE values (open/transparent)
- Demonstrates accountability to external observers
- Helps newcomers to engage within RIPE
- Clarifies intent behind past decisions and ensures alignment

Over-documentation Can Be A Problem

- Documentation is good, but no need to go crazy
- Over-documentation creates its own issues
 - Undermines flexibility and trust
 - Empowers people who want to game decision-making
- RIPE has consciously resisted becoming overly bureaucratic - avoids documentation for its own sake
 - We endorse and respect this tradition

Lack Of Documentation: Not Necessarily A Problem

- Missing documentation can be a problem if it's hindering transparency, openness and consistency.
- But a lack of documentation necessarily a problem – RIPE has norms and values that apply in the absence of any documentation

What We Found

- RIPE is an accountable community
 - Established, robust structures
 - Open, transparent, bottom-up, consensus-based
 - Has documentation of processes
- No serious or immediate risks to the community
- Full list of recommendations in our report

Highlights Of Recommendations

- RIPE Chair selection procedure and role description (in progress)
- Aligning WG Chair selection procedures
- Explaining what the WG Chair Collective is responsible for
- Explaining what the RIPE Plenary does and what its powers are
- Information for newcomers and newly-selected chairs

Periodic Review

- The community should consider implementing some kind of periodic review of its accountability
- First time around was a learning process
 - Expect that any future review could be faster, more lightweight
 - Perhaps with a smaller scope that look into the accountability of specific elements (e.g. a focus just on the RIPE PDP or mailing lists)
 - ...but it's up to you as a community to decide

Next Steps

- Comment period until 16 November (ripe-list@ripe.net)
- We'll then spend one month making any changes
- Aim to publish final report no later than 14 December
- Then it's up to the community to decide what to do with the final report and whether any of the recommendations should be implemented

Questions?

