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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

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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?

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"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

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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

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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

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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

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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?

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