

BoF: Building a Stable Future for the RIPE NCC, Minutes RIPE 88

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Presentation slides and recording are available at:

<https://ripe88.ripe.net/archives/video/1312/>

Remco van Mook welcomed attendees and ran through the agenda. He noted that this session was intended to discuss new challenges the RIPE NCC was facing and organisational changes that might be needed to address them.

Remco raised the topic of the RIPE compact, which constituted the collaboration between the RIPE community and its leadership with the RIPE NCC, its membership and its Executive Board. The goals of this compact included enabling the community to operate the Internet, a task that required a structured organisation and registry, among other needs, like data. He asked whether audience members agreed with this objective.

Jim Reid, on behalf of himself, noted it was important that the data be impartial.

Peter Hessler from Zayo said he thought this objective was correct.

Sander Steffann, on his own behalf, agreed with the sentiment, though the wording was not perfect.

Tina Morris, AWS, noted that the RIPE NCC had changed drastically, and it was important to note the assets they managed were now worth billions, with new stakeholders interested. There was a need to scale. RIPE NCC services like RIPE Atlas and RPKI were critical, so members should not be able to pick and choose which services to pay for. The RIPE NCC's strategic goals were not deliverable goals however, but rather general ways of working.

Sergey Myasoedov, NetArt Group, felt it was not necessarily true that the registry was trusted, efficient, accurate and resilient. He asked if the Board felt it was.

Remco said he was not speaking on behalf of the Board and that these terms were subjective. It was a goal to strive for, not necessarily the current reality.

Sergey said he liked this as a goal.

Daniel Karrenberg, RIPE NCC, said some missing goals were neutrality and community trust in the organisation. After all, past successes had come from trust.

Tobias Fiebig, Max Planck Institute for Informatics, said they needed to emphasise sustaining this environment, perhaps not even changing it.

Sander suggested something missing could be the RIPE NCC representing the community to governments and other stakeholders. Good representation was required for the community to be able to operate the Internet.

Niall O'Reilly, RIPE Vice Chair, said they needed to ground these goals in their underlying values to engage current and new stakeholders.

Wolfgang Zenker, punkt.de, said large financial assets could lead to bad-faith actors trying to influence the community. They had to determine how to be open, inclusive and engaged while protecting the community from these actors.

Tobias said the community's main goal should be to preserve the Internet. The RIPE NCC might need to change to best protect its assets, but change should not be the goal—protection should be.

Julf Helsingius, on behalf of himself, said the goals were missing a mention of speaking on behalf of the community. The Internet governance landscape had changed, and the community no longer managed this. They needed a voice for the technical community.

Pavel Odintsov, FastNetMon, said there needed to be an explanation of “membership association” and “member.” This was the main point, and everything else stemmed from that.

Remco said the spirit of the RIPE NCC had been for community support, and members only came later. This was a discrepancy that needed to be figured out.

Marlin Martes, AWS, said objectives were good, but they should avoid the pitfalls of other non-profits, where there were just words and nothing to measure. It was necessary to have definitions and measurement guidelines.

Dmtryo Kohmanyuk, Hostmaster, said other stakeholders would take over if the community did not properly manage this, so it was important to have this discussion. It was necessary to restore trust. And while critique could be helpful for the RIPE NCC, it needed to be mutual. A task force could help tackle this issue.

Paul Wilson, APNIC, said the goals were missing active stewardship. The community had been reducing its role here, but the need was only growing.

Niall said the community needed to focus on doing a good job. They could not just resist regulation, but rather should engage regulators and work with them.

Remco moved to the topic of structuring the NCC. He gave some background on the RIPE NCC's development from RARE (now TERENA) and pointed out that the structure described then was now a bit out of date (for example, one original goal was limiting applicable taxation). He asked what structure and principles the RIPE NCC should now follow.

Daniel said the RIPE NCC chose to be an association for democratic purposes. Several elements of the original structure were still relevant, such as being resistant to hostile takeover, supporting credible functioning as an organisation, and neutrality. The tax aspect could be revised, as it originally had to do with non-Dutch members disliking paying Dutch taxes.

Kurtis Lindqvist, LINX, noted that robust governance was not necessarily good. The members of today might prefer a very different structure. They needed to consider how to build trust through governance.

Pavel said that the foundational RIPE NCC documents were already very good and should not be significantly changed due to the risk of causing problems.

Tobias said there was a need to preserve bottom-up governance in the face of national governance attempts. The RIPE NCC structure had to reflect this.

Jim said that a non-profit structure was good enough, but they could review processes such as electing Board members. The RIPE NCC could not grow indefinitely, and it was also necessary to review its services and whether some could be reduced.

Remco agreed the RIPE NCC's goal was not to keep growing, but he noted that discussion of RIPE NCC's activities would take place at the autumn GM. The understanding of criticality might shift if they were to start cutting services.

Jim agreed but said it was still worth considering in light of present need.

Peter said that no matter the final structure, it should not resemble a marketplace selling IPs.

Cynthia Revström, on behalf of herself, said that the fundamental association structure was good and resilient. Only small changes were needed.

Randy Bush, on behalf of himself, said that trust was gone. They should now anticipate an un-trusting environment between all stakeholders.

Tina said RIPE and the RIPE NCC don't need to be separate. What they needed was strong, experienced Board leadership focused on strategic goals. The Board members could come from different backgrounds than engineering, and they might need advisors on non-profit governance. But it was difficult to find new Board members due to the time required for the role.

Blake Willis, Zayo Europe, suggested really defining the terms community, member and organisation. Members might need a community council where they could participate more and represent themselves aside from the Board. He also noted that parts of the service region were not represented well in the Executive Board. They should also consider different, more modern financial and governance structures.

Kaitlyn Pellak, AWS, said it was still important to consider resource distribution, not just registry accuracy. Policy compliance was also important, but they should listen to community needs and not regulate more than needed.

Remco said registry accuracy had always been part of the RIPE NCC's mission. In the past, swift resource distribution had been the priority but now a large amount of work had to be expended on registry accuracy.

Malcolm Hutty, LINX, said they needed to put just as much work into the current structure as into the original one. They should consider the power dynamics between RIPE and the RIPE NCC and which one should be taking the lead. They also needed to specify what to preserve and what to change.

Remco said this would take place over the next 18 months in this process.

Janos Zsako, NIC.HU, said they had not discussed RIPE NCC services enough. They should avoid cutting these, as the RIPE NCC was a leading RIR here.

Erik Bais, on behalf of himself, suggested limiting the number of proxy votes. Sponsoring LIR relationships should also be discussed, especially in light of recent EU regulations. Associate membership contracts could possibly increase the size of the membership.

Robert Carolina, on behalf of himself, said the RIPE NCC should remain a not-for-profit for stability. He disagreed with speaking about the RIPE NCC as managing assets, as it also managed a directory. They needed to be clear about how to identify the community and the industry in which they sought credibility for self-governance. He asked whether these functions really aligned with each other and with running an RIR.

Remco noted there could be community discussion in the community plenary. He acknowledged the point about asset management but said it was worth addressing that this was how other stakeholders viewed the RIPE NCC.

Lu Heng, Larus Limited, said the big paradox was the increased value of IPv4 and the declining membership, and thus lower budget. A solution could be going to institutions like the ITU or decentralising. This organisational structure was too vulnerable and inappropriate for the level of its assets.

Dmytro said all organisations were vulnerable if badly governed. He suggested they consider reducing voting rights for members who didn't vote enough and giving sponsored LIRs "second class" non-voting memberships. He thought it was fine to have different tiers of membership.

Remco thanked everyone for their contributions and said discussion about funding would be postponed to the GM tomorrow. Based on this BoF discussion, he proposed setting up a task force to draft a community document about these topics.

Shane Kerr, on behalf of himself, said he did not recommend this, based on his experience. A task force would help produce recommendations, but it would make it harder for the community to be involved. They could have similar discussions without the official TF structure.

Tobias suggested an open framing document where people could contribute.

Jim said there needed to be some organisational structure, such as a TF. A community consultation would not work if the TF needed to repeatedly check in with the community; it would be better just to have the community discuss the TF's work. They also needed to bring in other stakeholders, such as legal and regulatory representatives. The RIEP NCC could select these.

Blake said they should focus on smaller plans they could achieve without a formal TF; for instance, the RIPE NCC office in Dubai office had been a way to engage underrepresented regions.

Daniel noted that RIPE Docs like ripe-161 had been produced after consulting with the community about main principles, and this should be done again.

Lu Heng agreed that a TF was not a good direction because they should ensure more community members could be included. He suggested the community might want the RIPE NCC to be stripped down and to take over some of its tasks, such as maintaining the data in the registry.

Marlin said the community had a lot of good researchers they could make use of, such as by carrying out surveys and determining next steps from there.

Peter said the community needed to consult experts early on in this process to advise them on corporate governance.

Remco thanked attendees again and said he recommended a TF as often large groups could not take ownership of a project effectively. He would present a follow-up at the community plenary and would talk to WG chairs and RIPE NCC staff about next steps.