**RIPE Accountability Task Force Draft Report**

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# Overview

## What is RIPE

Réseaux IP Européens (RIPE) began in 1989 when a group of IP network operators based in Europe began a series of regular meetings to share experiences and carry out technical coordination work. They started to exchange information and established a database for storing operational data.

Just as the Internet itself is based on a de-centralised set of networks that interconnect with each other on the basis of trust and openness, RIPE from the early days adopted ways of working that included core values such as open, transparent and bottom-up decision making. This included a reliance on consensus as the basis of making decisions.

As more network operators came to participate in RIPE over time, the amount of coordination work expanded rapidly. The community has grown from humble beginnings with a handful of individuals in a room to a large, robust community supporting many hundreds of attendees per meeting and with thousands more subscribed to the community mailing lists.



RIPE is a forum open to anyone interested in Internet networks primarily in Europe, the Middle East and parts of Central Asia, but also beyond. The objective of RIPE is to ensure the administrative and technical coordination necessary for the operation of Internet networks.

The RIPE community has become a globally recognised policy making body. The community discusses a wide range of topics in a number of working groups, including: Address Policy, Cooperation, RIPE NCC Services, RIPE Database, Routing, Connect (IXPs), DNS, IPv6, Measurements and Tools, Open Source Software.

## The difference between RIPE and the RIPE NCC

In 1990 the RIPE community decided to fund a “coordination center” that employed full-time staff to carry out work for them. The RIPE Network Coordination Centre (NCC) was established in April 1992.

Although similar in name, RIPE and the RIPE NCC are separate entities. The RIPE community refers collectively to a group of like-minded individuals, whether members of the RIPE NCC or not, with an interest in the way the Internet is managed, structured or governed.

The RIPE NCC is a membership-based not-for-profit association under Dutch law. Some of the RIPE NCC's key activities include functioning as an Regional Internet Registry (RIR) responsible for distributing Internet number resources, providing secretariat support to the RIPE community, maintaining the RIPE Database, organising RIPE Meetings, and maintaining the RIPE Document Store and community mailing lists.

The RIPE community provides input to the RIPE NCC's activities through RIPE Meetings and the various RIPE Working Groups.

## Why RIPE is Reviewing its Accountability Now

In fall of 2016, stewardship of the IANA was transferred to the global Internet community. Oversight of IANA is now the responsibility of the Names, Numbers and Protocol Parameters communities that rely on its services.

As part of the transition, the industry established mechanisms to keep ICANN and its leadership accountable to the interests of the community. Following the successful transition, outside attention shifted from ICANN itself, to other community structures and their accountability.

In 2016, the RIPE community established a task force to review its accountability. With community consent, the RIPE Accountability Task Force was established with the following scope:

* Review existing RIPE community structures, documentation and processes to ensure they are accountable and in alignment with RIPE values
* Document existing RIPE community structures or processes where needed
* Identify potential gaps where RIPE accountability could be improved or strengthened
* Publish recommendations for the RIPE community
* Identify areas where communications efforts or materials may be required

This document is the report of the RIPE Accountability Task Force following its review of the RIPE community.

## How do we see accountability in RIPE?

Since it first began, RIPE was centred around a series of core values that were integral to its success as a community. As RIPE grew, a series of accountability features evolved to ensure the community remained consistent with its values.

These accountability features incorporate checks and balances that maintain the integrity of the community over time. This includes self-regulatory mechanisms such as the separation of powers and appeal processes to ensure that concerns can be addressed in an objective manner.

Because RIPE is an accountable community, participants can trust that their contributions to the decision-making process are worthwhile. Decisions can be justified on the basis of expert technical information, open and transparent structures, and the fact that they were made according to established processes.

With these accountability features RIPE is able to justify its role and the decisions it makes both to itself and external entities.

RIPE’s accountability features cannot guarantee that a decision made by the community will produce an ideal outcome or one that is to the liking of all individuals participating within the process. However, because RIPE has these features in place, it can guarantee that it will produce *accountable* outcomes. If a previous outcome is no longer appropriate for the current circumstances, it can always be revisited and changed by the community again in the future.

##  Who is RIPE accountable to?

RIPE is an open community where anyone with an interest in the technical coordination of Internet networks is welcome to participate.

RIPE has the following accountabilities:

* RIPE is accountable to the community as a whole
* RIPE is not accountable to external entities
* RIPE is not accountable to individuals in the community

RIPE is only directly accountable to these participants collectively. It is not accountable to individuals or entities outside of the community.

COMMENT ATHINA/ANTONY: This needs more input from task force – need to make our case better.

## The benefits of accountability

An accountable RIPE community enhances trust. Participants can trust that the community’s processes are predictable, open and transparent. This encourages participation, and attracts others to the community, as individuals can be sure that their contributions will be heard, and any objections addressed. Wider and more effective participation is more likely to produce outcomes that receive broad support.

RIPE being accountable also enhances its legitimacy. It demonstrates that the community is authoritative and can make important decisions concerning Internet infrastructure without undue influence.

### Preventing Capture

Capture is usually understood in terms of a certain group dominating decision-making processes within RIPE to produce outcomes that benefit itself at the expense of the wider community.

Having accountable structures in RIPE allows less room for malicious groups to make decisions in their own interest by capturing key positions in the community. RIPE has always been aware that there are risks associated with the capture of decision-making processes. Capture is an important concern, given that much of the legitimacy of RIPE rests on its ability to fairly address the concerns of many different individuals. Self-interested groups exercising undue influence over the community would compromise its integrity as a whole.

This is why the community consciously developed a separation of powers between individual Working Groups, the Working Group Chair Collective, RIPE Chair, RIPE Programme Committee, and other roles and structures. The community also uses an open and transparent approach that minimises the ability of individuals or groups to manipulate processes. Even if certain groups were successful in capturing critical positions in the community, RIPE structures would not allow them to make unilateral decisions.

For example, if a working group chair declared consensus on a policy that served their own business interest against a lack of consensus in the working group, we can expect that there would be a vocal response from the working group participants, who would have the option of appealing the consensus-call. A separate body, the Working Group Chair Collective (comprised of all RIPE Working Group Chairs) would then assess the consensus call. The RIPE Chair is also able to make a final call in the event the Working Group Chair Collective was unable to reach agreement.

Another concern would be if a group with a particular interest inserted outside supporters into the community to promote its own agenda. The task force believes this is more of a risk than the previous example because it would affect the base of the bottom-up process. Nevertheless, it’s the open, transparent nature of the community and the fact that it enjoys wide participation from a range of different individuals acting in good faith that minimises the risk of this type of capture. An accountable RIPE community attracts more participants and helps to minimise this form of capture “from the floor”, which is best countered by having a wide base of active community members.

**Possible recommendation:** RIPE community to consider alternative forms of capture.

# Core RIPE values

Since its inception, RIPE has always conducted itself based on a series of core values. The task force grouped these into three categories: substantive values, process values and consensus.

Substantive values are not explicit and have never been discussed by the RIPE community. Indeed, RIPE generally avoids engaging in these kinds of abstract discussions for good reason. Nevertheless, these values were identified by the task force as areas of implicit agreement that provide higher-level direction and guidance about what the shared enterprise of RIPE is really about.

The substantive values identified here are not a definitive set – the community may think that some are not really values or that others have been left out. However, it is worth mentioning these in the broadest possible terms as a means of outlining a shared understanding of what RIPE is trying to achieve. It is generally unthinkable that the community would agree on a policy or take a decision that undermined or contradicted these values.

Process values are about established community agreement on the nature of its processes. They are expected by default and incorporated into all RIPE processes from the beginning. These values are openness, transparency and bottom-up decision making.

Finally, consensus is also understood as a process value, especially since it is a core component of the “bottom-up” process value. However, consensus plays such a central and key role in all aspects of RIPE decision-making that it was felt this needed to be addressed separately from the other process values.

## Substantive values

### Everyone can use the Internet

RIPE is trying to make the Internet available and open for people to connect to. The Internet should be easy to use and barriers to its use should be minimised wherever possible. RIPE works to provide resources and coordination so that anyone can connect to the Internet.

### Inter-connected Networks (core network value)

Networks are separate and autonomous. There is no hierarchy or control. There is no centralised operator that is responsible for the global Internet.

The function of RIPE is to perform a coordination role that allows these autonomous networks to connect to the Internet. RIPE does not seek to impose rules or control. It works to bring people together to allow for an interoperable system of networks. These networks have a diverse range of purposes for which they want to connect. Network operators decide how to interconnect and no one imposes any rules on them about how they should operate their networks.

### Stable and Reliable Internet

The stability of the Internet depends on network operators and their ability to coordinate and cooperate. RIPE is a place where this coordination takes place. The shared enterprise of RIPE is a stable and reliable Internet.

### RIPE has a defined scope

Although RIPE’s scope has never been officially discussed and agreed upon, there is a general understanding that there are limits to the issues and problems it can address. RIPE is not an unlimited body – just because a problem exists does not mean it is RIPE’s problem to solve.

The RIPE community can only really work on issues where a consensus can be reached. In some cases, individuals may attempt to introduce issues into community discussions that are best addressed by other entities such as government, law enforcement or regulators. These are generally issues that are not appropriate for a voluntary self-organising community to solve.

## Process Values: Open, transparent, bottom-up decision-making

Openness

RIPE has no formal membership or participation requirements. It is open to anyone who wants to participate in decision-making and other discussions.

RIPE community discussions and policy discussions take place on open mailing lists. Discussions also take place at RIPE Meetings. While there are costs involved in attending RIPE Meetings, there are options that allow people to participate in community discussions remotely (at no cost).

Decisions made in the RIPE Policy Development Process must be made on the relevant mailing list. Therefore, the only precondition for participation in the discussions and policy-making process of the RIPE community is access to an email account. This way RIPE allows all individuals with an interest to participate in its discussions, including those from other regions.

Open participation ensures that all voices are heard, and that RIPE policies and decisions are representative of the actual needs of those they apply to.

Transparent

For the RIPE community to be sure that important decisions are not being made behind closed doors and that all interested parties have sufficient information about the relevant discussions, the RIPE community expects that all developments should be transparent to everyone.

Transparency is accomplished in the following ways:

* All developments are announced through the mailing lists.
* All discussions taking place through the mailing lists are archived in a comprehensive way and are publicly available.
* All discussions and developments that take place at the RIPE Meetings are recorded, archived and publicly available. In addition, a transcript and/or minutes of the discussions is archived and publicly available.
* RIPE Meetings can be attended for free via online remote participation.
* All RIPE policies and announcements are archived and publicly available.

Transparency does not mean absolute transparency in all instances. Rather, it is a core value that is interpreted according to specific contexts and situations.

Bottom-up decision-making process

RIPE is designed so that anyone with an interest can participate in decision-making. The more formal of these processes (for example, the RIPE PDP) adhere to set timeframes and guidelines that allow for community input.

Decisions in RIPE are not made by appointed leaders or other authorities within the community. RIPE Working Group Chairs and others function as facilitators that encourage discussion and administer the community’s processes rather than as decision-makers themselves.

### Consensus in RIPE

The RIPE community uses Rough Consensus as its decision-making standard. Consensus is the best way to ensure community decisions take into account the varying and often conflicting views and priorities of those who participate in RIPE.

Rough Consensus means that the community has reached agreement, having disregarded invalid objections. Consensus is a meeting of the mind of like-minded individuals.

This definition places critical weight on what is meant by “invalid objections”. This is discussed in detail further below.

## Consensus vs Rough Consensus

The RIPE community describes its decision-making standard as either “Consensus” or “Rough Consensus”. There are valid arguments for or against either label. Consensus risks being misunderstood as full agreement or unanimity. Rough Consensus is widely thought to have originated with the IETF; using it might give the improper suggestion that RIPE simply defers to the IETF for its standard. While the standard applied by RIPE is very similar to that of the IETF, some differences apply.

It should also be noted that while Rough Consensus is the usual decision-making standard within the RIPE community, it is not used to the exclusion of all else. For example, Working Group Chairs are sometimes selected by popular election. This section does not seek to describe when Rough Consensus is or should be used, only what it means.

COMMENT ATHINA/ANTONY: This section could use more clarify around what the distinction between consensus/rough consensus is and why it is relevant (for newcomers etc).

### What Rough Consensus is not

It is instructive to consider what consider what rough consensus is not: the alternative standards that the above definition disregards:

* Rough consensus is not unanimity

The above standard makes it clear that “invalid objections” are to be disregarded. However, such objections need to be identified and distinguished from valid objections, it is clear that the mere fact that one person disagrees with a proposal is not in itself sufficient to prevent rough consensus being declared.

* Rough consensus is not winning a vote
The rough consensus standard is an assessment that there is agreement within the community.
* Rough consensus is not a majority opinion
Rough consensus requires that the community be in agreement (disregarding invalid objections). This clearly means that the majority opinion does not necessarily prevail: if there is not general agreement for a proposal, it cannot be decided upon even if a majority support it.
* Rough consensus is not a super-majority
Perhaps the most difficult and finely nuanced issue is that of super-majority. Because “rough consensus” requires that “most” people in the community support a decision, and does not require complete unanimity, it is easy to mistake this for a super-majority, albeit one where the threshold for that super-majority is unclear (and perhaps not fixed). This would be an error. What determines whether a small minority is sufficient to block the declaration of rough consensus is not their number per se, but the nature and quality of their objection. If there is a sizeable number of people objecting, that might tend to indicate that the objection is valid, and if only one person dissents, that might tend to indicate that their objection is not valid. But these are at most rebuttable presumptions. Numbers, alone, are not decisive.

### The role of Chair

The chair occupies a crucial role within almost all RIPE community structures. In particular, a Working Group Chair is responsible for declaring whether a particular policy proposal has reached consensus or not. Typically, in any policy discussion, input can be sorted into a number of separate categories, such as:

Positive input for a proposal:

* A supporting statement with an explanation
* A statement of support without an explanation (usually expressed on a mailing list as “+1”)
* A statement of support with modifications

Negative input against a proposal:

* Objections with explanation (both valid and invalid)
* Objections with no explanation (“-1”)

The chair determines which statements can be included in the discussion and which can be disregarded for various reasons that are explained below (such as out of scope or lack of good faith).

### What kind of objections are invalid

There are several broad categories in which invalid objections may be found. Loosely, these might be considered “lack of good faith”, “out of scope”, and “asked and answered”.

### Lack of good faith

The RIPE community is open to all who wish to participate. It is therefore possible that it will attract people who are deliberately disruptive, who simply seek to prevent the conduct of business. These kinds of objections should be disregarded when considering whether there is rough consensus within the community.

The RIPE community exists for valid purposes that it has agreed are its proper scope and purview. It deemed legitimate for the RIPE community to develop policy within this scope.

It may be that a person does not accept the legitimacy of the existence of the RIPE community or its authority as a venue for policy-making within its agreed scope. That person may object to any policy or decision by RIPE, because they are opposed to RIPE in principle. This is a subset of the previous objections: such dissenters also seek to prevent the conduct of RIPE business, albeit on a point of principle rather than merely willfully.

Such an objection should be disregarded as invalid: it is to be viewed as a proxy for an opinion on another subject (“should RIPE exist?”) and not a valid intervention on the issue at hand. If the only disagreement within the community is from people who want to end or to sabotage the existence of RIPE, then rough consensus can be declared to exist.

The RIPE community is a collective enterprise that seeks to benefit the common good. Accordingly, positions that are based wholly on private interest, disregarding the common good, can be themselves be excluded from an assessment of rough consensus.

This ground for disregarding dissent must be employed carefully:

* It does not justify ignoring dissent merely because one side claims the moral high ground. It is wholly legitimate to disagree about where the common good lies. Accusations that one side is self-interested and harming the common good are absolutely no reason to disregard dissent.
* It should also be remembered that the community is made up of individuals and entities, all of whom have a legitimate personal interest. Each participant is a member of the community, and evidence of harm to members of the community is valid evidence in opposition to a proposal.
* It is therefore perfectly legitimate for a dissenter to oppose a proposal because they believe it is a poor decision, and to use evidence of how it would harm them personally in support of their case.

However, once it is clearly established that a proposal is beneficial to the community as a whole, and the only dissent is based entirely on the expectation that the proposal would cause harm or cost or reduced benefit to the dissenters themselves, then that dissent may be disregarded as invalid when considering whether rough consensus exists.

### Out of scope

It is legitimate to disregard dissent where the reason for that dissent is not properly related to the matter at hand.

* If the dissenter’s objection is simply unrelated to the issue, the fact that they express their opinion as opposition to the proposal can properly be disregarded when assessing whether rough consensus exists.
* RIPE community decisions should be made on their merits. Accordingly, it is not open to participants to willfully hold up decision-making on one issue so as to coercively silence dissent on another. If a dissenter is simply seeking to trade an offer to set aside their objection on one proposal if others in turn set aside their (validly held) concerns on another, this is an abuse of the process. Dissent from a person based on an attempt to game the system can properly be disregarded when assessing whether rough consensus exists.
* However, if two proposals, X and Y are currently being considered separately, it is entirely proper to consider one as a dependency for the other if there is a legitimate interaction between them (i.e. that policy X is viable only if accompanied by policy Y). An opinion along these lines would be a legitimate objection, and should not be disregarded.

### Asked and answered

If someone raises a potentially legitimate objection to a proposal, it is possible that a reasonably sufficient answer is given – either by way of information, or perhaps by modifying the proposal.

The objection should properly be understood as the reasoning underpinning the objection, and not the mere fact of the opposition: the mere fact of opposition, absent an underlying reason would merely be willful obstruction.

Nor should the objection properly be understood to be the dissenter’s proposed solution.

In other words, if the dissenter is understood to say “I object to this proposal, because it will result in X; please change it by adding Y to cure this problem”, the core of the objection standing in the way of a find of rough consensus should be understood to be “it will result in X’, not “I object” nor “please change it by adding Y”.

A dissenter is entitled to stand on their opposition as long as a reasonable concern remains, but they are not entitled to have that concern addressed in precisely the manner they propose. Accordingly, if a dissenter continues their opposition after their stated concern has been fully addressed, that continuing opposition can properly be disregarded in the assessment of whether rough consensus exists. Such continuing dissent may be disregarded notwithstanding that the proposal has not been changed in the manner that the dissenter asks.

### Other issues to consider when evaluating consensus

#### “Silence as Consensus” and “Rational Ignorance”

The amount of community participation can vary greatly between discussions. Generally speaking, the more critical an issue or the wider its impact, the more people will provide input to the decision-making process.

Minor proposals will sometimes proceed with a relatively small level of community input. While this may be seen as a minority making decisions on behalf of the community, this is not necessarily a bad thing. The transparency and openness of the decision-making process allows the community to proceed with the assumption that the wider community will get involved if it feels it is in its interests to do so.

Where low participation is evident, it can generally be assumed that the wider community noticed the discussion was taking place, but rationally decided that:

* Based on the expected impact, it was not worth their time and energy to learn about the issue and engage with it
* They did not know as much as others involved in the discussion
* They trusted that those community members who were involved in the discussion would produce an acceptable outcome.

While broad and active participation is always preferred, the community’s silence can often be interpreted as “we have no strong objections.” It is therefore not a failure of the process to demonstrate that consensus on a certain proposal was reached with a relatively small amount of community input.

It is up to the chair to determine whether the input received on a proposal is sufficient and that the wider community has been adequately informed of ongoing discussions. If a policy proposal in a relatively small working group would have a large impact, it is common for the working group chair to notify other working groups of the discussion and invite others to participate.

This model relies on the good faith of the Chair and the working group participants. One potential concern would be around a group of people acting in bad faith and attempting to “forum shop” for a working group that would allow them to pass a self-serving proposal without the wider community being aware.

In practice there are a number of informal mechanisms that minimise the risk of decisions taking the community by surprise. The Working Group Chairs meet as a collective at RIPE Meetings and communicate in-between meetings on a mailing list. RIPE community members participate in multiple working groups and engage in discussions with one another both at RIPE Meetings, on mailing lists and at other venues.

**Possible recommendation:** The community could ensure that a formal process exists – where all WGs are informed of a substantial change to ensure that nothing “sneaks” through without the wider community having an opportunity to comment. This would also ensure that if a chair is acting in bad faith, they would not be successful.

#### Self-interest vs collective interest

Individuals participate within RIPE because they have a shared interest in the successful operation of the Internet. At the same time, participants come to discussions with a range of different and often conflicting interests (private, political, commercial, etc.). RIPE has long understood that the best way to address this contradiction is by using consensus-based decision-making processes.

When the community takes a decision, it frequently balances the need and self-interest of some against the impact the decision would have on the wider community. Decisions are favoured that lead to the greatest good for the greatest number of people, or alternatively that everyone is as “equally unhappy” as possible.

Input can be categorized as “self-serving” (and thus set aside) if it focuses too heavily on the self-interest of an individual or group at the expense of the wider community. However, it is likely that an issue that affects one network is shared by others, so this is only done with careful consideration.

#### Applying process values in different contexts

While the community expects that values like openness and consensus will be applied to all of its processes from the beginning, in practice they are often applied to varying degrees depending on the specific context. Generally, the community will start with absolute openness, absolute transparency and make modifications to its approach depending the situation.

For example, in order for task forces to produce work in an efficient manner, they may need to limit contributions from casual observers who might derail their discussions (which contradicts openness). Similarly, the community recognises that certain roles within RIPE are best selected by vote rather than consensus (e.g. Programme Committee members). While these kinds of diversions from the norm happen in various cases, they remain open to further debate and reconsideration, and RIPE does not hesitate to challenge new processes that appear to break with its values to an inappropriate degree.

# The role of documentation and standards

Documentation contributes to the core community values of openness and transparency. It ensures RIPE remains accountable to itself as a community and helps to demonstrate its accountability to external observers.

Documentation also helps newcomers to engage within RIPE, by describing current processes and recording previous decisions and how they were taken. Being able to see the history of RIPE helps to preserve its values over time.

For people who have worked within RIPE for a long time, documentation also clarifies the intent behind past decisions and ensures alignment of values and purpose. It supports continuity in the community’s discussions.

For example, until recently there were not established processes for the selection of working group chairs. That does not mean that chairs were not selected according to open, transparent, bottom-up processes that the community supported. More recently, the community realised that due to the evolution that has happened in the community (and Internet governance in general) there was a need for documenting this process. Documentation is helpful in terms of communicating to newcomers and outsiders that chair selection is not a random process or a nepotism. When the community sees a need for documentation it responds to this need.

However, while documentation can provide certainty and continuity, *over-documentation* can disempower newcomers by raising the barrier for participation. It can also weaken underlying community values of flexibility and trust – by giving room to pedantic interpretations and rules. Over-documentation could also empower those who might attempt to game decision-making in RIPE.

It may happen that in an effort to have a documented process that would preserve the core values of the community, applying the process to the letter would actually contradict the intent behind the process.

RIPE has consciously resisted becoming overly bureaucratic and avoids documentation for documentation’s sake. It remains flexible by avoiding rules wherever norms will do. The RIPE accountability task force respects and endorses this tradition.

The task force recognises that RIPE has produced some very helpful and valuable documents, some of which are included in the appendix for reference. The RIPE NCC in its secretariat role, makes sure that these documents are stored in a systematic way. Obsolete documents are clearly market and link to the replacement document where applicable. The date of their last evaluation is also recorded.

The task force has noted that some RIPE Documents are marked as obsolete, but it is not clear why they were obsoleted and there is no replacement document linked.

**Recommendation:** The task force recommends that an explanation be given at the top of obsoleted RIPE Documents when there is no replacement document referenced.

## A lack of documentation is not necessarily a problem

RIPE has a set of both written and unwritten processes. When there are no written procedures, the community’s established norms and values apply.

Those that appear to have a prominent role within RIPE community (chairs, et al) have been appointed by RIPE community participants through procedures. During their term, they are acting in accordance with these procedures. And according to unwritten rules or expectations. If they don’t act in accordance with these rules and norms, they will be removed.

For example, there is an expectation that all voices will be heard. That chairs will coordinate with other working groups as appropriate. Chairs will actively facilitate community discussions, set agendas, etc. If a chair doesn’t act in accordance with these expectations, the community will doubt their capacity and while there may not be specific procedures in every case, there is trust in the self-regulatory system and the appropriate outcomes will be achieved (either by requiring the chair to modify their approach, or by removing them from their role).

## Documentation and continuity of RIPE values

Many RIPE processes are not documented, although they are currently performed according to the values of the RIPE community. RIPE has experienced and trusted community members that fill critical positions (such as working group chairs). These individuals have been following unwritten processes in a way that everyone feels comfortable with and that preserves the accountability of the community. However, there is a concern that over time, newer community members may come to fill these roles without having an understanding of the spirit behind the RIPE community’s process. This could erode the community’s trust in itself over time.

As well as community members filling key roles, community participants traditionally would gather in an informal manner to make technical decisions with shared goals in mind. Over time, people from different backgrounds and with other interests have also come to participate within the community. It is a principle of RIPE to accommodate everyone with an interest in Internet infrastructure. However, the values, aims and approach of these newcomers may be at odds with the traditions of RIPE. If RIPE’s structures are not sufficiently established or fortified enough to accommodate these changing demographics, there could be outcomes that weaken the accountability of the community’s processes in the future.

Documenting not only processes, but also core values, could help the community to protect against this, by having some kind of an agreed-upon affirmation to refer back to.

# Components of RIPE Accountability

This section represents an attempt by the task force to identify the core structures of the RIPE community and the roles they perform. Under the column Process, we have included documentation that describes how roles are expected to be performed. Under Decisions, we list where decisions taken are documented. Under Evaluation, the task force has included observations.

In the task force’s evaluation - No recommendations

Meets expectations

Needs review

|  |
| --- |
| **1.0 RIPE Chair**The RIPE Chair is responsible for ensuring the governing of RIPE and performs a range of different roles. Not much of this function is currently documented, though draft versions of a replacement procedure and role description havebeen circulated to the community. The task force believes that the community needs to make progress on finalising these documents.  |
| **Role** | **Process** | **Decisions**  | **Evaluation** |
| 1.1 Final word in PDP disputes  | [ripe-642](https://www.ripe.net/publications/docs/ripe-642) | A PDP dispute has never been escalated to the RIPE Chair before. If such a decision were taken, it would be announced on the relevant mailing list. The RIPE NCC has a draft web page it would publish that records the decision.  | Meets expectations |
| 1.2 Final word on location of RIPE Meetings | [RIPE Meeting Location Selection Process](https://www.ripe.net/participate/meetings/ripe-meetings/ripe-meeting-location-selection-process) | -[Upcoming RIPE Meetings](https://www.ripe.net/participate/meetings/ripe-meetings/upcoming-ripe-meetings)-Various MLs ([example](https://www.ripe.net/ripe/mail/archives/ripe-list/2016-June/001035.html))  | Meets expectations |
| 1.3 Chairs RIPE WG Chair collective | [Draft: RIPE Chair Function Description](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/chair/draft-ripe-chair-function-description) (Pending) | -[WG Chair Collective Meeting Summaries](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/wg/cc/summaries) | Needs review  |
| 1.4 Chairs RIPE Meetings | [Draft: RIPE Chair Function Description](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/chair/draft-ripe-chair-function-description) (Pending) | N/A | Needs review |
| 1.5 Representing the RIPE community in other forums | [Draft: RIPE Chair Function Description](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/chair/draft-ripe-chair-function-description) (Pending) | No reporting | Needs review |
| 1.6 Decides on RIPE Meeting schedule (not content) | [Draft: RIPE Chair Function Description](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/chair/draft-ripe-chair-function-description) (Pending) | -[RIPE Meeting Plan](https://ripe73.ripe.net/programme/meeting-plan/)[4] | Needs review |
| 1.7 Decides on content of Friday Plenary at RIPE Meetings | [Draft: RIPE Chair Function Description](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/chair/draft-ripe-chair-function-description) (Pending) | -[RIPE Meeting Plan](https://ripe73.ripe.net/programme/meeting-plan/)[4] | Needs review |
| 1.8 Raise minor issues to the Plenary for consensus | [Draft: RIPE Chair Function Description](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/chair/draft-ripe-chair-function-description) (Pending) | There is no established procedure around reporting plenary decisions back to the community. This is done on a case-by-case basis.  | Needs review |
| 1.9 Makes final decision on waiver of RIPE Meeting fees | [About RIPE Meetings](https://www.ripe.net/participate/meetings/ripe-meetings) | No reporting | Meets expectations |

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| **2.0 Working Group Chairs** Working Group Chairs facilitate the work of working groups and declare consensus on policy proposals. Many functions of this role are documented.  |
|  | **Process** | **Decisions**  | **Evaluation** |
| 2.1 Determine whether a proposal can move to the next step in the PDP and declare consensus | [ripe-642](https://www.ripe.net/publications/docs/ripe-642) | -ML announcements ([example](https://www.ripe.net/ripe/mail/archives/address-policy-wg/2017-February/011997.html)) | Meets expectations |
| 2.2 Assign action items to the RIPE NCC and others based on WG input | [ripe-692](https://www.ripe.net/publications/docs/ripe-692) | -ML or RIPE Meeting Minutes ([example](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/wg/ap/minutes/ripe-71))  | Meets expectations |
| 2.3 Announce final best practice documents (or other output) created by WGs | No | -ML ([example](https://www.ripe.net/ripe/mail/archives/bcop/2016-October/000152.html)) | Meets expectations |
| 2.4 Moderate ML discussions/discussions at RIPE Meetings | [ripe-692](https://www.ripe.net/publications/docs/ripe-692) | -ML ([example](https://www.ripe.net/participate/mail/forum/address-policy-wg/PDFCNEFENTkyLUZDQUItNDg1NC04QkQwLUIwRTM0ODU5NjI5NkBwbGVzYS5ybz4%3D))-RIPE Meeting Minutes([example](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/wg/ap/minutes/ripe-73)) | Meets expectations |
| 2.5 Propose agenda for RIPE Meetings and solicit relevant presentations | [ripe-692](https://www.ripe.net/publications/docs/ripe-692) | -ML ([example](https://www.ripe.net/ripe/mail/archives/address-policy-wg/2017-March/012005.html)) | Meets expectations |
| 2.6 Declare consensus on any topic raised in the WG  | No | Reported in WG minutes and on mailing lists | Meets expectations |
| 2.7 Approve minutes from RIPE Meetings | No | Takes place on mailing list or in working group session at RIPE Meetings | Meets expectations |

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| **3.0 Working Groups**Working Groups are one of the main bodies that the RIPE community is structured around. WGs discuss and decide on policies that the RIPE NCC will implement. Currently only policy development and working group chair selection are documented. There is not much description of what working groups do or how they work. The task force feels it would help newcomers to have some kind of a description documented somewhere.  |
| **Role** | **Process** | **Decisions** | **Evaluation** |
| 3.1 Select WG Chairs | [Working Group Chair Selection](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/wg/working-group-chair-selection) | -ML or RIPE Meeting minutes([example 1](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/wg/ap/minutes/ripe-72) [2](https://www.ripe.net/ripe/mail/archives/db-wg/2016-December/005480.html)) | **Needs more discussion by task force** |
| 3.2 Discuss policy proposals | [ripe-642](https://www.ripe.net/publications/docs/ripe-642) | -ML or RIPE Meeting Minutes ([example](https://www.ripe.net/participate/mail/forum/address-policy-wg/PGE2YTgyY2RjLTM1Y2EtOWQxYi00NjExLTQxZDZjMzQ1YzE4NUBpdC1uZHMuZGU%2B)) | Meets expectations |
| 3.3 Discuss best practices and other topics | No | -ML or RIPE Meeting minutes ([example](https://www.ripe.net/participate/mail/forum/address-policy-wg/PDk1NzAyMDNhLTA1MWYtMGM5Mi02NGM5LTQxNzEzMTEwYTJjNUByaXBlLm5ldD4%3D)) | Meets expectations |

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| **4.0 Working Group Chair Collective**The Working Group Chair Collective meets regularly at RIPE Meetings and as necessary to discuss issues relating to meetings and WG mailing lists. Very little of this function is currently documented. Since RIPE 67, the collective has published summaries of its meetings during RIPE Meetings. This is helpful for transparency and is a positive development.  |
| **Role** | **Process** | **Decisions** | **Evaluation** |
| 4.1 Escalation in disputed WG Chair PDP decisions | [ripe-642](https://www.ripe.net/publications/docs/ripe-642) | A PDP dispute has never been escalated to the RIPE Chair before. If such a decision were taken, it would be announced on the relevant mailing list. The RIPE NCC has a draft web page it would publish | Meets expectations |
| 4.2 Discusses RIPE Meeting plan (RIPE Chair makes the final decision) | No | -[WG Chair Collective Meeting Summaries](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/wg/cc/summaries) | Meets expectations |

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| **5.0 Task Forces**Task Forces produce reports with recommendations to be discussed by the RIPE community. Task Forces were originally described in ripe-004, however this document is now obsolete and no new RIPE Document has replaced it. The text from ripe-004 was reproduced on ripe.net and no longer seems fit for purpose. There is a definition provided in ripe-464, “Report of the Enhanced Cooperation Task Force” which may be sufficient.  |
| **Role** | **Process** | **Decisions** | **Evaluation** |
| 5.1 Produce a report with recommendations that will be discussed by the RIPE community and implemented when consensus is reached | -[RIPE Task Forces](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/tf)-[ripe-004](https://www.ripe.net/publications/docs/ripe-004) -[ripe-464](https://www.ripe.net/publications/docs/ripe-464) | -TF Report ([example](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/tf/dp/report-of-the-ripe-data-protection-task-force)) | Needs review |

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| **6.0 Programme Committee** The RIPE Programme Committee (PC) is responsible for the RIPE Meeting plenary content. The RIPE PC Charter explains how members are selected and gives an overview of their role.  |
| **Role** | **Process** | **Decisions** | **Evaluation** |
| 6.1 Decide on Monday-Tuesday RIPE Meeting Plenary programme | [ripe-600](https://www.ripe.net/publications/docs/ripe-600)  | -[RIPE Meeting Plan](https://ripe73.ripe.net/programme/meeting-plan/)[4] | Needs review |
| 6.2 Chair Plenary sessions | No |  N/A | Doesn’t need to be documented, as it comes under the umbrella of the RIPE Chair’s role as RIPE Meeting Chair |

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| **7.0 Plenary** The plenary refers to the attendees that (either physically or remotely) participate in plenary session at RIPE meetings. Few of the plenary’s powers are currently documented. The task force feels that more could be done to outline what the plenary can do and the process around how it makes decisions. Plenary decisions are not formally documented anywhere and minutes are not taken of the closing plenary where the community can make significant decisions.  |
| **Role** | **Process** | **Decisions** | **Evaluation** |
| 7.1 Approve new WGs | No | No reporting | Needs review |
| 7.2 Accept a TF’s recommendations and open/close TF | No | No reporting | Needs review |
| 7.3 Escalation for arbitration regarding resource requests by the RIPE NCC | [ripe-635](https://www.ripe.net/publications/docs/ripe-635)[ripe-670](https://www.ripe.net/publications/docs/ripe-670) | [Summary of Arbitration Rulings](https://www.ripe.net/about-us/legal/arbitration/summary-of-arbitration-rulings) | Meets expectations |
| 7.4 Issue recommendations/BCPs | No | No reporting | Needs review |
| 7.5 Ratifies/approves community decisions – e.g. might approve a communication to the ITU | No | No reporting | Needs review |
| 7.6 Makes consensus decisions on small issues brought up by the Chair | No | No reporting | Needs review |

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| **8.0 RIPE Meeting Attendees** The attendees that participate in RIPE meetings (including plenary sessions and WG sessions).  |
| **Role** | **Process** | **Decisions** | **Evaluation** |
| 8.1 Elect PC members | [ripe-600](https://www.ripe.net/publications/docs/ripe-600) | -[RIPE Programme Committee](https://www.ripe.net/participate/meetings/ripe-meetings/pc)-Daily Meeting Reports ([example](https://ripe73.ripe.net/programme/report/))[1]  | Meets expectations |
| 8.2 Elect NRO NC members from the RIPE region | [NRO NC / ASO AC Election Procedure](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/address-council-election-procedure) | -[NRO NC Nominations 2016](https://www.ripe.net/participate/internet-governance/internet-technical-community/nro/nro-nc/nro-nc-nominations-2016) -ML announcements ([example](https://www.ripe.net/ripe/mail/archives/ripe-list/2016-October/001092.html)) | Meets expectations |

# Recommendations

Based on its review, the task force has a number of recommendations it would like the RIPE community to consider.

1. The community needs to make progress on finalising the RIPE Chair replacement procedure and role description.
2. Consider adding an explanation to future obsoleted RIPE Documents when there is no replacement document that it refers to. Possibly add a new status of documents called “Archived” to represent that they are no longer current, but not exactly obsolete.
3. Consider developing more documentation around the role of the WG Chairs.
4. Consider documenting how WGs, Task Forces, BoFs, etc work.
5. Consider ensuring that a formal process exists so that all WGs are informed of substantial changes to ensure nothing “sneaks through” without the community having an opportunity to comment. This would minimise the risk of a chair acting in bad faith.
6. Community to consider preserving RIPE values, through documentation or otherwise, for continuity.
7. Develop documentation around the plenary and what its powers are. Also consider doing more to record closing plenary decisions (which are not minuted currently).
8. Individuals within the community have a broad degree of discretion, community leaders should be asked to review this document periodically which points out some of the higher-level principles that the community expects them to uphold. This document can help them to articulate some of RIPE’s core ideas and to defend their position.
9. Consider developing more user-friendly educational material do educate newcomers, and outsiders on how the community functions and its values.
10. Consider developing a “crash course in consensus” for new Chairs.
11. Task the RIPE NCC to educate external stakeholders on how the RIPE community works.

# Next steps

Input needed from task force. Development of a scorecard? Proposing that the document be reviewed again in X number of years? Etc.

## Appendix

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| **9.0 Procedures**These various procedures seem to be documented (apart from the selection of the RIPE Chair as mentioned above).  |
|  | **Process** | **Decisions** | **Evaluation** |
| 9.1 PDP | [ripe-642](https://www.ripe.net/publications/docs/ripe-642) | -[Archived Policy Proposals](https://www.ripe.net/participate/policies/archived-policy-proposals/archive-policy-proposals/)-RIPE Policy announce ML [(example)](https://www.ripe.net/ripe/mail/archives/policy-announce/2017-March/000498.html)  - ML announcements) ([example](https://www.ripe.net/ripe/mail/archives/address-policy-wg/2017-March/012003.html))-[Monthly Policy Updates](https://www.ripe.net/participate/policies/policy-updates)-[RIPE Document Store](https://www.ripe.net/publications/docs/ripe-policies/ripe-policies) |  |
| 9.2 RIPE Meeting Selection | [RIPE Meeting Location Selection Process](https://www.ripe.net/participate/meetings/ripe-meetings/ripe-meeting-location-selection-process) | -[Upcoming RIPE Meetings](https://www.ripe.net/participate/meetings/ripe-meetings/upcoming-ripe-meetings)-ML announcements ([example)](https://www.ripe.net/ripe/mail/archives/ripe-list/2016-June/001035.html)  |  |
| 9.3 WG Chair Selection | [Working Group Chair Selection](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/wg/working-group-chair-selection) | -[Active Working Groups](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/wg) (Chairs listed in individual WGs)  |  |
| 9.4 PC Selection  | [ripe-600](https://www.ripe.net/publications/docs/ripe-600) | -[RIPE Programme Committee](https://www.ripe.net/participate/meetings/ripe-meetings/pc)-Daily Meeting Reports ([example](https://ripe73.ripe.net/programme/report/))[1] |  |
| 9.5 NRO NC Member Selection | [NRO NC / ASO AC Election Procedure](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/address-council-election-procedure) | -[NRO NC Nominations 2016](https://www.ripe.net/participate/internet-governance/internet-technical-community/nro/nro-nc/nro-nc-nominations-2016)-ML announcements ([example](https://www.ripe.net/ripe/mail/archives/ripe-list/2016-October/001092.html)) -[Latest News (ripe.net)](https://www.ripe.net/publications/news/announcements/nro-nc-election-result-2016) |  |
| 9.6 RIPE Chair Selection | [Draft: RIPE Chair Selection Procedure](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/chair/draft-ripe-chair-selection-procedure)(Pending) | -[RIPE Chair](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/chair) |  |

Note: The tables below do not have the “output documented” field, as this doesn’t seem relevant here.

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| **10.0 History/Mandate** |
|  | **Documented** | **Comments** |
| 10.1 RIPE-001 | [ripe-001](https://www.ripe.net/publications/docs/ripe-001) |  |
| 10.2 RIPE-003 | [ripe-003](https://www.ripe.net/publications/docs/ripe-003) |  |

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| **11.0 Participation Requirements** |
|  | **Documented** | **Comments** |
| 11.1 Open to anyone with an email address | N/A | Some of this could be documented |
| 11.2 English language skills needed | N/A |  |
| 11.3 RIPE Meeting code of conduct | [RIPE Meeting Code of Conduct](https://www.ripe.net/participate/meetings/ripe-meetings/ripe-meeting-code-of-conduct) |  |

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| **12.0 Open/Transparent/Inclusive/Bottom-up** |
|  | **Documented** | **Comments** |
| 12.1 Public mailing lists | N/A |  |
| 12.2 Public announcement mailing lists | N/A |  |
| 12.3 RIPE Meeting WG sessions minutes publicly archived | N/A |  |
| 12.4 RIPE Meeting remote participation options | N/A |  |
| 12.5 RIPE Document store | N/A |  |
| 12.6 RIPE Fellowship/RACI | N/A |  |
| 12.7 MENOG/ENOG/SEE | N/A |  |
| 12.8 RIPE Meeting fee can be waived by Chair | [About RIPE Meetings](https://www.ripe.net/participate/meetings/ripe-meetings/about-ripe-meetings) |  |
| 12.9 Inactive Working Groups | [Inactive Working Groups](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/inactive-working-groups) |  |
| 12.10 Inactive Task Forces | [Inactive Task Forces](https://www.ripe.net/participate/ripe/tf) |  |