

# **RSSAC Advisory on Organizational Reviews**

## **5 October 2018**

From September 2017 to July 2018, an Independent Examiner (IE) conducted the second organizational review of the RSSAC. The RSSAC believes that our responses to the assessment, draft, and final reports clearly communicated a number of concerns with the organizational review and how it was conducted. For details of those concerns, we refer you to our responses<sup>1, 2</sup> and to the correspondence<sup>3</sup> between the IE and the RSSAC Review Work Party.

This letter focuses on three particular aspects of responsibilities for the ICANN organization with respect to the organizational review process:

1. Defining the process of an organizational review and its intended results;
2. Overseeing the organizational review process and the proceedings of the IE;
3. Testing the validity of the reported outcomes.

The RSSAC hopes this feedback is useful for future organizational reviews within the ICANN community.

### **Selection and Qualification of Reviewers**

Throughout the course of the organizational review, the RSSAC asked itself how an “organizational review” might be defined and, given a definition, might be conducted. In the absence of other guidance beyond Section 4.4 of the ICANN Bylaws, the RSSAC referred to several resources for its own benefit.<sup>4</sup> The RSSAC suggests that before any future organizational reviews, the ICANN organization should identify a suitable agency and consult with them on the Request For Proposal (RFP). This agency may possibly conduct the organizational review as well. The IE in an organizational review should be verifiably independent (i.e., from outside the ICANN community) and familiar with assessment frameworks and methodologies.

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<sup>1</sup> See RSSAC032: Feedback on the Independent Review of the Root Server System Advisory Committee (RSSAC) Assessment Report for Public Consultation

<sup>2</sup> See RSSAC036: RSSAC Statement on the Draft Final Report of the Second Organizational Review of the RSSAC

<sup>3</sup> See RSSAC-Review2 Mailing List Archives, <https://mm.icann.org/pipermail/rssac-review2/>

<sup>4</sup> Below are five resources that give guidance in this area. Some are from agencies that offer consulting services along these lines.

<https://bizfluent.com/how-10002395-conduct-organizational-review.html>,

<https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/human-resources/organizational-reviews>,

[https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/theme/organizational\\_performance](https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/theme/organizational_performance),

<http://www.reflectlearn.org/discover/frameworks>, and

<http://www.reflectlearn.org/discover/self-assessment-tools>.

## Guiding Principles in an Organizational Review

The RSSAC suggests that a few guiding principles be applied in any organizational review. These are the same principles that ICANN has been striving to reach for itself.

### *Transparency*

An organizational review should be transparent. The review should cite references for all stated facts and conclusions. The use of comments and subjective statements should be discouraged, but when they are included, they should be traceable to their source.

Anonymous comments should be used rarely, if ever, and only in cases where retaliation is a concern. If anonymous comments are necessary, then the source of such comments should be documented as much as possible (e.g., via interview, paper, E-Mail), and multiple sources (quotes or other) should be used to properly ensure the validity of the raised issues. This is important in large part to understand their context and determine their best interpretation.

### *Attribution*

Inputs that survive to the final report should be attributable to their origin to the maximum extent possible. If a set of people are interviewed, correspondences exchanged, or processes examined, the report should identify and enumerate those sources of input. Statements from individuals should only be considered evidence when attributed to their sources. For example, a reference to statements in an E-Mail archive documenting a conversation is properly attributed evidence, but a statement summarizing what *people believe* is not. Statements from anonymous sources should only be included when corroborated by multiple sources (e.g., a document and a quoted interpretation, so the reader can exercise individual judgment on the statements).

### *Objectivity*

The first purpose of an organizational review is to identify objective facts, and then suggest changes that might improve a situation. Interviews may be important in identifying issues and their causes, but the opinions of interviewed people are necessarily subjective. Findings need to be based on realities that can be shown to be true, independent of those subjective sources.

### *Professionalism*

The tone of the report should be professional and neutral in tone, not inflammatory or gossipy.

### *Evidence*

The resulting findings and recommendations should be based on cited evidence, that can be found in independently verifiable, stable sources such as documents, meeting minutes, and recordings.

## **Oversight of Contractual Obligations**

In an organizational review, the contract with the IE is between the IE and the ICANN organization. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the ICANN organization to ensure that contractual obligations are met by the IE. The ICANN organization should implement a schedule of checkpoints with both the reviewer and the reviewed to ensure that obligations are being met. Should there be any indication of failure to meet contractual obligations, at any point during the organizational review process, the ICANN organization should immediately intervene to course correct the organizational review to ensure compliance with terms. The ICANN organization should ensure that contractual funds expended are done so according to agreed upon terms.

## **Recommendations**

The RSSAC has five recommendations regarding future organizational reviews for the consideration of the ICANN Board Organizational Effectiveness Committee and the ICANN organization, specifically the Multistakeholder Strategy and Strategic Initiatives department:

1. The ICANN organization should, with sufficient detail, define an ICANN organizational review. This definition should be documented and available to the community. Details should be crisp and tight in order to ensure complete clarity of scope.
2. The ICANN organization should document the intent of the organizational review, what information it hopes to obtain, and how that information will be used.
3. The ICANN organization should continue to use its RFP process to select the IE. The process should be modified to ensure that the IE are experts in assessment frameworks and methodologies and that they are not from the ICANN community.
4. When an organizational review begins, the ICANN organization should ensure there are actionable checkpoints in place to ensure that the organizational review is meeting contractual obligations. Depending on the outcome of each checkpoint, the ICANN organization should take appropriate action to ensure contractual compliance.
5. At the conclusion of any organizational review, the ICANN organization should report on how the process transpired. If there are any lessons learned from the organizational review, the ICANN organization should demonstrate how the process will be modified.

The RSSAC appreciates this opportunity to provide its feedback on organizational reviews based on its recent experience.