

RSSAC Review Status Report 15 February 2018

Prepared by Interisle Consulting Group for the
RSSAC Review Working Party (RWP)

Schedule

- Draft Assessment Report (findings) delivered on 9 February 2018 for discussion with RWP on 15 February 2018

Present draft Principal Findings for Executive Summary

- Draft Assessment Report delivered on 19 February 2018 for public consultation starting 20 February 2018
- Presentation at ICANN61 (14 March 2018)
- Draft Final Report (findings + recommendations) for discussion with RWP on 2 April 2018
- Draft Final Report published for public comment (40 days) on 27 April 2018
- Final Report submitted for publication 2 July 2018

Principal Findings (1)

The ongoing RSSAC reformation that began in 2013—revised RSSAC charter, new operating procedures, and creation of the RSSAC Caucus—effectively implements all but one of the recommendations of the prior review.

The prior review recommendation that the RSSAC membership include Board or Nominating Committee appointments has not been implemented.

Principal Findings (2)

The operational procedures adopted in 2014 have substantially improved the structure and operation of the RSSAC, and the addition of staff support and travel funding has increased RSSAC and Caucus work quality and meeting participation.

Implementing changes recommended by the prior review has significantly improved the effectiveness of the RSSAC.

Principal Findings (3)

The RSSAC has become more open, transparent, and accessible since the last review, but is still widely perceived to be less transparent and engaged than other ICANN ACs and SOs.

The RSSAC's focus on technical root server operation issues and deliberate non-participation in other ICANN activities have limited its impact to a small technical audience of DNS experts. It is still widely perceived to be closed and secretive.

Principal Findings (4)

A persistent legacy of distrust complicates RSSAC efforts to function as a shared space for RSO–ICANN communication and cooperation, and ambiguity in the relationship between the RSSAC and the root ops creates uncertainty about who is speaking when the RSSAC gives advice.

The RSSAC is paradoxically both a statutory part of ICANN and a group with some members who persistently distrust ICANN, pushing back forcefully on its real or perceived infringement on their exclusive responsibility for all matters concerning root system operations. The tension between the RSSAC and its member organizations interferes with the clarity and authority of RSSAC advice.

Principal Findings (5)

The current RSSAC membership model omits both potential stakeholders and potentially critical skills and perspectives.

The RSSAC membership model excludes both serving-side root service participants (e.g., non-RSO anycast instance providers and public DNS resolvers) and provisioning-side interested parties (e.g., TLD registries and the ccNSO). It also denies the RSSAC the benefit of skills and perspectives beyond those that can be provided by the root server operators. The RSSAC Caucus was perhaps intended to fill these gaps but in practice it has not done so. Incumbent resistance and the difficulty of engaging non-RSO participants are likely to complicate any attempt to change the model.

Principal Findings (6)

The RSSAC's continuing purpose in the ICANN structure will depend on its ability to consider a broad range of potential future scenarios for serving the root, not just those that rely on a limited number of designated root servers.

The RSSAC is developing advice and recommendations concerning the future evolution of the root server system, but this work is being conducted entirely by RSO representatives who will be directly affected by it. Its ability to provide advice that anticipates changes to the root zone distribution model may be limited by its focus on the server-centric status quo. And many people outside of the RSSAC either don't know that it's working on root service evolution and other strategic policy issues or believe that its focus is misdirected.

Principal Findings (7)

Because the RSSAC has not been able to clearly identify its stakeholders, it is not clear for what and to whom it should be accountable.

The RSSAC has found it difficult to reach agreement on issues such as service level agreements and reporting for the root server system in the absence of a consensus accountability framework for its members. A major stumbling block has been uncertainty about whether RSSAC members should be accountable individually or collectively for the operation of the root server system.

Principal Findings (8)

The relative roles and responsibilities of the RSSAC, the RSSAC Caucus, the RZERC, and the SSAC are unclear to both outsiders and insiders.

In many cases even members of one of these groups could not distinguish its responsibilities from those of the others.