Root Server System Advisory Committee (RSSAC) Organizational Review Update and Next Steps

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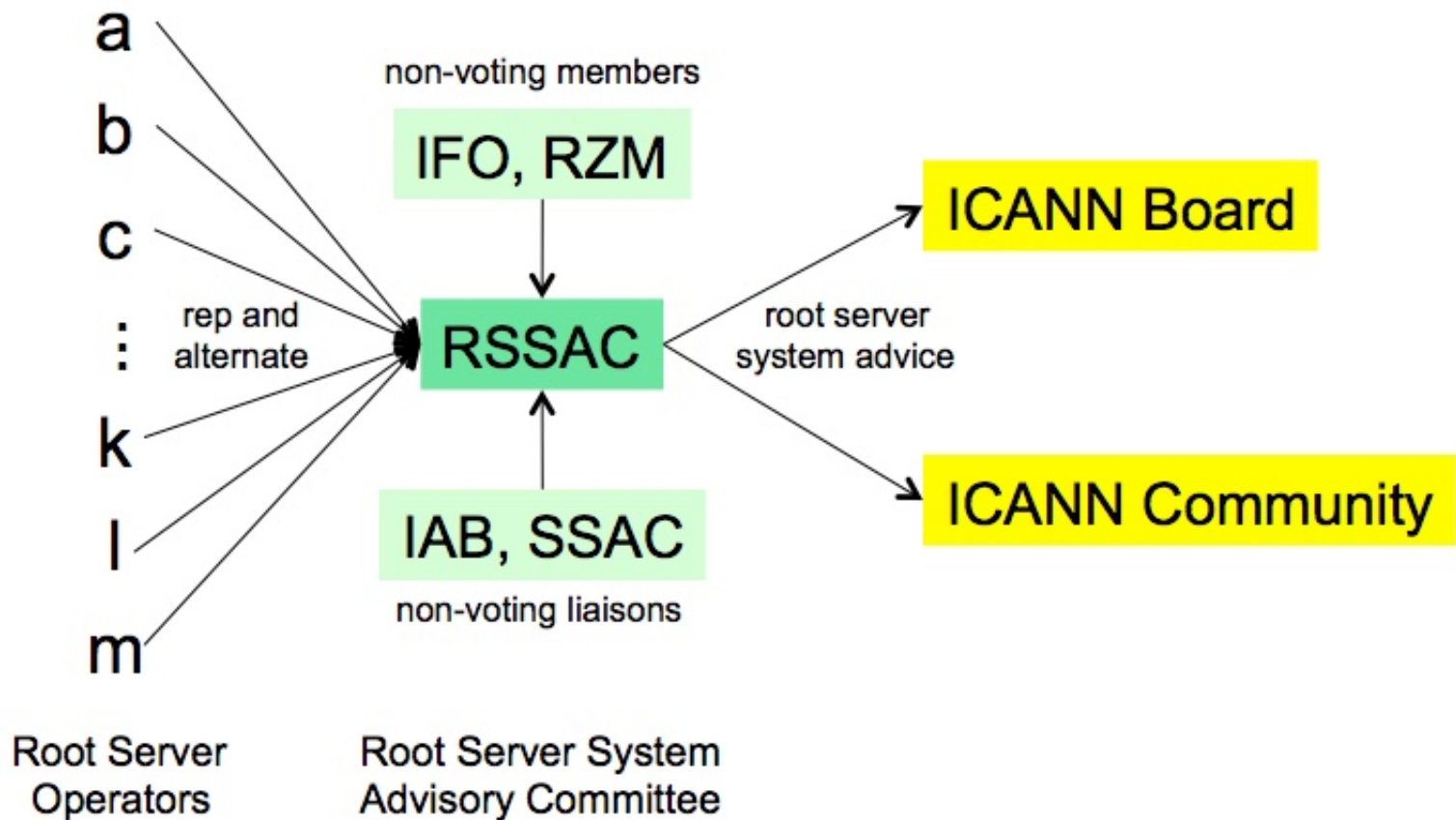
Status Update

■ Review began in September 2017

■ Assessment Report for Public Consultation
published on 27 February 2018

https://community.icann.org/display/ACCRSSAC/Assessment+Report

■ Presentation of principal findings at ICANN61

■ Draft Final Report published for public comment
at the end of April 2018

■ Final Report published early July 2018

Purpose of the Review

■ The purpose of the review is to determine

(i) whether the RSSAC has a continuing purpose in the ICANN structure;

(ii) if so, whether any change in structure or operations is desirable to improve its effectiveness; and

(iii) whether the RSSAC is accountable to its constituencies, stakeholder groups, organizations, and other stakeholders.

■ The review will also assess the effectiveness of the improvements resulting from the previous review, conducted in 2008.

Principal Findings (1)

The ongoing RSSAC reformation that began in 2013—revised RSSAC charter, new operating procedures, and creation of the RSSAC Caucus —has substantially improved the structure and operation of the RSSAC.

Implementing changes recommended by the prior review has significantly improved the effectiveness of the RSSAC. The addition of staff support and travel funding has increased RSSAC and Caucus work quality and meeting participation.

Principal Findings (2)

The RSSAC has become more open, transparent, and accessible since the last review, but this has not been widely recognized by outside observers.

The RSSAC's focus on technical root server issues and deliberate non-participation in other ICANN activities have concentrated its impact on a small technical audience of DNS experts. It is still widely perceived to be closed and secretive, and less transparent than other ICANN Advisory Committees and Supporting Organizations.

Principal Findings (3)

As the only visible interface between ICANN and the root server operators (RSOs), the RSSAC is expected to deal with every root service issue that arises within ICANN, whether or not the issue is properly within its scope.

The RSSAC's scope is limited to providing information and advice about the root server system, but because it is the only visible point of contact between ICANN and the RSOs many in the ICANN community imagine that its role is (or should be) much broader.

Principal Findings (4)

The RSSAC's ability to serve as a shared space for RSO–ICANN communication and cooperation is complicated by a persistent legacy of distrust of ICANN by some of its members.

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.

Principal Findings (5)

The current RSSAC membership model excludes non-RSO participants and their different 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.

Principal Findings (6)

The RSSAC's continuing purpose in the ICANN structure may include serving as the focal point for issues of mutual concern to ICANN and the RSOs, such as future operational and funding scenarios for serving the root.

The RSSAC is developing advice and recommendations concerning the future evolution of the root server system and how it might be supported, but this work is being conducted entirely by RSO representatives who will be directly affected by it. 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 RSSAC members do not agree on who its stakeholders should be, it is not clear for what and to whom it should be accountable.

Although its charter does not explicitly identify its stakeholders, its statement of RSSAC's role implies that they are the ICANN Board and community. Its members, however, do not agree on what this means in practice.

Principal Findings (8)

Interisle
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The relative roles and responsibilities of the RSSAC, the RSSAC Caucus, the Root Zone Evolution Review Committee (RZERC), and the Security and Stability Advisory Committee (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.

Next Steps

- Conclusion of public consultation
  - ◆ Comments may be sent directly to the independent examiner at rssac-review@interisle.net

- Development of recommendations

- Draft Final Report published for public comment at the end of April 2018

- Final Report published in early July 2018