

SAC106:
SSAC Comments on Evolving the Governance
of the Root Server System

A report from the ICANN Security and Stability Advisory Committee (SSAC)
08 August 2019

Preface

This is a report of the ICANN Security and Stability Advisory Committee (SSAC). The SSAC focuses on matters relating to the security and integrity of the Internet's naming and address allocation systems. This includes operational matters (e.g., pertaining to the correct and reliable operation of the root zone publication system), administrative matters (e.g., pertaining to address allocation and Internet number assignment), and registration matters (e.g., pertaining to registry and registrar services). SSAC engages in ongoing threat assessment and risk analysis of the Internet naming and address allocation services to assess where the principal threats to stability and security lie, and advises the ICANN community accordingly. The SSAC has no authority to regulate, enforce, or adjudicate. Those functions belong to other parties, and the advice offered here should be evaluated on its merits.

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Executive Summary

This publication represents the full SSAC input to the Evolving the Governance of the Root Server System ICANN Public Comment Proceeding.¹

The primary motivation of the SSAC during the review of the proposed Root Server System (RSS) evolution was to ensure that the RSS was adequately positioned for long term sustainability as the RSS is critical to the security and stability of the Domain Name System. The SSAC reviewed the proposed framework in order to assure itself, and others, that the proposed governance structures are capable of identifying issues and responding to them as they arise, including but not limited to issues of technology, policy, operations, or security.

Overall, the SSAC is confident that such issues have been adequately addressed in the proposed framework. Additionally, the SSAC makes four recommendations to assist the Governance Working Group (GWG) during its deliberations to adopt this proposed structure.

¹ See <https://www.icann.org/public-comments/rss-governance-2019-05-23-en>

1 Introduction

The Security and Stability Advisory Committee (SSAC) welcomes the opportunity to comment on a community-driven process for evolution of the governance of the Root Server System (RSS).

The SSAC's Charter, as defined in the ICANN Bylaws, states, among other things: "To develop a security framework for Internet naming and address allocation services that defines the key focus areas, and identifies where the responsibilities for each area lie. The committee will focus on the operational considerations of critical naming infrastructure."

The SSAC has reviewed the relevant resources listed in the call for public comment, including:

- RSSAC037: A Proposed Governance Model for the DNS Root Server System²
- Concept Paper on a Community-Driven Process to Develop a Final Model Based on RSSAC037³
- Root Server System Governance Working Group: Draft Charter and Operating Procedures⁴
- Root Server System Governance Working Group: Draft Work Plan for the GWG⁵

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2 Comments on RSSAC037

The SSAC is in broad agreement with both the principles and proposed changes as described in RSSAC037, noting that these proposals are not intended to address in detail every possible future scenario, but rather to describe a stable and sustainable organisational framework that can govern the evolution of the Root Server System (RSS) in the future. The SSAC believes that this described framework has the necessary attributes of stability and sustainability for the management of the RSS.

The SSAC notes that Section 4 of RSSAC037, listing the RSS stakeholders, does not make explicit mention of the Internet's user base. The reference to the ICANN Community includes ICANN's At Large Community, but there is a distinction between the collection of individual Internet users who participate in ICANN's policy development process and the broader collection of Internet users. The stability and security of the Internet's name system is critical for all

² See <https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/files/rssac-037-15jun18-en.pdf>

³ See <https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/files/rss-governance-model-concept-paper-23apr19-en.pdf>

⁴ See <https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/files/draft-rss-gwg-charter-op-procedures-23may19-en.pdf>

⁵ See <https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/files/draft-rss-gwg-charter-work-plan-23may19-en.pdf>

Internet users. RSSAC037 states: "The stakeholders of the RSS are the people, groups, and organizations that have an interest or concern in the proper operation of the RSS." It would be logical to consider how to include this broader category of Internet users within the evolution of the RSS's governance structures. This topic could be addressed in the ongoing evolution of the RSS governance processes

3 Comments on GWG Charter and Operating Procedures

The GWG's role is to be the design group that "develops the final cooperation and governance model for the Root Server System (RSS)". This is an important function with whose objectives the SSAC agrees.

The SSAC agrees with the GWG's focus on having subject matter experts from key stakeholders. However, given the SSAC's charter and the role of the GWG, the SSAC believes that it could make substantive and important contributions and should be invited to be a voting member in the GWG.

The SSAC would prefer not to act in any operational role in any future standing committees or other operational bodies related to the RSS, but is open to invitations to participate in an advisory capacity, consistent with SSAC's charter, experience and capabilities.

Recommendation 1: The SSAC recommends that the SSAC be included as a voting member in the Governance Working Group (GWG).

Recommendation 2: The SSAC recommends that the SSAC not be given any operational roles in any standing committees, operational committees, or other bodies that emerge from the deliberations of the GWG, but is open to invitations to participate in an advisory capacity, consistent with SSAC's charter, experience and capabilities.

The GWG Charter, in the section "Consensus" says: "The GWG shall operate on the basis of consensus. For the purposes of GWG work and outcomes, consensus is based on general agreement without any formal objections as determined by the chair." Later, in "Quorum and Voting," it says, "The GWG representatives may make decisions and adopt outcomes by vote."

Recommendation 3: The SSAC recommends that decisions of the GWG be made on the basis of consensus, and that votes only be taken when formality is required or consensus is not achievable.

The GWG Charter says: "The GWG will seek informed contributions when necessary."

While the process of seeking informed contributions "when necessary" is a good idea, the SSAC observes that such ideas often get caught short when decisions must be made under deadlines. The SSAC suggests that all required experts should be "in the room", not just when deemed necessary.

The GWG Charter says: “The GWG shall work openly and transparently”. This should be made more explicit with specific undertakings to ensure that this objective is part of the standard operating procedures for this group. An example of such an undertaking could be: “all meetings will be recorded and archived; mailing lists will be publicly archived; minutes will be released within 48 hours of the conclusion of each meeting.”

The SSAC recommends an explicit provision be made for bodies that emerge as ongoing entities involved in RSS oversight to be incorporated into ICANN’s regular periodic review process to ensure that the RSS remains responsive to evolutionary needs and changing environmental factors as appropriate.

The SSAC is aware that: "Each new group and their function [established by the GWG] would be reviewed periodically per the practices and processes established in the ICANN Bylaws." We wish to stress that a significant part of the enduring value of these reviews is to be responsive to evolutionary needs and changing environmental factors as appropriate.

Recommendation 4: The SSAC recommends that bodies involved in the ongoing oversight of the RSS be reviewed regularly to ensure that the RSS is both meeting its commitments and that it remains responsive to evolutionary needs and changing environmental factors as appropriate.

4 Recommendations

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5 Acknowledgments, Statements of Interests, and Dissents and Withdrawals

In the interest of transparency, these sections provide the reader with information about four aspects of the SSAC process. The Acknowledgments section lists the SSAC members, outside experts, and ICANN staff who co-authored or contributed directly to this particular document (Contributors) or who provided reviews (Reviewers). The Statements of Interest section points to the biographies of all SSAC members, which disclose any interests that might represent a conflict—real, apparent, or potential—with a member’s participation in the preparation of this Report. The Dissents section provides a place for individual members to describe any disagreement that they may have with the content of this document or the process for preparing it. The Withdrawals section identifies individual members who have recused themselves from discussion of the topic with which this Report is concerned. Except for members listed in the Dissents and Withdrawals section, this document has the consensus approval of all of the members of SSAC.

5.1 Acknowledgments

The committee wishes to thank the following SSAC members for their time, contributions, and review in producing this report.

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5.2 Statements of Interest

SSAC member biographical information and Statements of Interest are available at:
<https://www.icann.org/resources/pages/ssac-biographies-2019-06-04-en>

5.3 Dissents and Withdrawals

There were no dissents or withdrawals.