The Relationship Between RIPE and the RIPE NCC

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1. Introduction and Scope

This document describes the relationship between RIPE and the RIPE NCC as it has evolved from 1992 until the present time. We document current practices specifically to record RIPE community consensus about them and also for the sake of those who have not witnessed the evolution of this relationship. This document describes the status quo that exists and is not intended to propose anything new.

2. About RIPE

RIPE began as a community of European individuals interested in the operation of TCP/IP networks. It has since expanded. The purpose of RIPE is to bring people together, to exchange experiences, make operational recommendations (see RIPE Terms of Reference). RIPE is open to everyone wishing to participate; there is no membership or other formality needed. Most notably this low threshold to participate lends credibility to the process of developing Internet number distribution policies.

RIPE was established in 1989 and has continuously evolved since then. Today RIPE Meetings are held twice a year and draw 500-800 people from all over the world. There are 12 working groups, ranging from 'Address Policy' to 'Routing' (see the list of RIPE working groups). At the time of writing, RIPE has produced some 826 documents, including recommendations and Internet number policies (The RIPE Document Store).

RIPE works by consensus and does its work in working groups, task forces and plenary discussions. In between RIPE Meetings, work is continued on the mailing lists. There are also regional meetings and sometimes interim meetings of working groups and task forces. RIPE participants adhere to a code of conduct (RIPE Code of Conduct). Working groups are chartered by community consensus and select their own chairs who organise and facilitate the work. In turn, the RIPE Chair ensures that RIPE, as a whole, functions well (The RIPE Chair). The RIPE Chair is selected by a nominating committee (The RIPE Chair Selection Process). RIPE has a tradition of being pragmatic and avoiding formality as much as possible. RIPE participants wish to maintain this informal nature of RIPE with no barriers for anyone to participate other than the willingness to cooperate constructively. However, in order to function well and be more accessible to newcomers, RIPE has recently documented more of its governance, see for example The RIPE Chair, RIPE Accountability Task Force Final Report and The RIPE Chair Selection Process; this document is part of that effort.

In summary: RIPE is an open, inclusive and largely informal community of people with common interests and common purposes.

From its earliest days, RIPE has recognised that some of its activities cannot be performed well just by volunteers. In 1990, RIPE proposed the RIPE NCC as an activity under the guidance of RIPE but funded and governed separately.

3. About the RIPE NCC

The RIPE NCC began operations in April 1992 on [the initiative of RIPE](). Its purposes are:
- to support the work of RIPE,
- to act as a Regional Internet Registry for the distribution and registration of Internet numbers, and
- to execute activities for the common benefit of its members and the RIPE community in general.

Besides technical expertise, the most important asset of the RIPE NCC is its neutrality with respect to individual members and the resulting trust from both membership and community. The RIPE NCC is a neutral and independent home for activities that benefit the whole community.

Since 1998, the RIPE NCC has been organised as an association under Dutch law funded by its members and governed by a board elected by the membership. This structure was chosen by the community because of '... its democratic character and its ability to resist unwelcome takeovers.' ([A New Structure for the RIPE NCC: De Facto Organisational Rules (Revised)]()).

The governance of the RIPE NCC is quite straightforward: the members provide the funding and elect a board. The board determines the activity plan and hires management to direct the implementation of this plan. The membership decides how to divide the costs based on recommendations from the board ([RIPE NCC Articles of Association (2024)]()).

At the end of the year 2023, the association had 20,077 members from 119 countries, a staff of 182 FTEs with 42 nationalities and operating expenses of more than 32 million euros. The legal seat and main office are located in Amsterdam ([RIPE NCC Annual Report 2023]()).

In summary: the RIPE NCC is a not-for-profit association with members, a board and staff that supports the activities of RIPE, acts as a Regional Internet Registry, and performs activities for the benefit of the RIPE community.

4. The Relationship

Why Separate Organisations?
Maintaining two separate organisations with common goals and significant overlap has a purpose. The two have been kept separate first and foremost in order to keep alive the open, low threshold and informal bottom-up character of RIPE. Governing the RIPE NCC, an operational organisation with staff and budget, requires more formality and a different focus than running an open community. Keeping the roles separate even when filled by largely the same group of people has provided a clear separation of roles while maintaining coherence and stability. With the evolution of the Internet industry and the growth of the RIPE NCC membership over the last 30 years, this overlap has diminished somewhat.

Aspects
The relationship between RIPE and the RIPE NCC has three main aspects:
- The RIPE NCC supports RIPE; it is the 'secretariat' of RIPE.
- RIPE develops regional policies for Internet number distribution and registration; the RIPE NCC acts as a Regional Internet Registry and implements these policies.
- The RIPE NCC performs activities for the benefit of the RIPE community, which includes RIPE NCC members; RIPE provides guidance to the RIPE NCC concerning these activities.

This arrangement ensures that RIPE NCC activities are open and transparent to the community at large and even beyond while also giving the community substantial influence on what the RIPE NCC does. The continued support of the RIPE community in turn provides added legitimacy and standing to the RIPE NCC and its activities.

Implementation Details

RIPE NCC Membership Meetings
RIPE NCC membership meetings make governance decisions about the RIPE NCC. These are formal meetings, open to RIPE NCC members only. Here the board is elected and financial things such as the charging scheme are decided. The membership meetings are run according to the RIPE NCC Articles of Association.

RIPE NCC Services Working Group (of RIPE)
The 'NCC Services WG' is the RIPE working group where RIPE provides general guidance to the RIPE NCC. The RIPE NCC management gives reports about relevant activities. Participants can comment and the working group establishes consensus where appropriate. These meetings, like all WG meetings, are open to all RIPE participants and are run according to RIPE practices including the RIPE Code of Conduct.

The RIPE NCC Services WG meeting is usually held just before the RIPE NCC membership meeting and the relevant reports are considered part of both meetings in order to avoid repetition.

Address Policy Working Group (of RIPE)
The address policy working group develops policies for the distribution and registration of Internet numbers in the RIPE region. These policies govern the operation of the Regional Internet Registry operated by RIPE. This arrangement ensures that all interested parties and individuals, including those who are not members of the RIPE NCC, can participate in the development of these policies. Policies are developed according to a process that stresses transparency and ensures that operational considerations raised by the RIPE NCC are taken into account.

Other Working Groups
Some of the other working groups may give specific guidance to the RIPE NCC under their specific charters. For example, the RIPE Database Working Group provides guidance to the RIPE NCC about functionality and operation of the RIPE Database, the public part of the RIPE Internet Number Registry. The MAT (Measurements, Analysis and Tools) WG provides guidance about the Internet measurement activities of the RIPE NCC.

Participation of RIPE NCC Staff in RIPE
RIPE NCC staff participating in RIPE provide invaluable knowledge and expertise. At the same time, there is a potential for confusing roles since RIPE provides guidance to the RIPE NCC about specific activities. This issue has been recognised and RIPE has established consensus about "RIPE NCC Staff Participation in the RIPE Community". The RIPE NCC has also published its internal rules and procedures about this.

RIPE Chair Selection
The process of selecting the RIPE Chair has been closely modelled on the practices of the IETF at the time (The RIPE Nominating Committee). This process is bootstrapped by selecting the non-voting chair of the Nominating Committee who then takes over and runs the process. The IETF relies on the Internet Society to select this person and to safeguard that the process is run properly. RIPE relies on the RIPE NCC Executive Board for these things.

Risks

The division of tasks and governance between RIPE and the RIPE NCC has all the desired features described above. This poses the risk of potential friction in case the goals of the organisations or people involved turn out to diverge. Friction may even develop just because of misunderstandings. Up to the present time this has not been a significant issue because the people involved keep communicating and acting constructively. Processes and customs have developed over time to support this communication. The policy development process for instance has an 'impact analysis' that ensures that the community is well aware of any operational considerations from the RIPE NCC before coming to consensus on Internet Number policies. All this so far has resulted in everything being well-aligned.

However, it is entirely possible, for example, for RIPE to set address policy or give guidance that is either impossible or prohibitively expensive to implement for the RIPE NCC. The RIPE NCC on the other hand could possibly make entirely reasonable operational decisions that are against the spirit and consensus of RIPE as a bottom-up, self-governing community.

This risk is mitigated successfully by the processes and customs mentioned above that have been developed over the past 30 years.

5. Summary

RIPE and the RIPE NCC are different structures with common purposes. RIPE is a community of individuals open to anyone. The RIPE NCC is an association with members providing funding for operations that support RIPE and the Regional Internet Registry. Maintaining two separate organisations with common goals and significant overlap has a purpose. RIPE and the RIPE NCC have developed customs and procedures to cooperate effectively in order to reach their common goals. These have served the Internet community in our region for more than 30 years.

6. About the Author

Daniel Karrenberg is one of the founders of, and a continuous participant in RIPE; he was also the first CEO of the RIPE NCC, and is an advisor to the current CEO.

7. References

RIPE Terms of Reference
RIPE Network Coordination Center
A New Structure for the RIPE NCC: De Facto Organisational Rules (Revised)
The RIPE Chair
RIPE Accountability Task Force Final Report
RIPE Nominating Committee 2020
RIPE Code of Conduct
Policy Development Process in RIPE
The RIPE Chair Selection Process
RIPE NCC Staff Participation in the RIPE Community
RIPE NCC Articles of Association
RIPE NCC Annual Report 2023
RIPE Document Store
List of RIPE Working Groups

8. Document History

During the years 2023 and 2024 there had been discussions about the relationship between RIPE and the RIPE NCC. Some of these discussions had been concluded, like the involvement of RIPE NCC staff in RIPE. Others like the recommendation of the RIPE Accountability Task Force were still ongoing.

During these discussions it became obvious that the fundamental relationship between RIPE and the RIPE NCC had never been explicitly documented. This sometimes made discussions difficult. The RIPE Chair asked the author to document the status quo of the relationship.
During September 2024 the author shared drafts with the RIPE NCC Executive Board and Executive Team as well as the RIPE working group chairs in order to solicit suggestions for improvements.

The RIPE chair published a first draft to the community on 24 October 2024 .

First Draft Published: 24 October 2024

Second Draft Published: 30 January 2025

Consensus Declared: 7 March 2025

Final Version Published: 31 March 2025

9. Acknowledgements

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