

Executive Board Election Task Force Report

Introduction

The Executive Board Election Task Force was established by the RIPE NCC Executive Board in July 2020 in order to carry out an evaluation of the Executive Board nominations and election process. Particular issues to be addressed include:

- Measures for the qualification and verification of candidates
- Issues around the representation of candidates in terms of biographies and statements of support published on the RIPE NCC website
- Possibilities for allowing members greater opportunity to engage with and question candidates prior to the election

The full rationale, charter and scope of the task force, as well as further details on its work, is available from the [Executive Board Election Task Force page](#) on www.ripe.net.

Task Force Report

The task force will produce a draft report outlining a set of recommendations for the board to consider at its September 2020 meeting, a final version of which will be presented to the RIPE NCC membership at the October 2020 General Meeting. This will ensure that any necessary actions that need to be put to members for voting can be carried out before the next election takes place.

In addition to the above, after the report has been presented at the October GM, the task force will reconvene to assess whether there are any pertinent issues that require their further attention at that point.

Task Force Members

- Erik Bais (Netherlands)
- Randy Bush (Estonia)
- Carlos Friaças (Portugal)
- Töma Gavrichenkov (Russia)
- Sergey Myasoedov (Czech Republic) Task Force Chair
- Arnold Nipper (Germany)
- Cynthia Revström (Sweden)
- Jan Žorž (Slovenia)
- Remco van Mook (RIPE NCC Executive Board Representative)

The RIPE NCC will provide legal and secretariat support for the task force.

Elad Cohen (Israel) was initially part of the task force but was dismissed by the chair following complaints that he did not follow the Code of Conduct as expected. The task force confirmed this decision at its first meeting.

General Principles for Recommendations

The following are general principles that the task force agreed should be applied to the nomination and election processes:

1. Processes should not rely on anyone's subjective views of the nominees/candidates
2. The existing board should not be a filter on who becomes a confirmed candidate
3. The burden of disqualifying candidates should not fall on RIPE NCC staff

Topics for Discussion

The Executive Board and task force identified the following areas for which recommendations should be provided:

1. Verification of candidate identity
2. Confirming candidate acceptance
3. Harmonisation of biographies
4. Synchronisation of biography publication
5. Listing and sorting of candidates
6. Ensuring candidate meets requirements in Functions and Expectations document
7. Other candidate requirements
8. Nominations Committee - required or not?
9. Membership interaction with candidates

The discussion points are where possible divided into the following three sections:

- Short explanation of topic
- Discussion/argumentation on topic
- Recommendation

1. Verification of candidate identity

The task force discussed whether nominees should provide identification before being accepted as a confirmed candidate for the RIPE NCC Executive Board.

Discussion/argumentation

The RIPE NCC confirmed that anyone elected to the Executive Board would need to provide identification in order to be added to the Dutch Chamber of Commerce. It was generally agreed that this should therefore happen before a nominee can become a confirmed candidate.

Recommendation

The current RIPE NCC processes regarding verification of identification (e.g. as used when verifying members' identities) should be used to verify the identity of Executive Board nominees before they can become confirmed candidates for the election.

Nominees who fail to provide verification of their identity should be disqualified from the process. This requirement should be added to the Articles of Association.

2. Confirming candidate acceptance

The task force discussed whether a candidate should formally accept their nomination before being listed as a candidate for the election.

Discussion/argumentation

It was generally agreed that it might not be possible or desirable to force a nominee to stand as a candidate should they not wish to do so. There was a comment that this should be noted in a RIPE Document, although not necessarily in the Articles of Association.

Recommendation

The current approach of asking a candidate to confirm their acceptance of the nomination should be continued. As noted in section 1 above, nominees should provide verification of identification before becoming confirmed candidates.

3. Harmonisation of biographies

In the past, candidates have provided biographies that did not provide a clear picture of their suitability for the position or did not meet the purpose of allowing them to support their candidacy with the membership. The RIPE NCC currently asks for a biography and motivation statement.

Discussion/argumentation

There was a suggestion to ask candidates to fill out a standardised template that includes nominees' goals for running for the board, and a valid photo, when providing their biography. This was seen as a possible improvement. The question was raised of what happens if this is not done properly and it was suggested they should not become candidates until this step is fully completed. It was also suggested that this could be left to RIPE NCC staff to implement as they saw best.

It was also argued that flexibility allowed candidates to show their personality.

Recommendation

Candidates should be allowed to either fill in a template or provide the biography in their own format. The RIPE NCC should let the candidates know about the requirements in the RIPE NCC Executive Board – Functions and Expectations document. Failure to provide a biography should not result in disqualification of a candidate.

4. Synchronisation of biography publication

During the last election process, the question was raised on whether it was fair that some candidates should present their biography before or after other candidates have done so.

Discussion/argumentation

There was discussion around this topic with comments that earlier publication of a biography would benefit a candidate.

Recommendation

Biographies should be published three days after the nomination period has ended. Biographies submitted after this date should be published as they are received.

5. Listing and sorting of candidates

The current procedure is to list candidates alphabetically by surname. It has been suggested that this provides a disadvantage to those who therefore appear at the bottom of the list of candidates on both the biography listing and the voting ballot.

Discussion/argumentation

There was a suggestion that listing alphabetically on the ballot could have an impact if people vote in order, but it was argued that this was unlikely to happen. There was also the argument made that the current listing system was fine.

Recommendation

It was agreed that randomisation of the candidate list on the RIPE NCC webpages and on the ballot should be implemented.

6. Ensuring candidate meets the requirements in Functions and Expectations document

The Functions and Expectations document on the RIPE NCC website lists the requirements and desired qualities for a RIPE NCC Executive Board member. The document is available at:

<https://www.ripe.net/about-us/executive-board/ripe-ncc-executive-board-functions-and-expectations>

The task force discussed which requirements should be mandatory and how these could be effectively checked.

Discussion/argumentation

The list of requirements in the Functions and Expectation document was seen as a good list of qualities for a board member to have.

There was a suggestion that before becoming a confirmed candidate, the nominee must have an interview with members of the existing board to see if they would be a good fit for the position. It was argued that this created conflicts and might not be perceived well among members.

The topic of good behaviour was raised, and it was suggested that candidates must adhere to a Code of Conduct and refrain from spamming members. The point was made that by the time someone could be proved to have e.g. harvested contact data from the RIPE Database, the election would be over. Asking the RIPE Trusted Contacts (not including RIPE NCC staff) and/or potentially someone such as the RIPE Chair or Vice Chair to determine whether the Code of Conduct was violated was suggested as a way forward.

The issue of how all the requirements could be verified was acknowledged as very difficult to carry out and it was suggested that nothing should be implemented that cannot be verified adequately. The idea of having candidates interviewed by board members was suggested because it might benefit both the candidate and the board.

Recommendation

A new code of conduct should be adapted from the existing RIPE codes of conduct with minimal changes, and the RIPE Trusted Contacts should be asked to assess whether a violation of the code of conduct has occurred. Violation should result in disqualification of the candidate. The Articles of Association should be amended accordingly.

7. Other requirements of nominees

The task force discussed other requirements that might be required of potential board members.

Discussion/argumentation

There was a discussion around the issue of whether a candidate for the board should represent a RIPE NCC member and have been an active member of the community and/or membership.

There was initial agreement that having candidates be a contact person for a member would be desirable, even if this meant non-members could be added as contact persons for the duration of the process.

Previous meeting/community participation was generally seen as a good thing for a candidate to have although issues were raised about the ability of some people to travel to meetings. Virtual attendance was seen by some as good enough to constitute participation with the membership and/or community.

It was suggested that fluency In English be a requirement for candidacy although it was asked who would measure this. Having English as the language used by the RIPE NCC and it was generally used as a common business language was seen as a reason to have this requirement.

The question was raised as to whether candidates should provide a certificate of conduct to show that they would not be a reputational or financial liability to the RIPE NCC. It was generally agreed that a criminal record should not be a disqualifying factor due to the different laws in different jurisdictions. However, there was some discussion on whether candidates should certify that there were no financial impediments to them carrying out their board duties.

Recommendation

It was agreed that the candidates must agree to follow the code of conduct at all times (see point 6 above). The nominee should also sign a statement certifying that they have not committed fraud or other financial misconduct in any jurisdiction. This requirement should be added to the Articles of Association.

8. Nominations committee – required or not?

The issue of whether there should be a nominations committee to assess the quality of the candidates for the board came up frequently during task force discussions.

Discussion/argumentation

There was some support for having a NomCom although others felt that this was unnecessary and there was some strong objection to this. Cases were made for having board involvement on a NomCom although doubts were raised about this aspect because the process would be unduly influenced by the opinion of a select group of incumbents. The board, however, would have good insight into what qualities were needed at any given time on the board.

The idea of a task force consisting of board members and RIPE NCC members who would give their impression of candidates was also raised.

There was support for using the “Trusted Contact” model, although the current group consists of the new RIPE Chair and RIPE NCC staff, which is not ideal and might lead to conflicts of interest.

Recommendation

The task force agreed that a nominations committee was not recommended.

9. Membership interaction with candidates

During the previous GM, the issue was raised of how best to let the candidates for the board interact or answer questions from members.

Discussion/argumentation

It was suggested that holding a RIPE NCC-organised webinar with candidates could be a way for candidates to interact with the membership. It was also suggested that

a mailing list be established and activated on the day that the candidate biographies are published. This would allow questions to be asked of the candidates.

Recommendation

A webinar should be provided that allows candidates to interact with members and answer questions. A mailing list where candidates can answer questions from members should also be provided.

Full List of Recommendations

1. Verification of candidate identity

Recommendation

The current RIPE NCC processes regarding verification of identification (e.g. as used when verifying members' identities) should be used to verify the identity of Executive Board nominees before they can become confirmed candidates for the election. Nominees who fail to provide verification of their identity should be disqualified from the process. This requirement should be added to the Articles of Association.

2. Confirming candidate acceptance

Recommendation

The current approach of asking a candidate to confirm their acceptance of the nomination should be continued. As noted in section 1 above, nominees should provide verification of identification before becoming confirmed candidates.

3. Harmonisation of biographies

Recommendation

Candidates should be allowed to either fill in a template or provide the biography in their own format. The RIPE NCC should let the candidates know about the requirements in the RIPE NCC Executive Board – Functions and Expectations document.

4. Synchronisation of biography publication

Recommendation

Biographies should be published three days after the nomination period has ended. Biographies submitted after this date should be published as they are received.

5. Listing and sorting of candidates

Recommendation

It was agreed that randomisation of the candidate list on the RIPE NCC webpages and on the ballot should be implemented.

6. Ensuring candidate meets the requirements in Functions and Expectations document

Recommendation

A new code of conduct should be adapted from the existing RIPE codes of conduct with minimal changes, and the RIPE Trusted Contacts should be asked to assess whether a violation of the code of conduct has occurred. Violation should result in disqualification of the candidate. The Articles of Association should be amended accordingly.

7. Other requirements of nominees

Recommendation

It was agreed that the candidates must agree to follow the code of conduct at all times (see point 6 above). The nominee should also sign a statement certifying that they have not committed fraud or other financial misconduct in any jurisdiction. This requirement should be added to the Articles of Association.

8. Nominations committee – required or not?

Recommendation

The task force agreed that a nominations committee was not recommended.

9. Membership interaction with candidates

Recommendation

A webinar should be provided that allows candidates to interact with members and answer questions. A mailing list where candidates can answer questions from members should also be provided.