

India Internet Foundation appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed The Root Server System Governance Structure. We recognize and commend the significant work undertaken by the RSS GWG and the ICANN community to translate the principles of RSSAC037 into a structured governance framework. The introduction of a dedicated Council, the identification of core functions such as Strategy, Architecture, and Policy (SAP), Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (PME), and Designation and Removal (DNR), and the phased implementation approach are all positive steps that can enhance the accountability, transparency, and long-term sustainability of the Root Server System. We particularly welcome the explicit recognition of the need for stable governance arrangements, public consultations, and documented reporting processes, which strengthen trust in this critical global resource.

At the same time, we believe the current draft falls short of the full vision laid out in RSSAC037, and several critical elements need revision for the system to remain globally legitimate, accountable, and inclusive.

First, the draft leaves ambiguity around the role of the existing Root Server System Advisory Committee (RSSAC). At present, RSSAC is a formally recognized ICANN Advisory Committee with a clear mandate to advise the ICANN Board on the operation, security, and stability of the root server system. In the proposed governance structure, however, RSSAC is mentioned only in passing, with the Council expected to “define its relationship” with RSSAC during the Establishment Phase. This creates uncertainty over whether RSSAC will continue to advise the ICANN Board directly, whether it will instead be subordinated to the Council, or whether its functions will be duplicated or diminished. For stability and continuity, the final model should explicitly clarify the ongoing advisory role of RSSAC vis-à-vis the Council and the ICANN Board.

Second, the situation is even less clear for the RSSAC Caucus, which currently provides much of the technical expertise and research capacity underpinning RSSAC advisories. The Functional Model does not specify how the Caucus will connect to the new governance system, raising the possibility that its work could be sidelined or absorbed into Council committees such as Strategy, Architecture, and Policy (SAP) or Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (PME). Given its established credibility and diverse technical membership, the Caucus should be preserved as a distinct body with a defined channel for feeding technical analysis into the Council’s deliberations. Explicit recognition of the Caucus will help ensure the new governance model retains the depth of expertise that has been essential to the RSS’s stability and evolution.

Third, the draft Functional Model consistently references “IANA” in its description of interfaces with the root zone management functions, but does not acknowledge that these functions are actually carried out by Public Technical Identifiers (PTI), a legally separate but wholly controlled subsidiary of ICANN. While “IANA” remains the globally recognized functional name, referring only to IANA obscures the fact that PTI, and ultimately the ICANN Board through its control of PTI, remains the true point of accountability. For transparency and clarity, the governance model should explicitly state whether the Council’s interface is with PTI as the legal operator, with the IANA Functions Operator as a functional layer, or with ICANN itself. This distinction is essential to ensure that accountability pathways are not blurred and that the independence of the RSS governance system is not undermined by institutional ambiguity.

Fourth, the absence of independent oversight is a major concern. As currently drafted, appeals and review mechanisms are kept internal to the Council. This creates a risk of self-reference and weakens trust. We strongly recommend establishing an independent review mechanism, external to the Council, to handle appeals on RSO designation, removal, and performance monitoring.

Fifth, the Council's composition disproportionately empowers existing RSOs, reserving half the seats for them without requiring geographic balance. Such an arrangement risks entrenching the current power structure while excluding large parts of the Internet community, particularly the Global South. We suggest reducing RSO dominance by limiting their representation to one-third of Council seats, and introducing explicit geographic balance criteria so that regions such as Asia, Africa, and Latin America are adequately represented or countries with large base of Internet users gets fair representation.

Sixth, the draft model excludes critical operational stakeholders such as resolver operators, major ISPs, and governments from formal participation, relegating them to public comment status only. These actors are directly responsible for delivering Internet services to billions of end-users and are central to the resilience of the root. We therefore urge the inclusion of additional stakeholder categories for resolver operators and ISPs, along with a structured liaison mechanism for governments that goes beyond simple public comment.

Finally, the funding arrangements proposed in the draft are fragile and incomplete. Reliance on ICANN's budget in the early phases and voluntary contributions later creates risks of instability and capture by those with greater financial means. To ensure sustainability and fairness, the model should define a predictable and stable funding mechanism tied to the broader DNS ecosystem—for example, through proportional contributions linked to domain name fees or structured stakeholder commitments—while also instituting safeguards against undue influence from any single contributor.

In conclusion, India Internet Foundation believes the proposed model can only succeed if it restores the core principles of RSSAC037 and provides explicit clarity on the role of RSSAC, the RSSAC Caucus, and the PTI/IANA accountability relationship. By embedding independent oversight, balanced representation, stakeholder inclusivity, sustainable funding, and recognition of existing advisory structures, ICANN can ensure the root server system remains globally trusted and resilient.

Submitted respectfully,

India Internet Foundation