

FOIANet Steering Committee In-Person Meeting 11 & 12 February 2015

The FOIANet Steering Committee met on 11 and 12 February in Madrid to discuss general issues relevant to FOIANet, and to develop and deepen discussions on priorities for FOIANet over the next 4 years. These priorities were then developed further into more actionable project ideas which could be presented to funders as proposals. Finally, the Steering Committee (SC) also held a regular SC meeting.

The SC decided to adhere to 2 key principles during discussions:

1. The basis for FOIANet activities should be to promote RTI within established and set parameters (ideally as set out in a Charter).
2. In its work to promote RTI, FOIANet should not encroach on the work of members, or directly compete with members for resources such as funding.

This document is split into 4 sections:

- » Discussion of the Context
- » Prioritisation
- » Deeper Discussion on Agreed Priorities
- » Regular Steering Committee Meeting

Steering Committee Members Present at Meeting
Toby Mendel (Chair)
Alexander Kashumov
Gilbert Sendugwa
Carole Excell
Adam Foldes
Toby McIntosh
Andreas Pavlou (Coordinator)

Discussion of the Context

The Steering Committee began the meeting by discussing the context within which the FOIANet would be developing priorities and projects.

Basic FOIANet facts
238 Member Organisations
824 Observers (Individuals) on discussion list

Relations with the Open Data movement

There was overall acknowledgement that the Open Data movement has captured more attention than the RTI movement in recent years. While this has caused some tension in the past, at the same time it was seen as an opportunity to engage with the Open Data community and build bridges.

The attention to Open Data is reflected in the availability of funding (donors appear to be more receptive to Open Data projects than to RTI). In addition, some governments have become less responsive to RTI and shifted policy towards developing Open Data/releasing information for Open Data purposes.

As such, it was considered important to connect with the Open Data movement and organisations in order to reach out to broader audiences and promote/re-establish the important interconnections between the two movements, including as a way of securing more funding for RTI. The RTI and Open Data communities have different roles and messages. Donors appreciate the RTI message that access to information is a *right* and we have also had successes in terms of reaching over 100 RTI laws but there remain problems with implementation.

The SC noted that previous attempts to engage with Open Data (such as the FOIANet panel with Open Data leaders at the OGP Meeting in London) have been positive and well received by both communities. That panel in London helped to start bridging the lack of communication between the two communities and was useful in demonstrating that more opportunities to engage need to be explored, such as the Ottawa Open Data Conference later in 2015, and through other fora such as the OGP.

Development of RTI Standards and Laws

The SC also raised questions over international law/jurisprudence on RTI and whether standard setting was going in the right direction. For example, it was noted that before the European Court of Human Rights, RTI is contingent on wanting to access public interest information and for an expressive purpose.

Standard setting on RTI is lacking at the regional level in Asia. The RTI Community has yet to focus on such work, yet there are regional bodies such as ASEAN, or regional UN economic bodies, where such work could be focused.

At the national level there is still a lot of RTI work that needs to be done, as many countries still do not have RTI laws. Yet, there is a tension between simply 'increasing

the number of laws' and the need to look back and try to work on improving bad/mediocre laws that already exist and work on improving implementation.

The development of proactive disclosure as a standard has been dominated by the discourse on Open Data which has influenced donors and governments. The RTI community needs to rediscover its voice in this area and 'claim the space'.

An image problem

There was an overall perception that the RTI community has not been able to present itself as successfully as it should be able to do (unlike Open Data) and that this was having a detrimental effect on funding sources and the view of RTI outside the community.

The SC felt that there was a need to start "making a better case" for RTI and that the community needs to do more to shine a positive light on the work that it does (and not focus solely on the negative side of the work, that is to say, when information is denied, laws are weak and so on). It needs to work on orientating discussions towards success stories based on the use of RTI which can demonstrate its human side and 'practical' effectiveness/necessity, and not solely have a 'right of RTI' policy focus.

FOIANet

The FOIANet is a significant network that is highly representative of the RTI community around the world. That is also why it should make sure any work it does has high standards and quality. However, FOIANet has very little history of speaking with its own voice (the 10-10-10 Report is an exception). Up until now the Network has only ever facilitated sign-ons rather than signing onto letters or taking positions itself in the name of the network. The SC reiterated however, that FOIANet should not encroach into the space of members or replace their actions, although in countries where there is not an active organisation, action by FOIANet, including by reaching out to potentially interested groups, could be useful. It is important that FOIANet not take positions on which members may not agree.

The SC noted that important work was needed within the network itself, particularly as it grows in size. The membership rules are vague (the only requirement is a demonstration of working on RTI) and there is no document, such as a Charter, that indicates what members are signing up to. The lack of formality makes it difficult for the SC and Secretariat to take action or undertake projects. A Charter, for example, could help to outline values and principles and serve as a basis for membership.

The SC felt that, as the Network grows in size, more formal arrangements and structures are needed. A package of documents – comprising a simple constitution, a Charter for members, an agreement with Access Info Europe, which hosts the secretariat, and a package for new members – was discussed.

Prioritisation

» Support, Engage with and Build Capacity for Members

The Steering Committee discussed various options presented under the category of 'support, engaging with and building capacity for members'.

The SC felt that there was a need to make sure members felt welcome and engaged in the discussion list and network when they joined. Therefore, the development of a membership package was recommended as a priority, which would be provided to (new) members in order to understand what FOIANet expects from them and what they can expect from the FOIANet. Such a membership package could also help to stimulate debate as members would feel more encouraged/empowered to participate. The Steering Committee could also seek to fund meetings of members, but this would be easier if members were able to meet around already organised events which multiple FOIANet organisations were attending.

It was recommended as an ongoing priority that the SC and FOIANet Secretariat ensure that posts to the discussion list receive a reply as this is important in making sure members are engaged, and to encourage debate and participation.

The SC also recommended that, as part of encouraging the development of the community, there should be more information about the work of the members so that those who are interested can find out more about member organisations. This might simply be by adding 'tags' to the members list so that people can briefly understand the work that organisations are involved in (eg. environment, litigation, donor, journalism etc). The FOIANet could also begin a 'Membership/Individual Profiling series' whereby member organisations could profile themselves on the website, helping to develop and present the community of RTI activists and organisations. CSOs could share success stories, good RTI practices, and/or news via such a profiling series.

The SC agreed that the development of webinars could be a substantial and useful tool facilitated by the FOIANet. For example, webinars could be held around certain topics, such as sharing litigation experiences, or specific RTI themes, such as exceptions. Webinars could also be used to train and build capacity for members and others and done in collaboration with international organisations such as the World Bank.

Trainings could also take the form of a video series (eg. experiences on passing a law, tools used to this end), bringing in the work of members to share with others. Such a project could be quite big and complicated but it would be a substantial benefit for members. Training of trainers was also deemed to be somewhat complicated and, instead, the FOIANet could provide a forum for members to work together on projects.

There was consensus around not providing legal advice related to litigation as this would be too complicated and outside the capability of the FOIANet Secretariat (and SC

members who are not paid for FOIANet work). However, the FOIANet could help identify members or organisations that do litigate and provide such advice, in order to facilitate member cooperation when such a need arises.

The SC was also against the idea of getting involved as a network in specific national-level legislative initiatives. It was felt it could be controversial to get the FOIANet engaged too deeply in policy issues at national level, and that in some cases this could be detrimental to the national campaign as FOIANet could be seen to be driving an 'outside' agenda. It was noted that, in some contexts, it would be useful to have FOIANet facilitating, but not necessarily taking a stand itself. However, the network should support the current actions of members who use the discussion list to obtain support for 'sign-on' letters.

It was also felt that the FOIANet could not work on 'protection of RTI activists' against threats as it would be time consuming and difficult to ensure that the reason for an attack is due to RTI.

AGREED PRIORITIES:

1. TRAINING / CAPACITY BUILDING (eg. via webinars/workshops/videos)
2. ACTIVITIES TO ENGAGE MEMBERS AND SHARE INFORMATION (eg. sharing good practice about how the FOIANet can be used)

» Reports, Analyses and other Information Products

In terms of collecting information already produced, the Steering Committee agreed that specific resources, for example training materials and studies on implementation of RTI laws, would be useful rather than a repository of all kinds of information or documents from members on RTI. There was a clear agreement not to reproduce/collect the resources already covered by other sites such as FreedomInfo.org and Right2Info.org.

The SC expressed concern around the production of reports/analyses in the name of FOIANet – what would be the goal or purpose of producing such materials? If any reports or analyses were produced in the future, there would need to be a clear goal/reason behind them based on the idea of having an impact. For example, a goal could be to promote 'greater' or more radical transparency. Whilst the strength of the network in writing such reports comes from the broad geographic spread and experience of its members, it was recognised that, previously, writing reports has been time consuming and were not used to full effect after they were published.

The SC was wary of producing a methodology to measure implementation of access to information. Firstly, it was felt it could be encroaching on the work of members, would be time-consuming to produce, and would need approval and participation from the members in order to gain legitimacy. Since other actors, including the World Bank and Carter Center, were studying implementation, the FOIANet could encourage analysis,

discussion, and comments from members in order to help those actors improve their work, and thus gain greater civil society support for it.

Alternatively, the FOIANet could focus on a small set of practice indicators and do spot-testing of countries on certain issues, which would involve the collaboration of members. Such spot testing could become the basis of a statement calling for an improvement on a certain RTI issue. Such statements could also come from discussions that arise from the Network list.

The SC discussed the possibility of proactively stimulating discussions on certain key topics that could be then collected and produced into a series of information reports. Such discussions could revolve around key/controversial topics or big issues. It would need to be clear that while the FOIANet could provide forward-looking leadership by stimulating such debates, it should be advocating for the same things as in its members' campaign messages.

Whilst there was enthusiasm for driving certain discussion topics, the SC also supported the idea of 'mining' previous topics talked about on the list and developing them into write ups/reports that could serve as a resource for others. FreedomInfo.org could write articles on the different topics (given the limited time of the Secretariat). Examples of success stories could also be taken from previous discussions, and follow-ups from previous topics could also be requested from members in order to complete stories.

AGREED PRIORITIES:

3. SUCCESS STORIES
4. DATA MINING (collecting previous conversations and continuing this in a forward looking way)
5. STRUCTURALLY PUSHING TOPICS / MANAGING DISCUSSIONS (possibly to produce reports)
6. FOCUSED ONLINE RESOURCES (training materials and guides/resources on implementation)

>> Engaging and Campaigning with Wider Communities

The Steering Committee recognised that the 10-10-10 Statement could help to frame activities under this topic. They also looked at how the FOIANet could facilitate engagement with other regions, such as concrete actions between regional RTI communities.

The Caribbean and African regional networks shared their priorities and advocacy plans in order to see where there was overlap and where FOIANet priorities could be aligned. Other regions such as the Americas could also be invited to do this. Further sharing of such information and resources across networks would help to bridge regional communities.

It was agreed that there was not necessarily an appetite for FOIANet to engage in campaigns with international forums (GRECO, IPI etc), as there was no clear advocacy target. If engagement were to take place, it would be useful to have active support from at least some member organisations and, if there were strong objections, then FOIANet should reconsider engagement.

It was reiterated that it would be worth engaging with the Open Data community and possibly try to work with them. This would also link with work many members do in the OGP as that forum is also heavily oriented towards Open Data. The OGP could be used to push for improvements at the national level on RTI implementation or changes in the law.

There was agreement to focus on Open Data/OGP rather than fora such as UNCAC for example, although having our voice added to the UNCAC debate might not be a bad idea when strategically necessary as we are the only ones who would specifically support RTI issues (rather than anti-corruption in general).

AGREED PRIORITIES:

7. FOCUS ON ENGAGEMENT WITH OGP AND OPEN DATA
8. STRENGTHEN COOPERATION BETWEEN REGIONAL NETWORKS

» Promoting International Right to Know Day

The former Steering Committee discussion in July was explained to the current SC in order to help frame the reasoning behind previous decisions on RTKD actions.

The current SC discussed the possibility that the FOIANet could look at producing a press statement on RTKD calling for greater recognition of the right etc, as a common activity.

The SC also discussed the possibility of getting RTKD recognised by international organisations such as UNESCO, although this may be difficult. It was explained that African efforts towards recognition had received a boost by ACHPR Resolution #222 and the fact that the APAI Working Group is engaging both AU and UNESCO, and that the FOIANet could facilitate the broadening of public consciousness and wider support beyond Africa for such recognition. A number of possibilities were discussed, such as having members write common letters to governments pushing for RTKD recognition, as a common RTKD activity.

AGREED PRIORITIES:

9. ADVOCATE FOR OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF RTI DAY

Deeper Discussion on Agreed Priorities

1. TRAINING / CAPACITY BUILDING (dependent on funding)

Training

- » Could be online training course with videos and exercises for activists/organisations (eg EdX)
 - » A series of videos, eg 5 hours in total, with reading materials and case studies (along the lines of the work done by FUNDAR)
 - » Topic-orientated trainings, primarily for those with limited knowledge of RTI: History, Standards, Tactics for advocacy, Tactics for requesting
 - » Topics could start at beginner level and develop into more complicated topics/issues
 - » Could be presented by members.
 - » Materials could be edited and tailored for specific recipients, such as journalists or judges, etc.
- We would also need to do an assessment of the needs of/feedback from members and what they feel it is important or want to discuss.

Webinar/Exchange

- » What do members want to talk about? Could include controversial issues; the idea would be to engage members in an interactive format.
- » Webinars could be accessible for members, and/or the wider public depending on issue or topic. The priority is for capacity building of members, but it is not necessarily a closed book.
- » Could be on a variety of topics: Litigation issues/experiences, Classified Information, Exceptions vs. Access, Oversight Mechanisms, United Nations Human Rights Committee/Inter-American Court of Human Rights/European Court of Human Rights, International Procedures, FOI and Open Data, FOI Advocacy, FOI Implementation, Who actually uses FOI (CSOs vs. citizens), What can RTI activists do at Open Data events? How have members pushed for FOI in their country?
- » Could pitch webinar ideas to the World Bank
- » As part of work with the OGP, the FOIANet could host webinars for CSOs, governments etc.
- » Could also be in-person meetings (like previous litigation event in Manchester in 2006)

Raise public awareness on RTI in general, for example along the lines of the Reddit AMAs (Ask Me Anything) organised by CLD last RTKD with participation of various FOIANet members.

2. ACTIVITIES TO ENGAGE MEMBERS AND SHARE INFORMATION (less dependent on funding)

The FOIANet has an active discussion list but there are concerns that some members, including newer members, are not as confident about contributing or asking questions as they could be. In order to tackle this, the SC felt they should support engagement of members to participate and share information.

One action could include SC members reaching out directly to contact current members to raise awareness about the role of FOIANet and to encourage them to participate. This could also be used as an opportunity to collect further information on members that could be displayed on the website (key facts, contact details, etc). Collecting information from member organisations could also help other members know about who they could collaborate with in projects or with things like litigation.

The FOIANet could also seek to promote meetings between members. This could be part of a general FOIANet meeting (although this is complicated and expensive to organise), or alongside other meetings where a number of FOIANet members are present. FOIANet could encourage side meetings between members when they go to other meetings (eg upcoming Information Commissioner Conference, OGP meetings). At such meetings, and generally at events, the SC should also be aware they are ambassadors for the FOIANet and should also work to promote the network where they can.

The SC also discussed other activities that could be done to further engage membership. Such activities could be based on participation, for example inspired by the photo competition held a few years ago, or a video or other audiovisual competition on RTI, success stories, cartoons, essays, awards, etc.

Another way to help to engage members would be through social media. A more defined policy regarding Twitter and Facebook could be drawn up by the Secretariat in order to focus social media on Right to Know Day in particular, and other campaigns as they develop.

3. SUCCESS STORIES (dependent on funding)

As explained earlier in discussions, the RTI community needs to make a case about the importance of the right to information. Whilst these 'success stories' need to have promotional qualities to them, they must also be inspirational and demonstrate how the right to information can positively impact the daily lives of people. Human interest stories are important to attract viewers/readers, alongside more bannerline stories which talk about corruption and money, or the environment.

The stories would be sourced from members. Also, journalists who often use RTI laws could be invited to explain how they used RTI and how their stories motivated change, although it could be difficult to gather these stories and it very much depends on the good relationship between FOIANet members and the journalists who use RTI in their work. Having stories from different sources (not just CSOs) as well as tackling a variety

of issues, would also demonstrate the importance of the right to society at large, and not just a select minority of 'watchdogs'. Just as Open Data has used economic arguments to promote its importance, so too could RTI activists as this appears to have traction with governments.

In order to collect success stories, the SC could start a list which would also represent a sort of template for how to present such stories, and then get members to add to it with their own examples. Documentation of success stories is a difficult task as often organisations do not have time, so motivating members will be crucial in obtaining an optimum number of stories. Stories could be collected initially by the Secretariat as pictures and text, and those that pass a series of requirements could then be invited/helped to produce a video on the story.

Success stories should come from all areas of the globe, but ones from poorer countries, for example in Africa and Asia, are likely to get greater attention. The materials should be open for use by members in order to show the importance of RTI and to help push for greater recognition of its importance as a right.

Whilst many success stories would be presented as text and photos, or in maps, a portion of these could be developed into videos as they can be more engaging. Ideally, videos could be filmed and edited as much as possible by professional teams which could be hired as part of any proposal. The FOIANet could also facilitate the dispersal of small grants to members in order for them to carry out the video process. All these success story resources could be presented on the FOIANet website in an attractive and professional manner, and could also be presented on member websites as well.

Alternatively, the FOIANet could collect these stories and present them in the style of (or in conjunction with) "Top 10 requests" as done by online media outlets such as BuzzFeed. They could also be presented in TED Talks. This could help to engage a wider audience on the positive and human interest side of RTI and encourage viral dissemination. They often have 'feel good' elements to them that will also help to promote the RTI cause.

Stories need not only be drawn from CSOs or journalists, but could also be about proactive disclosure of information by governments and the positive impacts that has had.

The Aga Khan Foundation (http://www.akdn.org/akf_civil.asp) could be a potential funder, and potential collaborators/video-ers could be Witness (<http://witness.org/>), based in Canada.

4. DATA MINING (relatively dependent of funding)

There have been many conversations and discussions on the FOIANet which have produced specific and key information on a variety of topics. This is one of the FOIANet's

strong points as it brings together so much knowledge and experience from around the global RTI community, which is an original contribution of FOIANet.

FOIANet will take the necessary steps to make these conversations public and enable wider access to them from when the conversations were first saved. Ideally, we should capture these discussions and present them as research orientated topics which would be useful for members and researchers. However, as part of this work the identities of participants will need to be removed (either by machine or by hand). It was agreed that we would go through and do a pilot test to capture at least one conversation manually and try to get someone to help us test out a data mining approach and then we will revisit to see what is the best way forward.

Some topics might not be as complete as we would like. Once they are identified, members could be invited to update information or add to the discussion to create a richer resource. Such topics could include: How many requests do you do? What responsibilities do Information Commissioners have in your country? Can you get minutes of meetings in your country? Information on certain thematic areas across countries such as 'RTI and nuclear issues' could also be sought, which is particularly useful from a comparative perspective.

In the future, after the data mining of past discussions, every summer the FOIANet would mine the year's conversations (potentially as an intern project) and then post them online with the previous conversations.

The data mining of the conversations could be presented on the website as "thematic discussions" rather than placed in the "resources" section.

One option for this could be to work with DataKind, with whom we will set up a call to investigate further the potential for collaboration.

5. STRUCTURALLY PUSHING TOPICS / MANAGING DISCUSSIONS (less dependent on funding)

The key ongoing FOIANet activity is the discussion list. For the most part, discussions arise naturally and in a somewhat ad hoc manner from the work our members are doing and through questions which are based on fact-based scenarios about what is happening in other parts of the world. While these are informative, they are not necessarily opinion based or designed to help to develop the RTI community's thoughts around RTI. The idea here would be for the Steering Committee to take the lead in promoting more thoughtful discussions, grounded in the FOIANet's challenge, as presented in its 10-10-10 Statement, of playing leading role in developing the right.

The idea here would be to stimulate discussions on difficult topics facing the RTI movement that would hopefully elicit strong reactions or opinions from members and which, in this way, would help to drive our thinking forward on these key topics. An

element of dynamism to the discussion list debates and discussion would help the FOIANet further develop the network as a community of RTI 'thought leaders' and activists. The topics could be presented as part of a related series of say 6 discussions that collectively build our understanding of more complex issues. Topics need not be initiated only by the SC, but could be suggested by members as well. Conversations could occur every couple of months.

It is important that as part of these discussions there is involvement from a variety of regions, such as Asia, Africa, and Latin America, which are sometimes underrepresented in our discussions.

A series of discussion ideas could include: Reactive vs. Proactive (eg. open data)? Has RTI Implementation failed? What is the radical future of transparency? Do RTI laws work in fragile states/low capacity settings? Is litigation effective? How much should civil society compromise with government when advocating for a RTI law (is a weak law better than no law)? Why is South Africa the only country to include access to company information? Is RTI more important as a right or as a tool for governance? Is RTI an elite right?

6. FOCUSED RESOURCES (less dependent on funding)

The FOIANet is a place where members share resources and publications. However, there is no place, other than through the list, where these are accessible, which has prompted the SC to prioritise the development of resource gathering on specific kinds of materials.

First of all, the network should not collect information that is gathered elsewhere, such as law/jurisprudence or news (already collected in places such as FreedomInfo.org, Right2Info.org).

Since the target audience for these materials is primarily the members, and taking into account the above, it was agreed that the focus should be on two areas: publications about RTI implementation and RTI training materials (including for CSOs such as litigation strategies or training materials, links to websites). The latter could also be understood to include guides for requesters (for example for journalists, CSOs, including on advocacy, citizens and judges).

Training resources could include:

- measuring implementation (e.g. protocols, methodologies)
- comparative testing studies
- memorandums on interpretations, government produced publications,
- practical guides
- RTI training manuals for judges/media/information officers
- country reports on implementation

A certain level of vetting would be undertaken by the Secretariat (and SC) in order to ensure solid materials of high quality and usefulness for members. FOIANet would not have the resources to translate materials, and so it is likely resources would be primarily in English. Materials in other official UN languages would also be accommodated but in a first phase, we would probably limit it to this, to keep the resource focused and relatively accessible to members.

Any material added to the site would need to have a small paragraph briefly explaining the content, and would also need to be tagged in order to group materials together to facilitate searching.

7. *FOCUS ON ENGAGEMENT WITH OGP AND OPEN DATA (relatively dependent on funding)*

- *Engaging with OGP*

Generally on OGP, the FOIANet could host panels in regional and global OGP summits (the next one being in Mexico) that could help to maintain and develop the presence of RTI in OGP discussions.

In the lead up to such summits or other key events, the FOIANet could also source information to produce a report or statement on the extent to which RTI is represented in Action Plans or across regions. Shadow reports by civil society on RTI could also be developed or encouraged by the network.

The FOIANet could create a 4-year goal on what the network is looking for from OGP regarding RTI, and take an advocacy position from this. The network could then for example, create pressure where countries do not put commitments on RTI in their national Action Plans. This could also include pressing the OGP to only accept the ongoing participation of countries on the condition they adopt an RTI law, say within 2-4 years of joining OGP.

It is important, given the overlap between the 65 participating countries and the membership of the FOIANet, that the Network understands the plans of its members in the context of the OGP: How can the FOIANet help them? Where does the network have added value? How can we help to engage members? Part of such work could include informing members of OGP events and cycles (for IRM, presenting national Action Plans etc.)

Within the OGP, there is a specific Working Group on RTI (RTIWG). The purpose of these Working Groups is to enable collaboration between governments and civil society. The FOIANet has yet to engage in the RTIWG, where it could work to promote the right and push for commitments from governments directly.

The FOIANet SC could request formally to be part of the RTIWG in order to open a line of communication, part of which would include requesting more information on how the Group operates. Part of this request could also include opening up the RTIWG to the FOIANet members to engage the wider RTI community and gain further legitimacy to its work. There should also be a discussion amongst the community about how engagement with the RTIWG should happen.

The RTIWG could be enriched by the participation of more and more diverse FOIANet members, who on the whole have vested interests in obtaining commitments to develop RTI in national Action Plans.

- *Engaging with Open Data community*

As previously mentioned, the Open Data community and the RTI community need to build bridges and work more closely together. Importantly, the RTI community needs to engage with the Open Data community to discuss, where possible, the important policy issues related to RTI and Open Data.

The next event to be held by Open Data activists is in Ottawa. One proposal could be the hosting of a panel between the two communities, with the participation of a SC member.

As part of this effort and other efforts to engage with the Open Data community, the SC identified a number of key strategies:

- Engage with key organisations such as OKFN and Web Foundation.
- Organise a summit or workshop between key Open Data and RTI activists in order to create joint strategies and better understand each other (would require brainstorm of who to go, what to discuss, what would agenda look like).
- Seek opportunities for collaboration between Open Data and RTI activists and organisations:
 - Get Open Data community to help RTI community use the data obtained to demonstrate the usefulness of it (We need you).
 - Get the Open Data community to understand that the FOIANet community is a valuable resource as they can help Open Data activists to get the data they want because of their expert knowledge on RTI (You need us).

8. *STRENGTHEN COOPERATION BETWEEN REGIONAL NETWORKS (dependent on funding)*

The expertise from the FOIANet and the SC could help regional networks to develop and improve their strategies for achieving their goals. New networks such as the Caribbean Network (made up of 15/16 members and 2 information commissioners) would welcome more support from FOIANet and in particular in sharing and collaborating on activities.

In particular, it was decided that the FOIANet website would host a page for the Caribbean Network. With both the Caribbean and African networks represented on the SC, there is a need to make sure the Alianza Regional (covering Latin America) and other groups are also engaged and supported by FOIANet.

The FOIANet could also help (through its resources section) increase resource and capacity building of regional networks by being a go-to resource.

The FOIANet could also enable and facilitate advocacy around certain regional instruments or days (such as RTKD) which can help to advance regional recognition. Efforts could be made to ensure that regional efforts and activities that take place on RTKD are also communicated and promoted globally through the network, and that the FOIANet also use its links to help coordinate global actions.

The SC also emphasised the need to make sure key information is passed across lists, such as key events, developments and publications.

Significant areas for inter-regional advocacy include engagement with the OGP [Priority 7] and RTKD recognition [Priority 9].

9. ADVOCATE FOR AN OFFICIAL RTK/RTI DAY (dependent on Funding)

Right to Know Day is celebrated across the network and around the world every year on 28 September. Many public bodies in different countries carry out events on the day (such as Information Commissioners) but there is no official recognition of this day.

There have been discussions around this idea for some time now, and the SC decided that FOIANet should seek funding to enable it to engage more actively on this issue. In the last few years, Africa has moved forward on this issue. For example, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has formally requested the AU to recognise 28 Sept. and International Right to Information Day and the African group within UNESCO has drafted a resolution on this issue for the UNESCO General Conference. The SC noted that African efforts in this regard have referred to International Right to Information Day (as opposed to International Right to Know Day), which might have some implications which could need further discussion, but it was generally agreed to support the African efforts.

A number of possible activities were discussed in support of formal recognition of the day. FOIANet could help facilitate work in other regions to get the day recognised officially, most probably through UNESCO. African countries have already expressed their support for official recognition of the day, but they would need other regions to support them in this endeavour, so mobilising regional networks is an important part of the strategy. FOIANet could also prompt member organisations to write to their national UNESCO delegations calling for support for the 28 September to be recognised officially.

Efforts to mobilise members and regional groups should be supplemented by efforts to create promotional materials for the day, such as infographics and posters.

As part of the effort, the FOIANet would need to make a statement setting out the rationale for the day. It would, working with members, also need to send (model) letters to governments, talk with UNESCO, reach out to regional networks, send (model) letters to information commissioner to gather support, write to Special Rapporteurs on RTI/FoE.

Regular FOIANet Steering Committee Meeting

Legal recognition

The Steering Committee was informed of the previous discussions about the FOIANet becoming a legal entity, with both advantages and disadvantages presented. The SC noted that if the FOIANet were a legal entity, it would look like a stronger entity and that this would facilitate fundraising. But it was also recognised that transforming into a legal entity would create some risks and would also require the creation of separate systems of auditing and payment of salaries apart from AIE.

It was agreed that we would not move forward with this idea for the time being, but that we would keep it on the table in case we pulled in more significant funding.

Getting more formal

It was agreed that, in the short term, a separate agreement between AIE and the FOIANet would need to be created that sets out the relationship between the two organisations in a more formal manner. The FOIANet also expressed a desire to formally adopt a constitution that would help to set out the roles and power of the SC and Secretariat, basic rules, relationship with members etc.

The FOIANet SC also discussed the idea of a Charter that would serve as the overall statement of values of the Network and which members would be expected to endorse. A draft will be produced by the Steering Committee and then presented to members for discussion. The idea would be that members could opt-out if, after the document had been agreed, they did not wish to endorse it. The Charter would outline the core values and goals of the Network, such as our belief in and support for RTI, that members support each other through sharing knowledge, etc. The 10-10-10 Statement and founding documents could serve as a basis for some of the Charter.

ACTION AP/TM – Create Memorandum of Understanding between FOIANet and AIE

ACTION AP/TM– Create basic document outlining Constitution for consideration

ACTION CE/AK – Draft Charter for SC consideration (and then send to members)

Membership

The SC recognised that at the moment there was not a clear or fluid process for accepting new member organisations or individuals/observers. The current membership requirement for organisations is a demonstrated ("significant") workload on RTI. A new approach was proposed in order to streamline SC discussions on membership, that if one SC member solidly approves an application, there is a 2 week period for other SC members to disagree. If there is no objection after 2 weeks, then the applicant becomes a member organisation of the FOIANet. If there is no solid approval, then the SC enters a period of investigation and discussion to find out more about the applicant (this could include contacting the applicant organisation for more information).

The Steering Committee also felt that it would be useful for members to receive a 'membership package' when they join. The membership package would outline what the FOIANet does, how it works, what the FOIANet expects of members, and what the members can expect of the FOIANet, and the kinds of activities that FOIANet undertakes. It would be a 3-4 page document.

ACTION AP - Develop Membership Package for SC approval

Social Media

The Steering Committee discussed the need for a more coherent social media approach for the FOIANet, using Twitter and Facebook. It was decided that a Twitter policy would be needed, including tweeting of minutes of meetings, pictures of meeting, institutional matters, projects, RTKD and build-up. The FOIANet would be more explicit in asking members to follow and retweet the FOIANet Twitter account.

The FOIANet Facebook page would also be used more for RTKD activities and would have more information in general.

ACTION AP – Draft a Twitter and Facebook Policy for FOIANet

ACTION AP – Write up 'What is FOI?' section for the website and send to TM

Fundraising

As part of the meeting to narrow down the priorities for FOIANet funding, the SC discussed who they could look at to obtain funding for projects.

The SC agreed that member organisations could fundraise in the name of FOIANet if these proposals were in line with agreed FOIANet priorities and approved by the SC. For example, a member organisation may wish to conduct a webinar and want a number of FOIANet members to take part and therefore want it to be endorsed by the network. The SC would approve such plans.

The SC members would also look at different funders and make initial approaches:

HIVOS – AP

OMIDYAR – TM

German Foundations – AF

Sigrid Rausing Trust – TM

EU Funds – AIE

UNDEF (31 dec)

DFID – TMc

Ford Foundation – TM

Mott Foundation – TMc

Swedish Postcode Lottery – CE

Hewlett – GS

Bill Gates Foundation – TMc

Rockerfeller Foundation – AP

German Marshall Fund – AK

Norwegian, and Swedish (SIDA) Bilateral Funding – AP

It was mentioned that the Swedes (SIDA) or Finnish could be interested in funding activities given the 250 anniversary of the world's first RTI law in 2016. Funding could also be sought regionally with other networks/organisations and put towards projects FOIANet wants to work on such as success stories, trainings, etc. Trainings could be done in collaboration with other CSO sectors such as minority groups, lgbt, health, environment etc.

ACTION AP - Concept note of what is FOIANet to be used to put before funders (and would include funding priorities, bullet points, 4 or 5) BY END OF FEB.

AOB

SC members were reminded to be active in promoting FOIANet on the list, and at events they may attend!

ACTION from priorities CE –Share priorities for Caribbean FOI network with SC.

ACTION from priorities AP – Ask members of FOInet to provide information on their organisations for the FOIANet webpage.

ACTION from priorities AF – Get title for public interest litigation publication.

ACTION from priorities AK – post Bulgaria success story to the list

ACTION from priorities GS – Share AFOIC strategy on RTKD recognition