Minutes of Steering Committee Meeting - 17 March 2014

Present (online)
Eduardo Bertoni, Shushan Doydoyan, Said Essoulami, Andrea Figari, Gergana Jouleva, Andreas Pavlou, Toby Mendel, Codru Vrabie.

Item 1 - Strategic planning - Strategic directions, Funding, Use of campaign fund, SC meeting
The Steering Committee began by outlining their ideas for priorities and directions for the FOIAnet:

Eduardo raised support for focusing on _implementation tools_. Codru supported this idea and argued there could be a space for FOIAnet to work on helping organizations monitoring implementation of recently passed FOI laws, improve implementation in countries with old FOI laws, and also working together with Open Data people to help them get the data they need in the right formats etc

Codru raised the idea of the FOIAnet providing/creating _advocacy tools for members at the regional/national level_.

Eduardo raised the point that the FOIAnet could have an impact working to promote better practices.

Supporting OGP work – Supported by Steering Committee. Gergana highlighted the need for substantial funding if FOIAnet were to carry out such activities and a priority might need to be website. Shushan highlighted the need to propose concrete activities to contribute to OGP direction/principles. Toby mentioned that in the previous London Summit, FOIAnet hosted a panel and this could be done more so in the future.

It was generally agreed that increasing the profile of RTI within the OGP was definitely a good idea.

Said raised the idea of FOIAnet _following in the footsteps of IFEX_. This would mean the FOIAnet would work on making itself known outside the RTI community and give it a more external vision. This may mean focusing on substantially improving the website.

Codru, Toby and Andrea highlighted that FOIAnet and the website are internally focused towards providing support and sharing content/information to members, rather than being the driving force in creating content and communicating/advocating to the outside world. The point was also raised that IFEX is not a fair comparison as it is a much larger organization with many more resources than FOIAnet. Eduardo said he does not support collecting and reporting on RTI abuses. In the same way IFEX does for its members.

Andreas highlighted that significant website work would need significant amount of resources and money and may unnecessarily duplicate the work of others such as FreedomInfo.org. Gergana agreed that more resources would be needed to focus on the website and that focusing on OGP instead, would be a good idea (providing materials to members on it etc).

Andrea stated that there was a need for more funding to address all these issues and that there would need to be a list of priorities. It would also be important to involve members to engage their ideas/perceptions/needs, raising the question of when and to what extent should they be involved. Andreas mentioned the possibility of creating a questionnaire/consultation for members to collect their ideas. Andrea pointed out that the Global Update could work as a starting point for raising issues to be tackled.

The Steering Committee highlighted the importance that FOIAnet should not encroach upon its members' work or advocacy, and that *it should be made clear (possibly codified) what FOIAnet does and what it does not do*. It was agreed the value of FOIAnet is that it is a platform to share and distribute information, and it is not an organization that carries out specific advocacy activities.

Eduardo also supported the idea of putting m*ore time and effort into International Right To Know Day* – making it more visible, promoting it and supporting member events and activities. Toby and Codru supported the idea for a focus for RTKD 2014, but to be discussed later. Pushing for recognition by the UN or other international bodies also raised as an idea.

Item 2 - Steering Committee Meeting
It was agreed that the physical meeting for the Steering Committee would be done in order to draw up the long term strategy for the FOIAnet. This *physical meeting should take place before July and may take place over 2 days*.

The prospect of Ireland as a meeting point for a physical meeting was raised, but this was eventually rejected as an option as a majority of the Steering Committee did not have plans to go, and that it would possibly be a distraction for the meeting if it tagged onto a different event. Some members were not available for travel until July and September.

The possibility for a larger conference that included all FOIAnet members was raised. It was rejected as funding did not stretch that far, and input from members could be fed into a smaller meeting of just the Steering Committee by use of a questionnaire, that was later agreed to be a better idea for gathering members input.

Codru raised the idea of having a current- and Steering Committee-elect meeting after elections to get a strategy document agreed between the two committees, which was rejected as it could be complicated to find agreement and that members could still provide input through a consultation process/questionnaire.

It was agreed that *Andreas and Toby would begin to plan a time and location for a physical meeting. They would also begin to discuss how to engage wider members' ideas, and create a background document to develop further over email/Google Docs (also taking the discussion from the Steering Committee meeting) with the rest of the Steering Committee and finally to be discussed at a physical meeting*.

Item 3 - Membership and elections
Andreas explained that the FOIAnet *membership* list has been tidied up, and there is now a definitive list of member organizations and contact details ready for elections. The Steering Committee was informed the website is not up to date, but that this is a problem that cannot fully be resolved without a revamp of the website.

Eduardo asked if there is any way we can find out if members are still active on RTI and that maybe charging a small fee or removing voting rights to inactive members could help motivate members to be more engaged in the discussion. Andreas said that currently, the number of active members was difficult to measure. Toby said that changes to the way we measure engagement of members should maybe be discussed at a face to face meeting.

Andreas suggested that a system like the UNCAC of yearly reports/updates of information could help to keep track of engaged members working on RTI. This could be directly posted/uploaded to the website and consulted when necessary. Andrea said these reports could simply be copies of the reports set to donors by members. Toby mentioned it may be unfeasible for the Steering Committee to read these reports each year from all the members. An upgrade and change of the current website might make it feasible for members to automatically upload information each year about their activities.

The Steering Committee was happy for Andreas to continue testing the current proposal for a voting platform for *Steering Committee elections*.

It was also stressed that there needs to be prepared handover documentation for the Steering Committee and Toby agreed he would help the next Chair with the handover of responsibilities. An overlap of Steering Committees was rejected. It was not confirmed if current Steering Committee members could be reelected.

There were discussions to hold elections just before RTKD 2014 and handover on September 28, but this was deemed too much work for the Coordinator to organize depending on size of RTKD 2014 activities on behalf of FOIAnet and could distract members from holding events etc. The Steering Committee agreed for *elections to be scheduled for October 2014.*

Item 4 - Website
Due to previous discussion and interest in the website within an overall strategy, it was decided for a Working Group to be created to steer the development of the website. This was to be made up initially of Andrea Figari, Andreas Pavlou and Said Essoulami. It is open to other Steering Committee members to join, with decisions shared with the general Steering Committee.

Initially and as a temporary phase, *the website will be simply transferred from Joomla to Wordpress and have minimal changes to design and content*.

Following this, *Andrea volunteered to write a proposal for the development of the website, including immediate and longer term plans*. This will later be presented to the Steering Committee for discussion and approval.

Item 5 - RTKD 2014
RTKD 2014 *brainstorming was agreed to take place amongst the Steering Committee via email*. Andrea would send an initial email to begin the conversation. Later on, but not too late, the FOIAnet membership would also be included in finalizing the focus for RTKD 2014.

Item 6 - AOB
No other business. It was noted that this was possibly the first SC call with everyone present.