



AN OVERVIEW OF PRIVACY  
ON THE  
UNBLOCK REQUEST TICKET SYSTEM (UTRS)

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PREPARED FOR: WIKIMEDIA FOUNDATION

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(Hersfold, DeltaQuad, TParis, Thehelpfulone)

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# An overview

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The Unblock Request Ticket System will be a Toolserver project that allows for users to request that a block placed against their account, IP address, or network be lifted. For a number of reasons, many blocked users are unable to figure out how to appeal on-wiki, or are unable or unwilling to do so.

Currently, their alternative is to email the unblock-en-l mailing list, however recently the list has had difficulties with many requests going unanswered, and a very small number of dedicated admins have been handling almost all of the incoming requests.

This tool should provide a much more user-friendly experience for both blockees and administrators, and will ensure every appeal gets addressed appropriately and in a timely manner.

All participants with developer or checkuser access are identified to the Wikimedia foundation.

## **Hersfold**

*Project Manager*

## **TParis**

*Lead Developer*

## **DeltaQuad**

*Lead Interface Manager*

## **Thehelpfulone**

*Lead System Integrity*

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# A Comparison

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	<b>Unblock-en-l</b>	<b>UTRS</b>	<b>MediaWiki</b>
<b>Private data acquired at time of first use</b>	Email address	Email address IP Address Useragent	IP Address Useragent
<b>Volunteered private data</b>	IP Address Account name	Account name	Email address Account name
<b>IP address visibility (anonymous accounts)</b>	All list subscribers upon user volunteering	All tool users (Wikipedia sysops only)	All Wikipedia readers
<b>IP address visibility (named accounts)</b>	Only when the user volunteers information because of an IP block affecting an account	Checkusers/Developers	Checkusers/Developers
<b>Email Address visibility</b>	All list subscribers  Communication is entirely email based and both sysop and blockee email addresses are visible upon transmission	Developers  UTRS allows communication between sysops and blockees without revealing either email address  See Note 1	Developers  Additionally, sending an email through the MediaWiki interface reveals the sender's email address. A reply will reveal the receiver's email address
<b>Useragent visibility</b>	None	Checkusers/Developers	Checkusers/Developers/Staff
<b>Private data removal</b>	Never, stays in subscribers email accounts	7 days after close of appeal	3 months

Note 1: All users have access to see the email domain. Use of the domain will be explained in the case analysis. Although email domains are generally considered not personally identifiable due to the number of users of a particular domain such as Hotmail.com, gmail.com, aol.com, ect; in the case where a user uses an official email address or a personal domain name then an email address domain could be used to identify a user.

# Permission sets

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	<b>Users</b>	<b>Checkusers</b>	<b>Tool Admins</b>	<b>Developers</b>
<b>Read Appeal</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Add comments</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Send and receive email messages</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>IP Address visibility (anonymous accounts)</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>IP Address visibility (named accounts)</b>	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Email</b>	Domain only	Domain only	Domain only	Yes
<b>Useragent visibility</b>	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Change email templates</b>	No	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Open closed appeals</b>	No	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Set 'Admin' Permission</b>	No	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Set 'Developer' Permission</b>	No	No	No	Yes
<b>Set 'Checkuser' Permission</b>	No	See note 1	No	See note 1
<b>Send mass emails</b>	No	No	No	Yes

Note 1: Only a dual 'Developer' and 'Checkuser' account can set the 'Checkuser' permission on another account using the UTRS interface. However, developers can manually set this flag directly into the database.

# English Wikipedia Unblock Ticket Request System



[Home](#) [Statistics](#) [Manage/View Templates](#) [Preferences](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Logout](#)

## Details for Request #26: TParis-alt :: \*\*\*\*\*@ufpfleet.org

Account links: [User Page](#) | [Block Log](#) | [Contribs](#) | [Unblock](#) | [Create Account](#)  
Request timestamp: 2012-02-07 15:55:50  
Status: **AWAITING\_USER**  
Blocking Admin: **Test**  
Assigned: TParis

### Why do you believe you should be unblocked?

Test

### If you are unblocked, what articles do you intend to edit?

Test

### Is there anything else you would like us to consider when reviewing your block?

### Actions

[Release](#) [Checkuser](#) [User](#) [Hold](#) [Proxy](#) [Tool Admin](#)  
[Close](#)

### Responses

Please select

### Logs for this request (new comment)

User	Action
TParis-alt	<i>Appeal Created</i>
TParis	<i>Reserved appeal</i>
TParis	<i>Sent email to user using Need Block Info template</i>
TParis	<i>Status change to AWAITING_USER</i>

[Quick Comment](#)

Users active in the last five minutes: Thehelpfulone

The Unblock Ticket Request System is a project hosted on the Wikimedia Toolserver intended to assist users with the [unblock process](#) on the English Wikipedia.

This project is licensed under the [GNU General Public License Version 3 or Later](#).

For questions or assistance with the Unblock Ticket Request System, please email our development team at [unblock@toolserver.org](mailto:unblock@toolserver.org).

**Example of the appeal page on a named account from the perspective of a tool user (Wikipedia sysop) with zero additional permissions. Private data is not visible.**

# English Wikipedia Unblock Ticket Request System



[Home](#) [Statistics](#) [Manage/View Templates](#) [Preferences](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Logout](#)

## Details for Request #25: [198.51.100.14](#) :: \*\*\*\*\*@ufpfleet.org

Account links: [User Page](#) | [Block Log](#) | [Contribs](#) | [Unblock](#) | [Create Account](#)  
Request timestamp: 2012-02-07 15:55:19  
Status: **AWAITING\_CHECKUSER**  
Blocking Admin: TParis

### Why do you believe you should be unblocked?

Test

### If you are unblocked, what articles do you intend to edit?

Test

### Is there anything else you would like us to consider when reviewing your block?

### Actions

[Reserve](#) [Checkuser](#) [User](#) [Hold](#) [Proxy](#) [Tool Admin](#)  
[Close](#)

### Responses

Please select

### Logs for this request (new comment)

User	Action
<a href="#">198.51.100.14</a>	Appeal Created
TParis	Reserved appeal
TParis	Status change to AWAITING_CHECKUSER

[Quick Comment](#)

Users active in the last five minutes: Thehelpfulone

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For questions or assistance with the Unblock Ticket Request System, please email our development team at [unblock@toolserver.org](mailto:unblock@toolserver.org).

Example above is an example of the level of visibility for a UTRS Tool user. An IP Address is visible because this is a request from an anonymous account. Tool users do not have the "Ban Management" section.



# English Wikipedia Unblock Ticket Request System



[Home](#) [Statistics](#) [Manage/View Templates](#) [User Management](#) [Ban Management](#) [Search](#) [Preferences](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Logout](#)

## Details for Request #26: TParis-alt :: \*\*\*\*\*@ufpfleet.org

Account links: [User Page](#) | [Block Log](#) | [Contribs](#) | [Unblock](#) | [Create Account](#)  
Request timestamp: 2012-02-07 15:55:50  
Status: AWAITING\_USER  
Blocking Admin: Test  
Assigned: TParis

### Why do you believe you should be unblocked?

Test

### If you are unblocked, what articles do you intend to edit?

Test

### Is there anything else you would like us to consider when reviewing your block?

### Actions

[Release](#) [Checkuser](#) [User](#) [Hold](#) [Proxy](#) [Tool Admin](#)  
[Close](#)

### Responses

Please select

### Logs for this request (new comment)

User	Action
TParis-alt	Appeal Created
TParis	Reserved appeal
TParis	Sent email to user using Need Block Info template
TParis	Status change to AWAITING_USER

[Quick Comment](#)

### Ban Management

[Ban Email](#) [Ban IP](#) [Ban Username](#)

Users active in the last five minutes: Thehelpfulone

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For questions or assistance with the Unblock Ticket Request System, please email our development team at [unblock@toolserver.org](mailto:unblock@toolserver.org).

**Example of the appeal page from the perspective of a tool administrator on a named account. Private data is not visible to the tool administrator.**

# English Wikipedia Unblock Ticket Request System



[Home](#) [Statistics](#) [Manage/View Templates](#) [User Management](#) [Ban Management](#) [Search](#) [Preferences](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Send Mass Email](#) [Logout](#)

## Details for Request #26: TParis-alt :: \*\*\*\*\*@ufpfleet.org

Account links: [User Page](#) | [Block Log](#) | [Contribs](#) | [Unblock](#) | [Create Account](#)  
Request timestamp: 2012-02-07 15:55:50  
Status: **AWAITING\_USER**  
Blocking Admin: **Test**  
Assigned: TParis

### User Agent

198.51.234 Mozilla/5.0 (Windows NT 6.0; rv:9.0.1) Gecko/20100101  
Firefox/9.0.1

### Why do you believe you should be unblocked?

Test

### If you are unblocked, what articles do you intend to edit?

Test

### Is there anything else you would like us to consider when reviewing your block?

### Actions

[Release](#) [Checkuser](#) [User](#) [Hold](#) [Proxy](#) [Tool Admin](#) [Close](#)

### Responses

Please select

### Logs for this request (new comment)

User	Action
TParis-alt	Appeal Created
TParis	Reserved appeal
TParis	Sent email to user using Need Block Info template
TParis	Status change to AWAITING_USER

[Quick Comment](#)

### Ban Management

[Ban Email](#) [Ban IP](#) [Ban Username](#)

Example above of the system from the view of a "Developer" and "Admin". Useragent data is visible due to developer access, exact same view from checkuser access, in addition to ban management which is available to tool administrators.

# IRC Notifications

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The IRC notification robot, called UTRSBot, works live in conjunction with the UTRS system in two Freenode channels: #wikipedia-en-unblock (en-unblock) and #wikipedia-en-unblock-dev (unblock-dev). In en-unblock, the IRC bot notifies the channel when a new appeal is created, a tool user reserves the appeal, when a comment is made, when an email is sent, and when a reply by the user is made.

For appeals where an anonymous user has requested an unblock the IP address is used, in addition to the appeal identification number, to notify the channel. This operates similarly to the Wikimedia Foundation's IRC Recent Changes log and the en-unblock UnblockBot which both publish anonymous IP addresses to IRC. The two existing systems, one owned by Wikimedia, publish long-term publicly available IP addresses to IRC. In the case of anonymous accounts, the UTRSBot performs a similar function. Anonymous IP addresses are used for identification in the same way that MediaWiki software uses the IP for identification. No other details are present that would allow the linking of an IP address to any form of personally identifiable information.

For appeals with named accounts, the UTRSBot only publishes the account name. IP Address is not posted to an IRC channel. Email addresses and useragent data are also never published to IRC under any circumstances.

The unblock-dev channel receives all the same messages as en-unblock with the addition of administrative messages. Unblock-dev notices with also include tool user account requests, tool user permission changes, mass email notifications, tool user account activations and deactivations.

```
[09:55] <+UTRSBot> New appeal has been created for 199.248.2.34 ( 25 ) URL: http://toolserver.org/~unblock/
[09:55] <+UTRSBot> New appeal has been created for TParis-alt ( 26 ) URL: http://toolserver.org/~unblock/
[09:56] <+UTRSBot> Appeal TParis-alt ( 26 ) reserved by TParis URL: http://toolserver.org/~unblock/
[09:56] <+UTRSBot> Email sent to user TParis-alt using template Need Block Info by TParis
[09:56] <+UTRSBot> Status changed for TParis-alt ( 26 ) to AWAITING_USER by TParis URL: http://toolserver.org/~unblock/
[09:56] <+UTRSBot> Appeal 199.248.2.34 ( 25 ) reserved by TParis URL: http://toolserver.org/~unblock/
[09:56] <+UTRSBot> Status changed for 199.248.2.34 ( 25 ) to AWAITING_CHECKUSER by TParis URL: http://toolserver.org/~unblock/
```

# Data Removal

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A server side automated cron job is run to remove IP Addresses, email addresses, and user agent data from closed appeals that are more than 7 days old. The script will run weekly without user intervention every Sunday at 00:25 UTC.

# Case analysis

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## Case 1: Anonymous user blocked by IP Address

**Condition:** An anonymous Wikipedia editor edits with the IP address is blocked for vandalism. They create a ticket on the Unblock Ticket Request System. When prompted to identify an account, they do not because they do not have one; they are editing anonymously. User is informed that clicking submit will agree to the privacy policy.

**Action:** UTRS system records the user's IP Address and useragent automatically. The user must volunteer an email address to facilitate communication. The appeal is set to "NEW" status.

**Visibility:** The user's IP Address is visible to all UTRS users. The email address is not visibility in its entirety, however the domain (after the @ symbol) is visible. Useragent data is only visible to checkusers.

**Workflow:** UTRS users will first reserve the appeal to their account. This will prevent duplicate effort and duplicate responses to the user. Tool users will not be able to email the blockee unless they hold a reservation on an appeal. UTRS user will then review the appeal request. The tool user will review the IP's contributions on Wikipedia and any unblock template on the IP talk page.

If the tool user requires more information from the IP Address, they will use a drop-down menu to select from a list of response templates, or a blank template, to send the user an email. Email is transmitted by the UTRS system using a [noreply-unblock@toolserver.org](mailto:noreply-unblock@toolserver.org) email address. The IP's email address will never be available to the tool user. The appeal is set to "AWAITING\_USER" status.

The IP will receive the email at their identified email address. The email will contain a link to a reply form where the user can enter a response. Once a response is entered, the appeal is set to "AWAITING\_REVIEWER" status.

The tool user can review the response in the comments window as a highlighted comment. If the user feels there may be a case of abuse or sockpuppetry, they may forward the appeal to a checkuser by clicking the checkuser button. This will drop the user's reservation on the appeal and set the appeal's status to "AWAITING\_CHECKUSER".

If there are no concerns and the tool user decides to unblock, they can use the IP Address to unblock the anonymous account on Wikipedia. They can then send an unblocked template email response to the user and the appeal will be set to close. If the tool user decides not to unblock, they may close the appeal and send an email, or not send an email, explaining the rationale to the user. Alternatively, if the tool user feels there is abuse of the UTRS system, they may click the "Tool Admin" and leave a comment requesting the IP Address be banned from the system. This will set the status to "CLOSED" or "AWAITING\_ADMIN" depending on the action.

## Case 2: Named Account blocked by IP Address

**Condition:** A named account is blocked by IP address either because they are in a rangeblock or because of an autoblock. They identify an account when creating an appeal. User is informed that clicking submit will agree to the privacy policy.

**Action:** UTRS system records the user's IP Address and useragent automatically. The user must volunteer an email address to facilitate communication. The appeal is set to "NEW" status.

**Visibility:** The users IP address and useragent data are only available to checkusers and developers. Email address is visible by domain only.

**Workflow:** The tool user will review the account similarly to Case 1. The user will review the named account's contributions instead of IP Address contributions because they do not have access to view the IP Address. Often times, Wikipedia users are unaware that there can be blocks on IP Addresses or accounts. The tool user will check for a block on the account. If one is not found, they will check for an autoblock.

If an autoblock is found, they will review the merits of the case and close the appeal. If an autoblock is not found, the tool user will click the checkuser button to forward the appeal to a checkuser. A checkuser will view the IP Address on the UTRS tool, and then check for cases of sockpuppetry, rangeblocks, or IP blocks.

If one is found, the checkuser will review the appeal and determine an outcome. They will close the appeal. However, if it is determine that the account or IP is abusing the UTRS system, they will click the tool admin button to forward the appeal to a tool admin to ban the account, email, or IP from the UTRS system.

## Case 3: Named account is blocked

**Condition:** A named account is blocked. They identify an account when creating an appeal. User is informed that clicking submit will agree to the privacy policy.

**Action:** UTRS system records the user's IP Address and useragent automatically. The user must volunteer an email address to facilitate communication. The appeal is set to "NEW" status.

**Visibility:** The users IP address and useragent data are only available to checkusers and developers. Email address is visible by domain only.

**Workflow:** Similar to Case 1. The tool user will review the merits of the appeal. They will check the accounts contributions, block log, and other pertinent details related to the block. They will communicate with the user using the built in communication tools. No IP addresses, useragent data, or email accounts will be visible to the tool user or reviewed unless there are signs of sockpuppetry requiring elevation to a checkuser. The tool user will determine the outcome. This is the predicted most common scenario.

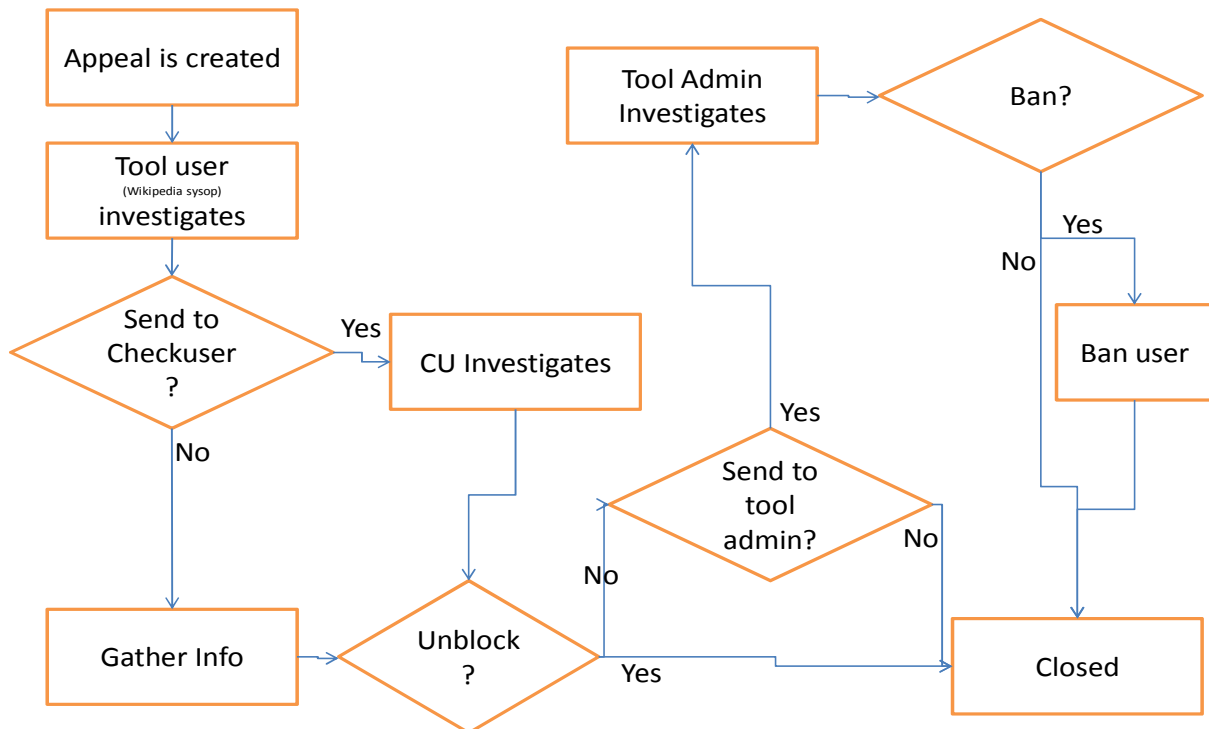
## Case 4: IP Address is blocked as a sock puppet

**Condition:** A user with a named account does not reveal their account name instead opting to be identified by IP Address. They create a ticket on the Unblock Ticket Request System. When prompted to identify an account, they do not despite actually owning an account. User is informed that clicking submit will agree to the privacy policy.

**Action:** UTRS system records the user's IP Address and useragent automatically. The user must volunteer an email address to facilitate communication. The appeal is set to "NEW" status.

**Visibility:** The user's IP Address is visible to all UTRS users. The email address is not visibility in its entirety, however the domain (after the @ symbol) is visible. Useragent data is only visible to checkusers.

**Workflow:** Similar to case 2. If the tool user feels there may be more information, they can request the information from the user. The user will be given the opportunity to reveal their account name. If the tool user feels the appeal is deceptive or there are signs of sockpuppetry, they can forward the appeal to a checkuser.



# Privacy Policy

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Welcome to the Unblock Ticket Request System. We recognize that you are a volunteer working to contribute towards the world's largest free online encyclopedia. As such, we recognize that there may be some information you'd rather keep private. We value that privacy and wish to assure you that we have taken steps to ensure that by requesting unblocking here, you are not at risk of exposing your identity on the internet. At the same time, however, in order to properly process your unblock request, we do need to collect certain information that will allow us to distinguish you from others editing from the same or a nearby location that seek to do Wikipedia harm.

## *Why we have this policy*

In addition to our desire to protect your privacy, this policy is in place to comply with German and European Union laws regarding the collection, processing, and use of private data. While Wikipedia and the Wikimedia Foundation are both located in the United States, the Toolserver on which UTRS is hosted is located in Germany, and so is subject to those laws. These laws require that we obtain your consent to collect such data, and that we outline specifically how it is used and why it is necessary. For more information about these laws, please see the European Commission's website on data protection laws and directives at [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/policies/privacy/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/policies/privacy/index_en.htm).

## *What data do you collect, and why?*

Wikipedia uses the Mediawiki software, which allows administrators to issue blocks to accounts and specific [IP addresses](#). Some of these blocks may be configured to affect both. To differentiate between legitimate users and vandals, both of whom may be caught on these blocks, specific members trusted by the community are granted access to the CheckUser tool. This tool allows these users to view a person's [useragent](#), which provides data about your internet browser and operating system, generally for the purpose of assisting web developers in making websites display properly. All of this data is managed by the Wikimedia Foundation, with servers hosted in the United States; you can view the Wikimedia Foundation's privacy policy [here](#).

As a result of this, volunteers at the Unblock Ticket Request System, several of whom are CheckUsers on Wikipedia, require this same information - your IP address and useragent - to be able to review your block. Without your IP address, we cannot look up the block that is affecting you and will not be able to assist. Even if your account was blocked, usually an "autoblock" will have been applied to your IP address by the MediaWiki software, and these are not always lifted automatically. Without your useragent, we will have a very difficult time distinguishing you from other users who mean Wikipedia harm, which could delay or prevent you from being unblocks.

It is important to note that this information is provided by your internet browser to any website you visit; it is not possible to confirm any specific person's identity with this information. We



only use this to confirm that multiple accounts or IP addresses were used by the same person, whoever that person may be.

We also require your email address so that we can respond to you with questions and the result of your appeal.

By submitting an appeal at UTRS, you agree to provide this information and allow UTRS volunteers to view it for the explicit purpose of reviewing your block on the English Wikipedia.

### *How is this data stored, and who can see it?*

We store this data in a secure database, which is visible only to UTRS developers, several of whom are identified to the Wikimedia Foundation, just as Checkusers are required to do. In order to assist with reviewing your block, this information is provided to UTRS volunteers as follows:

- Your email address will be obscured for most people reviewing your block. All emails we send you will be sent through the system, so there is no need for volunteers to view your email address in full. As a result, only the domain of your address will be visible to most volunteers (for example, wikiuser@gmail.com will display only as \*\*\*\*\*@gmail.com). The domain remains visible to assist volunteers in determining if you are a legitimate user of a school or business network, if you are editing from one. UTRS tool developers will be able to see your full email address to ensure the tool is working properly. *(Administrators: Your email address is stored along with your UTRS account to allow tool administrators to contact you about your account. This does not get deleted, but is never visible to anyone other than UTRS developers looking at the database itself.)*
- Your IP address will be visible alongside the rest of your appeal to anyone reviewing the block. Again, this is necessary to allow us to look up your block and determine possible outcomes.
- Your useragent will only be visible to UTRS developers and those reviewing the block that have access to the CheckUser tool on Wikipedia. CheckUsers need to see your useragent to help differentiate you from the person the block is intended for, and UTRS developers need to see this information to ensure the tool is working properly.

At no point will your data be provided to a third party for any purpose; furthermore, this information will be removed from our system no more than one week after your appeal is closed. This removal process is automated, so you don't need to worry about anyone forgetting to hit the "delete" button.

### *What are my rights with regard to this information?*

If you wish to see what information has been collected on you by this system, you may email the development team at [unblock@toolserver.org](mailto:unblock@toolserver.org) to request all information associated with your appeal.

If you do not wish for this information to be collected by UTRS, you may appeal via your talk page on Wikipedia, or by email to [unblock-en-l@lists.wikimedia.org](mailto:unblock-en-l@lists.wikimedia.org). Please note that if you appeal on Wikipedia, your IP address and useragent may be examined by any CheckUser, with cause, in accordance with the Wikimedia Foundation Privacy Policy. Wikipedia is hosted in the

United States and is not subject to the same laws. If you appeal by email, your email address will naturally be visible to all volunteers on the mailing list, and they may require that you provide additional information in order to look up your block.

If you have already entered an appeal at UTRS and wish for your information to be deleted immediately, please email the development team at [unblock@toolserver.org](mailto:unblock@toolserver.org) to have your appeal deleted from the database. You will then need to appeal your block through one of the alternate venues mentioned above. Again, please note that this information will be automatically removed one week after your appeal is resolved.

If you have any questions about this policy, please contact the development team at [unblock@toolserver.org](mailto:unblock@toolserver.org).

# Conclusion

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The Unblock Request Ticket System employs many of the same privacy features provided by MediaWiki software used to power Wikipedia. A permission system has been developed to maintain the integrity of private data on the tool, the IRC notification system has been modeled after Wikimedia's own IRC systems, and a method of removing private data from the tool's database has also been incorporated to minimize the impact as the result of a hack as well as to remove private information that is no longer relevant from the visibility of even tool developers.

The UTRS system will increase the effectiveness of the appeals process as well as provide more protection and privacy for Wikipedia's users and Wikipedia's sysops than current methods. Communication with users will be standardized, logged, and monitored for transparency. Checkuser and WP:OPP (Open Proxy Project) will have better control and more involvement in the unblock appeal process. Appeal response and response times will see an improvement which will provide a more professional and respectable image for Wikipedia users, Wikipedia sysops, and Wikimedia Foundation.