

IETF Administration Restructuring: Motivation
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Abstract

This document follows up the observations and recommendations outlined in the IAB Advisory Committee report ([1]) with a statement of purpose for the administration restructuring proposed in [3]. A high level definition of the IETF's purpose can be found in [2]. All 4 documents are meant to be read collectively.

1. Introduction

As Internet technology is increasingly important to the world, the full set of organizations involved in the life cycle of producing the IETF's published output must work together in a coordinated and efficient fashion to carry out the IETF's work (described in [2]).

To enable this coordination, an administrative structure that allows the IETF to respond to changing times and economic climates is proposed in [3].

This document provides the rationale for that proposal.

2. Overview

It is the work of the IETF's participants that is the basis of the IETF's continued relevance, through contributions of technical expertise and participation in public open discussions. The IETF remains open to contributions from any informed individual.

The IAB Advisory Committee (AdvComm) report ([1]) recommended establishing a more regular and uniform administration of the operational aspects of the IETF, with clear lines of control and accountability to the IETF participants.

In practical terms, this means:

There is a need for an overarching IETF structure that is responsible for coordinating and administering operational activities that support the IETF mission.

This structure must have no other responsibilities than to make the IETF work well.

The structure must have clear, comprehensive and transparent accounting for all activities, being visibly accountable to IETF participants.

This structure needs to have normal business arrangements with the various organizations that do work on behalf of the IETF.

The structure needs to administer the money flows that constitute the IETF funding and operation.

The form of this structure depends strongly on both legal advice and advice from people with insight in how the IETF operates. It will be created in a form that is able to fulfill the goals listed above.

3. What this offers

A common question is, "Does a new structure solve any of the IETF's existing problems, or is it simply rearranging deck chairs?".

It is our belief that a change in structure and streamlining of overall administration is a necessary first step to enable the other

changes needed to address the requirements outlined in [1]. In the current model, it is difficult to make any IETF-wide operational change. Without recognized coordination and accountability across the organizations, each organization that supports functions of the IETF (ISI/RFC-Editor, ICANN/IANA, CNRI/Secretariat) can be operating in finest form, while the overall IETF effort suffers for lack of funding, fails or otherwise misses its mission.

The IETF support structure (that which enables meetings to be organized and held, drafts to be published and maintained, protocol specifications to be published, protocol numbers to be assigned, etc) has been functioning for many years on a network of unwritten, partly written and written agreements. The IETF has depended for its operation on the good will of all organizations supporting these IETF functions to work for the best of the Internet and to have the ability to keep in constant touch to arrive (with a joint perspective) at the best decisions for the Internet.

As the Internet and the IETF has grown and changed, this structure of loosely-coupled organizations carrying out core elements of the IETF's mission is showing the strain of supporting a far larger organization than it used to. The participants - IETF participants, the IETF leadership and these organizations themselves - are using significant time and energy on the communication needed, and there are some overall dispositions that simply cannot be made because there is no single entity that has the overall responsibility for the management of the IETF.

This structure has little overall accountability - it has depended on each organization supporting an IETF function to exercise its best judgment. It is also extremely hard to explain to outside participants who is making a particular decision, and why this particular entity is the right one to make it.

The individuals, corporations and other organizations that contribute to the IETF are demanding more transparency and accountability for the funds they invest in the IETF - through the meeting fees, the time they invest in the work, and the contributions they make through ISOC. At a time when the attendance at meetings has been shrinking, the complex structure of the IETF support does not make getting more contributions easier.

4. Summary

To put it succinctly, the IETF is in need of making some significant operational choices in order to evolve and continue to be able to fulfill its mission. Under today's operational model, these decisions have to be made by each organization supporting or funding

an IETF function -- ISOC may seek more organizational support; IANA, Secretariat or the RFC-Editor may decide to scale back services to save money; the Secretariat may have to vary the meeting fees to meet their own costs. We believe there needs to be a single focus of the IETF's administrative management to allow these choices to be made and implemented in a way that will allow the entire IETF effort to remain viable and relevant. A proposal for structuring that single focus is outlined in [3].

5. Security Considerations

This document does not discuss Internet protocols, and thereby introduces no security issues for their operation.

References

- [1] AdvComm, AdvComm., "The IETF in the Large: Administration and Execution", [draft-iab-advcomm-01](#) (work in progress), December 2003.
- [2] Alvestrand, H., "IETF Mission Statement", February 2004.
- [3] Daigle, L. and H. Alvestrand, "A Proposal for IETF Administration Restructuring", February 2004.

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