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**Extending DHCP Options Codes**  
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Abstract

[RFC 2132](#) defines the DHCP for IPv4 options 1 to 127 as the DHCP public option space which is managed by IANA as documented in [RFC 2939](#). As this public option space has few unassigned options at this time, it is prudent to define a mechanism to extend this option space before it is too late. This Internet-Draft proposes two means to extend this option space.



## **1. Introduction**

[RFC 2132](#) defines the DHCP public option space as options 1 to 127 (decimal). This option space has a limited number of unassigned option numbers at the present time. Work is in progress [[unused-optioncodes](#)] to recover options that were assigned before [RFC 2489](#) (since updated by 2939) was published and never formally documented. Approximately 20 unused option codes should be available after the recovery initiative is completed.

However, even with this effort, the current public space is likely to be exhausted over the expected lifetime of DHCPv4 and so some actions are needed to plan for this before it is too late.

This document proposes two means to extend this option space:

1. Use already allocated options 126 and 127 as previously proposed by Ralph Droms.
2. Use option numbers from the site-specific option space as defined by [RFC 2132](#) (options 128 to 254).

## **2. Requirements**

The requirements for any proposal to extend the public options space should include:

- o The mechanism must interoperate with existing clients and servers. Existing clients should be able to continue operating with servers that implement the mechanism, and vice versa.
- o The mechanism must interoperate with existing relay agents. Relay agents must not need to be updated in order for clients and servers to use the mechanism.
- o The mechanism must not create an undue burden to DHCP client and server implementations for the first few options that need to make use of this option space.
- o The mechanism must not negatively impact existing DHCP uses.
- o The mechanism must not negatively impact existing standards-compliant uses of DHCP.

## **3. Use of 16-bit Options**

The first proposal, originally submitted in late 1996 by Ralph Droms proposed the use of two "extension options" and requested IANA to reserve options 126 and 127 for this purpose. As this



pre-dated [RFC 2489](#) procedures, these option codes were assigned without formal review and are now being considered to be returned to the available list [[unused-optioncodes](#)].

### 3.1 Definition of option 127

Option code 127 indicates that the DHCP option has a two-octet extended option code. The format of these options is:

Code	Len	Extended option code	Data...
+-----+	+-----+	+-----+	+-----+
127	XXX	oh   ol	d1   d2   ...
+-----+	+-----+	+-----+	+-----+

### 3.2 Definition of option 126

This option is used by a DHCP client to request values for specified configuration parameters that are identified by extended option codes as defined above. The list of n requested parameters is specified as 2n octets, where each pair of octets is a valid extended option code.

The client MAY list the options in order of preference. The DHCP server is not required to return the options in the requested order, but MUST try to insert the requested options in the order requested by the client.

The code for this option is 126. Its minimum length is 2.

Code	Len	Extended option codes
+-----+	+-----+	+-----+
126	XXX	c1h   c1l   c2h   c2l   ...
+-----+	+-----+	+-----+

## 4. Using Site-Specific Options

The site-specific option range is rather large (127 options in all) and has, in general, been little used. Ideally, DHCP options in wide use should be in the public option space rather than in the site-specific space (since these options are not site specific).

The use of option codes in the site-specific option code range (128-254 decimal) for other purposes such as vendor defined options that have not been part of the IETF standards process is not compliant with the DHCP Internet Standard as described in [RFC2132](#).



This proposal is to reclassify site specific options 128 to 223 as public options, leaving options 224 to 254 as site specific options.

As proper use of site-specific options likely requires very few actual options, this proposal provides 31 site-specific options.

#### **4.1 Impact To Existing Site-Specific Options**

There are known to be uses of option codes that are not standards-compliant and there are likely sites legitimately using option codes in the range being proposed for reclassification. These sites and users will be impacted by this action when IANA begins to assign the options numbers to new uses.

Users would be encouraged to move to alternative site-specific option numbers (224 to 254), switch to using the vendor-specific option, or document the existing usage and request a public option number using the process described in [RFC 2939](#) (IANA should be requested to allocate the existing site-specific option number if in the reclassified public option space and still available).

IANA would be requested to assign the reclassified options only after the original public option space (1 to 127) has been exhausted. And, further IANA should assign options from this reclassified range starting at the lowest value (128).

This should give a reasonable amount of time for corrective action to be taken.

If there are existing uses of these options and some of the systems can not be updated, there is a potential for confusion at some point.

#### **4.2. Resultant IANA Recommendations**

IANA is requested to increase the DHCP public option space from 1 to 127 to 1 to 223. IANA is requested not to assign any options from the new space (128 to 223) until such time as all options from 1 to 127 have been assigned. At such time, IANA is further requested to assign options starting at 128 on up.

IANA should allow an exception to the above when an existing usage of a site-specific option in the 128 to 223 range is approved (per [RFC 2939](#)) and the approved usage is consistent with the existing usage, IANA should assign the existing site-specific option number if available.





## **5. Analysis of the Two Proposals**

### **5.1 Use of 16-bit Options**

This proposal allows for a very large number of DHCP options and with the definition of the procedure for encoding large options [[RFC3396](#)], the data in Option 127 would not be restricted to 255 octets.

The proposal meets all of the requirements listed in [section 2](#) with one exception, "the mechanism must not create an undue burden to DHCP client and server implements for the first few options that need to make use of this option space." The first option using this proposal will require implementing two other options (in addition to the desired option) - option 127 and 126 as defined by the proposal - and also the encoding large options [[RFC3396](#)] if not already implemented. The encoding of large options is needed to allow option 127 to carry multiple 16-bit options and allow these options (either singly or in aggregate) to exceed 255 bytes.

### **5.2 Using Site-Specific Options**

This proposal adds 96 additional DHCP options to the public options space, which is about 75% of the original space. The original space has lasted 10+ years (based on the publication of [RFC 1531](#)) and is not yet exhausted. This original space also included many options inherited from BOOTP and to support the basic DHCP protocol. Thus, 96 additional option codes should last for a long time.

The proposal meets all of the requirements listed in [section 2](#) with one exception, "The mechanism must not negatively impact existing DHCP uses." As stated in [section 4.1](#), existing uses of site-specific options in the reclassified range are impacted and these uses must be moved to the newly proposed site-specific option range, to a vendor specific option, or documented and to a public option.

However, there are believed to be few sites that make heavy use of site-specific options and they would have many years to redeploy.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

TBD

## **6. Security Considerations**

This document in and by itself provides no security, nor does it impact existing security.



## References

[RFC2131] Droms, R., "Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol", [RFC 2131](#), March 1997.

[RFC2132] Alexander, S. and R. Droms, "DHCP options and BOOTP Vendor Extensions", [RFC 2132](#), March 1997.

[RFC3396] Lemon, T. and S. Cheshire, "Encoding Long DHCP Options", [RFC 3396](#), November 2002.

[unused-optioncodes] Droms, "Unused DHCP Option Codes", Work in Progress.

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