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# IETF Working Group Guidelines and Procedures

## Status of this Memo

This document specifies an Internet Best Current Practices for the Internet Community, and requests discussion and suggestions for improvements. Distribution of this memo is unlimited.

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## Abstract

The Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) has responsibility for developing and reviewing specifications intended as Internet Standards. IETF activities are organized into working groups (WGs). This document describes the guidelines and procedures for formation and operation of IETF working groups. It also describes the formal relationship between IETF participants WG and the Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG) and the basic duties of IETF participants, including WG Chairs, WG participants, and IETF Area Directors.

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## 1. Introduction

The Internet, a loosely-organized international collaboration of autonomous, interconnected networks, supports host-to-host communication through voluntary adherence to open protocols and procedures defined by Internet Standards. There are also many isolated interconnected networks, which are not connected to the global Internet but use the Internet Standards. Internet Standards are developed in the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF). This document defines guidelines and procedures for IETF working groups. The Internet Standards Process of the IETF is defined in [1]. The organizations involved in the IETF Standards Process are described in [2] as are the roles of specific individuals.

The IETF is a large, open community of network designers, operators, vendors, users, and researchers concerned with the Internet and the technology used on it. The primary activities of the IETF are performed by committees known as working groups. There are currently more than 100 working groups. (See the IETF web page for an up-to-date list of IETF Working Groups - http://www.ietf.org.) Working groups tend to have a narrow focus and a lifetime bounded by the completion of a specific set of tasks, although there are exceptions.

For management purposes, the IETF working groups are collected together into areas, with each area having a separate focus. For example, the security area deals with the development of security-related technology. Each IETF area is managed by one or two Area Directors (ADs). There are currently 8 areas in the IETF but the number changes from time to time. (See the IETF web page for a list of the current areas, the Area Directors for each area, and a list of which working groups are assigned to each area.)

In many areas, the Area Directors have formed an advisory group or directorate. These comprise experienced members of the IETF and the technical community represented by the area. The specific name and the details of the role for each group differ from area to area, but the primary intent is that these groups assist the Area Director(s), e.g., with the review of specifications produced in the area.

The IETF area directors are selected by a nominating committee, which also selects an overall chair for the IETF. The nominations process is described in [3].

The area directors sitting as a body, along with the IETF Chair, comprise the Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG). The IETF Executive Director is an ex-officio participant of the IESG, as are the IAB Chair and a designated Internet Architecture Board (IAB) liaison. The IESG approves IETF Standards and approves the publication of other IETF documents. (See [1].)

A small IETF Secretariat provides staff and administrative support for the operation of the IETF.

There is no formal membership in the IETF. Participation is open to all. This participation may be by on-line contribution, attendance at face-to-face sessions, or both. Anyone from the Internet community who has the time and interest is urged to participate in IETF meetings and any of its on-line working group discussions. Participation is by individual technical contributors, rather than by formal representatives of organizations.

This document defines procedures and guidelines for the formation and operation of working groups in the IETF. It defines the relations of working groups to other bodies within the IETF. The duties of working group Chairs and Area Directors with respect to the operation of the working group are also defined. When used in this document the key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" are to be interpreted as described in RFC 2119 [6]. RFC 2119 defines the use of these key words to help make the intent of standards track documents as clear as possible. The same key words are used in this

document to help smooth WG operation and reduce the chance for confusion about the processes.

### 1.1. IETF approach to standardization

Familiarity with The Internet Standards Process [1] is essential for a complete understanding of the philosophy, procedures and guidelines described in this document.

### 1.2. Roles within a Working Group

The document, "Organizations Involved in the IETF Standards Process" [2] describes the roles of a number of individuals within a working group, including the working group chair and the document editor. These descriptions are expanded later in this document.

## 2. Working group formation

IETF working groups (WGs) are the primary mechanism for development of IETF specifications and guidelines, many of which are intended to be standards or recommendations. A working group may be established at the initiative of an Area Director or it may be initiated by an individual or group of individuals. Anyone interested in creating an IETF working group MUST obtain the advice and consent of the IETF Area Director(s) in whose area the working group would fall and MUST proceed through the formal steps detailed in this section.

Working groups are typically created to address a specific problem or to produce one or more specific deliverables (a guideline, standards specification, etc.). Working groups are generally expected to be short-lived in nature. Upon completion of its goals and achievement of its objectives, the working group is terminated. A working group may also be terminated for other reasons (see section 4). Alternatively, with the concurrence of the IESG, Area Director, the WG Chair, and the WG participants, the objectives or assignment of the working group may be extended by modifying the working group's charter through a rechartering process (see section 5).

### 2.1. Criteria for formation

When determining whether it is appropriate to create a working group, the Area Director(s) and the IESG will consider several issues:

- Are the issues that the working group plans to address clear and relevant to the Internet community?

- Are the goals specific and reasonably achievable, and achievable within a reasonable time frame?

- What are the risks and urgency of the work, to determine the level of effort required?

- Do the working group's activities overlap with those of another working group? If so, it may still be appropriate to create the working group, but this question must be considered carefully by the Area Directors as subdividing efforts often dilutes the available technical expertise.

- Is there sufficient interest within the IETF in the working group's topic with enough people willing to expend the effort to produce the desired result (e.g., a protocol specification)? Working groups require considerable effort, including management of the working group process, editing of working group documents, and contributing to the document text. IETF experience suggests that these roles typically cannot all be handled by one person; a minimum of four or five active participants in the management positions are typically required in addition to a minimum of one or two dozen people that will attend the working group meetings and contribute on the mailing list. NOTE: The interest must be broad enough that a working group would not be seen as merely the activity of a single vendor.

- Is there enough expertise within the IETF in the working group's topic, and are those people interested in contributing in the working group?

- Does a base of interested consumers (end-users) appear to exist for the planned work? Consumer interest can be measured by participation of end-users within the IETF process, as well as by less direct means.

- Does the IETF have a reasonable role to play in the determination of the technology? There are many Internet-related technologies that may be interesting to IETF members but in some cases the IETF may not be in a position to effect the course of the technology in the "real world". This can happen, for example, if the technology is being developed by another standards body or an industry consortium.

- Are all known intellectual property rights relevant to the proposed working group's efforts issues understood?

- Is the proposed work plan an open IETF effort or is it an attempt to "bless" non-IETF technology where the effect of input from IETF participants may be limited?

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