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Automatic Configuration of Email, Calendar, and Contact Server Settings  
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Abstract

This document specifies an automatic configuration mechanism for email, calendar, and contact user agent applications. Service providers publish standardized configuration information that user agent applications retrieve and use to simplify server setup procedures.

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## Table of Contents

1. Introduction . . . . .	3
2. Document Conventions . . . . .	3
3. Overview . . . . .	3
4. JSON Configuration . . . . .	4
4.1. Example . . . . .	5
4.2. Protocols . . . . .	6
4.3. Authentication . . . . .	7
4.4. Informational . . . . .	7
4.4.1. Provider Information . . . . .	8
4.4.2. Help . . . . .	9
5. Flow . . . . .	9
5.1. Email Address . . . . .	10
5.2. Configuration Source . . . . .	10
5.2.1. Primary Source . . . . .	10
5.2.2. DNS MX Fallback . . . . .	17
5.3. Configuration JSON Validation . . . . .	21
5.4. Selecting Protocols and Authentication . . . . .	21
5.4.1. OAuth . . . . .	22
5.4.2. HTTP Authentication Mechanisms . . . . .	23
5.4.3. Other Protocols Authentication Mechanisms . . . . .	24
5.5. Confirming Server Names . . . . .	27
5.6. Username . . . . .	27
5.7. Configuring OAuth . . . . .	28
5.8. Configuring Password-Based Authentication . . . . .	28
6. Configuration Validation . . . . .	29
6.1. User Approval . . . . .	29
6.2. OAuth2 requirements . . . . .	29
7. Security Considerations . . . . .	29
7.1. Mistyped Domain Names . . . . .	30
7.2. Attacker Controlled JSON Configuration . . . . .	30
7.3. DNS . . . . .	31
7.4. Transport Security Validation . . . . .	31
7.5. Updating the Configuration . . . . .	32
7.6. Provider Information . . . . .	32
8. IANA Considerations . . . . .	32
8.1. The User-Agent Auto-Configuration Protocol Registry . . . . .	32
8.1.1. Registration Template . . . . .	33
8.1.2. Initial Registrations . . . . .	33
8.2. Registration . . . . .	34
8.2.1. Registration of Well-Known URI user-agent-configuration . . . . .	34
8.2.2. Registration of DNS Underscore Label _ua-auto-config . . . . .	34
9. Normative References . . . . .	34
Appendix A. Configuration JSON Schema . . . . .	39
Acknowledgements . . . . .	41

Authors' Addresses . . . . .	41
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## 1. Introduction

Manual configuration of email, calendar, and contact user agent applications requires users to correctly specify numerous technical parameters including server hostnames, port numbers, and authentication protocols. This manual process frequently results in configuration errors and setup failures, even among technically skilled users.

This document defines a mechanism that significantly simplifies this configuration process. Service providers can publish standardized configuration data that user agents can automatically retrieve and use. In most cases, users need only provide their email address and account password to complete the setup.

For service providers that support the OAuth Profile for Open Public Clients [OAuthPublic], this mechanism also enables automatic OAuth configuration. The user agent automatically determines all necessary details to set up OAuth authentication for the associated account.

## 2. Document Conventions

In protocol examples, this document uses a prefix of "C: " to denote lines sent by the user agent to the server, and "S: " for lines sent by the server to the user agent. Lines prefixed with "// " are comments explaining the previous protocol line. These prefixes and comments are not part of the protocol. Lines without any of these prefixes are continuations of the previous line, and no line break is present in the protocol unless specifically mentioned.

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "NOT RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in BCP 14 [RFC2119] [RFC8174] when, and only when, they appear in all capitals, as shown here.

## 3. Overview

The automatic configuration process begins when a user wants to set up their user agent application. The user agent requests the user's email address and then uses the domain portion of that address to retrieve configuration data for the account.

Configuration retrieval uses the Well-Known URIs mechanism defined in [RFC8615]. The specific suffix for this configuration is user-agent-configuration. Section 5.2 provides detailed information about the retrieval process.

The configuration is provided as a JSON document (detailed in Section 4) that informs the user agent about:

- \* Human-readable information about the service provider
- \* Supported protocols for this domain
- \* Server endpoints for each protocol
- \* OAuth Profile for Open Public Clients support availability

The user agent uses this configuration to determine whether the provider supports protocols that the user agent can also use, helping decide whether to continue with the setup process. For example, an email user agent might check for support of JMAP, IMAP, POP3, and SMTP protocols.

Next, the user agent typically connects to the relevant services to verify which authentication methods they support and whether the user agent can use those methods. For instance, if the user agent needs both IMAP and SMTP, it will connect to both servers to check their capabilities and confirm compatibility with the user agent's supported authentication mechanisms.

Based on the available options, the user agent then proceeds with one of two approaches:

1. Continue configuration using OAuth Profile for Open Public Clients, or
2. Request the user's password for traditional authentication

Finally, the user agent uses the obtained credentials (OAuth tokens or password) to connect to the servers specified in the configuration document and validates that the credentials work correctly with the desired protocols.

#### 4. JSON Configuration

The configuration document describes which services are available and their corresponding endpoints for a specific domain.

The configuration file MUST conform to the JSON schema specification provided in Appendix A.

The configuration uses the media type application/json. The HTTP server MUST set the corresponding Content-Type header as specified in [RFC9110].

#### 4.1. Example

The following example demonstrates a typical JSON configuration:

===== NOTE: '\ ' line wrapping per RFC 8792 =====

```
{
  "protocols": {
    "jmap": {
      "url": "https://jmap.example.com/session"
    },
    "imap": {
      "host": "imap.example.com"
    },
    "pop3": {
      "host": "pop3.example.com"
    },
    "smtp": {
      "host": "smtp.example.com"
    },
    "caldav": {
      "url": "https://sync.example.com/calendar/"
    },
    "carddav": {
      "url": "https://sync.example.com/contacts/"
    }
  },
  "authentication": {
    "oauth-public": {
      "issuer": "https://auth.example.com/"
    },
    "password": true
  },
  "info": {
    "provider": {
      "name": "Example Provider Name",
      "shortName": "Example",
      "logo": [
        {
          "url": "https://www.example.net/logo.svg",
          "content-type": "image/svg+xml"
        }
      ]
    }
  }
}
```

```

    }
  ],
  "help": {
    "documentation": "https://help.example.net/howto/\
set-up-your-mail-app.html",
    "developer": "https://developer.example.net/\
client-apps/",
    "contact": ["mailto:it@team.example.net"]
  }
}

```

## 4.2. Protocols

The protocols object specifies all protocols that the domain supports and identifies the server endpoint for each protocol.

For the following HTTP-based protocols:

- \* JMAP defined in [RFC8620],
- \* CalDAV defined in [RFC4791], and
- \* CardDAV defined in [RFC6352]
- \* WebDAV defined in [RFC4918]

each protocol entry MUST include a url value containing a URL with the https scheme. This URL MUST specify an endpoint that serves the corresponding protocol. The server MUST use the default port 443 for HTTPS, and the URL MUST NOT include an explicit port number.

Hostnames in URLs MUST support Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) as defined in [RFC5890] and [RFC5891]. Service providers MAY use either Unicode labels (u-labels) or ASCII Compatible Encoding labels (a-labels) in their configuration. User agents MUST support both forms and handle the conversion between them as specified in [RFC5891].

Example:

```

"jmap": {
  "url": "https://jmap.example.com/session"
}

```

For the following text-based protocols:

- \* IMAP defined in [RFC9051],
- \* SMTP defined in [RFC5321], and
- \* POP3 defined in [RFC1939]
- \* ManageSieve defined in [RFC5804]

each protocol entry MUST include a host value specifying the hostname of the server that provides the corresponding protocol. The server MUST use the default port number for that protocol, with connections secured using TLS. Section 5.4.3 goes into details about TLS and which ports to use.

Hostnames MUST support Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) as defined in [RFC5890] and [RFC5891]. Service providers MAY use either Unicode labels (u-labels) or ASCII Compatible Encoding labels (a-labels) in their configuration. User agents MUST support both forms and handle the conversion between them as specified in [RFC5891].

Example:

```
"imap": {  
  "host": "imap.mail.example.com"  
}
```

#### 4.3. Authentication

The authentication object specifies which authentication mechanisms the provider supports.

The nested password value indicates whether the provider supports username and password authentication.

The nested oauth-public object contains a single issuer value that specifies the authorization server's issuer identifier as defined in [RFC8414]. This value is a URL that uses the https scheme and has no query or fragment components. User agents can use this identifier for authentication via [OAuthPublic]. The presence of the oauth-public object indicates that the provider supports OAuth.

#### 4.4. Informational

The info object contains information that user agents can present to users. The only required field is info/provider/name, which SHOULD clearly identify the provider to the user. The optional info/provider/shortName provides a shorter version of name.

The info/provider/logo array can contain one or more entries pointing to the provider's logo images. User agents can use these to display the provider's logo to users.

The info/help/documentation field provides a URL that can be presented to users for additional information about the provider. The info/help/developer field contains a URL with information specifically for user agent developers. The info/help/contact array lists URLs that users can use to contact the provider, such as mailto URLs.

A minimal info example:

```
"info": {  
  "provider": {  
    "name": "Example Provider Name"  
  }  
}
```

#### 4.4.1. Provider Information

provider object can have name, shortName, and logo properties.

The name and shortName values are intended for display to the user.

The name property specifies the provider's display name, such as the name used in the provider's marketing materials. It SHOULD be no longer than 30 characters, but MUST be no longer than 60 characters.

The shortName property is optional. It specifies a brief version of the provider's name, as commonly recognized by users. It SHOULD be no longer than 12 characters, and it MUST NOT be longer than 20 characters.

Both name and shortName MUST NOT include any Control-characters and SHOULD NOT include any excessive white space.

The logo property contains an array of provider logo variants. User agents select the variant that best matches their UI requirements and technical constraints.

Each object in the array contains the following properties:

- \* url - Location where the logo can be retrieved. User agents MAY download the logo file during configuration and store it locally.



- \* content-type - Media type of the logo image. This follows [RFC2045] media type format, specifying the main type and subtype without parameters. The main media type MUST be image.
- \* width - Image width in pixels. Optional. Omitted for SVG files.
- \* height - Image height in pixels. Optional. Omitted for SVG files.

The logos SHOULD at least include one of each

- \* image/svg+xml
- \* image/png with size 128 by 128
- \* image/png with size 512 by 512

If the server provides images in the SVG format, these images MUST use the SVG Tiny PS Profile specified in [I-D.svg-tiny-ps-abrotman].

#### 4.4.2. Help

These fields are intended to allow a service provider to provide additional information about configuring user agents.

The documentation property should link to a document intended for users. It can provide additional information to users about how to configure their user agent. A user agent MAY choose to display a link to this URL. User agent SHOULD NOT display links with a URL scheme other than https.

The developer property should link to a document intended for user agent developers. The document this URL links to can provide additional information to the developer.

The contact property should provide a way for user agent developers to contact the service providers. It is not intended as a way for users to contact the service provider. User agents MUST NOT display this link in their user interface. This URL would typically be a mailto URL or a URL linking to a contact form for developers to use.

#### 5. Flow

Section 3 provides a high-level overview of the automatic configuration process. This section details the individual steps involved in this process.

### 5.1. Email Address

During the initial configuration process, the user agent requests the user's email address. User agents SHOULD accept any valid mailbox format as specified in Section 3.4 of [RFC5322].

### 5.2. Configuration Source

After the user provides their email address, the user agent extracts the domain part of the user's email address according to Section 3.4.1 of [RFC5322]. For example:

+=====+=====+	
Text Entered by User	domain
+=====+=====+	
jdoe@foo.example.com	foo.example.com
+-----+-----+	
"J Doe" <jdoe@foo.example.com>	foo.example.com
+-----+-----+	
<jdoe@foo.example.com>	foo.example.com
+-----+-----+	

Table 1: Domain from email address

This domain is then used to retrieve the JSON configuration resource.

There are two methods for retrieving the JSON configuration: a primary method and an MX fallback method. The primary method should be attempted first, with the MX fallback method used only if the primary method fails.

#### 5.2.1. Primary Source

The primary method for retrieving configuration data uses well-known URIs with DNS-based digest validation.

##### 5.2.1.1. Well-Known Uniform Resource Identifier

The user agent retrieves configuration data over HTTP using the format described in Section 4.

Configuration retrieval uses [RFC8615] Well-Known URIs. The user agent constructs the URI using the `_domain_` from the user's email address and the `_configuration name_ user-agent-configuration`. The detailed URI construction process is specified in [RFC8615].

The domain name MUST support Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) as defined in [RFC5890] and [RFC5891]. User agents MUST handle both Unicode labels (u-labels) and ASCII Compatible Encoding labels (a-labels) when processing domain names from email addresses, and convert them appropriately for URI construction as specified in [RFC5891].

The URI follows this template:

===== NOTE: '\ ' line wrapping per RFC 8792 =====

```
https://ua-auto-config.{domain}/\
    .well-known/user-agent-configuration.json
```

If the user's email address' domain is foo.example.com, the user agent constructs the following URI:

===== NOTE: '\ ' line wrapping per RFC 8792 =====

```
https://ua-auto-config.foo.example.com/\
    .well-known/user-agent-configuration.json
```

This URI always uses the https scheme. User agents MUST retrieve the configuration file only via https (HTTP over TLS).

The user agent MUST validate that the connection is secured by TLS. See Section 7.4 for details about TLS with respect to retrieving the configuration.

The media type of the configuration is application/json, and the HTTP server MUST set a corresponding Content-Type type header. See [RFC9110]. The user agent MUST validate that the content-type of the returned resource is application/json.

The HTTP server that serves the JSON configuration MUST NOT require any form of HTTP authentication to return the configuration.

For example:

```
C: GET /.well-known/user-agent-configuration.json HTTP/2
C: Host: foo.example.com
C: user-agent: curl/8.4.0
C: accept: application/json
C:
```

```
S: HTTP/2 200
S: server: nginx/1.25.3
S: date: Mon, 23 Oct 2025 10:30:00 GMT
S: content-type: application/json
S: content-length: 1184
S:
S: {
S:   "protocols": {
S:     "jmap": {
S: ...
```

#### 5.2.1.2. DNS-Based Digest Validation

After retrieving the auto-configuration resource from the well-known URI as described in Section 5.2.1.1, the user agent **MUST** validate its integrity before use. This validation is performed by comparing a locally computed digest of the resource against a digest published in a DNS TXT resource record (RR).

If the validation fails, the user agent **MUST** ignore the auto-configuration resource.

##### 5.2.1.2.1. Validation Procedure

The user agent **MUST** perform the following steps to validate the auto-configuration resource:

1. Let the "decoded message content" be the payload body of the HTTP response after all Transfer-Encoding (e.g., "chunked") and Content-Encoding (e.g., "gzip", "br") transformations have been reversed. This is the final, decompressed representation of the resource. See Section 6.1 of [RFC9112] and Section 8.4 of [RFC9110] for details on these encodings.
2. Construct a DNS query QNAME using the template `_ua-auto-config.{domain}`, where {domain} is the domain part of the user's identifier (e.g., "foo.example.com" for "jdoe@foo.example.com").
3. Perform a DNS query for the TXT RR type at the constructed QNAME. The response may contain multiple TXT RRs.
4. For each TXT RR returned in the DNS response:

- a. Parse the record according to the syntax in Section 5.2.1.2.2. If the record is malformed or is missing any of the mandatory tags (v, a, d), discard this RR and proceed to the next one.
  - b. Let the "remote algorithm" be the value of the a tag. If the user agent does not support this algorithm, discard this RR and proceed to the next one.
  - c. Let the "remote digest" be the Base64-decoded value of the d tag. If decoding fails, discard this RR and proceed to the next one.
  - d. Using the "remote algorithm", compute a "local digest" of the "decoded message content" obtained in step 1.
  - e. Perform a byte-for-byte comparison of the "local digest" and the "remote digest". If they are identical, the validation is successful. The user agent **MUST** immediately stop processing further TXT RRs and **MAY** use the auto-configuration resource.
5. If, after checking all valid and supported TXT RRs, no match is found, the validation has failed. The user agent **MUST** discard the "decoded message content" and behave as if no auto-configuration resource was found.

Note: A compliant HTTP client library will typically handle the decoding of Transfer-Encoding and Content-Encoding transparently. The requirement in this document is to ensure that the digest is computed on the final data, not on an intermediate, encoded representation.

#### 5.2.1.2.2. DNS Resource Record for Auto-Configuration

Configuration information for a given domain is published as a DNS TXT resource record (RR) at a special name, `_ua-auto-config`, prepended to the domain name. For example, for the domain `example.com`, the lookup would be for a TXT record at `_ua-auto-config.example.com`.

##### 5.2.1.2.2.1. Record Syntax

The content of the TXT RR is a string of tag=value pairs separated by semicolons (`;`). Tags are short ASCII strings that identify a particular parameter. Values are ASCII strings whose format depends on the tag.

The formal syntax of the record is described using ABNF [RFC5234] as follows:

```

config-record    = tag-value *( *WSP ";" *WSP tag-value ) *WSP [";"]

tag-value        = version-tag / alg-tag / digest-tag / future-tag

version-tag      = "v" *WSP "=" *WSP "UAAC1"
alg-tag          = "a" *WSP "=" *WSP digest-algorithm
digest-algorithm = "sha256" / "sha512" / "sha3-512"
digest-tag       = "d" *WSP "=" *WSP 1*base64-char

future-tag       = 1*tag-name *WSP "=" *WSP 1*tag-value-char

tag-name         = ALPHA / DIGIT
tag-value-char   = %x21-3A / %x3C-7E ; Any visible ASCII char
                  ; except semicolon

base64-char      = ALPHA / DIGIT / "+" / "/" / "="
; As defined in Section 4 of RFC 4648

WSP              = " " / HTAB
; As defined in Appendix B.1 of RFC 5234

```

#### 5.2.1.2.2.2. Tags

The following tags are defined. Tag names are case-sensitive and MUST be processed as lowercase.

Tag	Description	Status
v	Version. The value MUST be "UAAC1" for records compliant with this specification.	Mandatory
a	Digest Algorithm. The value MUST be one of "sha256", "sha512", or "sha3-512". This identifies the algorithm used to create the digest in the 'd' tag.	Mandatory
d	Digest. The Base64-encoded digest of the JSON resource described in Section 5.2.1.1. The encoding MUST follow Section 4 of [RFC4648].	Mandatory

Table 2: Defined Tags

#### 5.2.1.2.2.3. Digest Algorithm

Three digest algorithms are supported:

- \* SHA-256 ("sha256") as defined in [RFC6234]
- \* SHA-512 ("sha512") as defined in [RFC6234]
- \* SHA-3-512 ("sha3-512") as defined in [RFC8702]

The digest is computed over the raw bytes of the JSON resource retrieved from the well-known URI, after any HTTP transfer or content encoding has been decoded.

Servers MUST publish DNS records for both SHA-256 and SHA-512 algorithms. Servers MAY additionally publish records using SHA-3-512.

#### 5.2.1.2.2.4. Parsing Rules

A client parsing the record MUST adhere to the following rules:

- \* The record MUST contain the v, a, and d tags. If any of these tags are missing, the record is invalid and MUST be ignored.
- \* The order of the tags is not significant.
- \* Whitespace (WSP) is permitted on either side of the = and ; separators and MUST be ignored.
- \* If a tag is encountered that is not defined in this document (e.g., a tag from a future version), the parser MUST ignore that entire tag=value pair. This allows for future extensions.
- \* If any of the mandatory tags (v, a) have values other than those specified in this document, the record is invalid and MUST be ignored.

#### 5.2.1.2.3. Primary Source Example

This example demonstrates the primary configuration retrieval process for a user with email address user@example.com.

The user agent performs the following steps:

1. Constructs the well-known URI from the email domain:

===== NOTE: '\ ' line wrapping per RFC 8792 =====

```
https://ua-auto-config.example.com/\
    .well-known/user-agent-configuration.json
```

2. Retrieves the JSON configuration over HTTPS and receives:

```
{
  "protocols": {
    "jmap": {
      "url": "https://jmap.example.com/session"
    },
    "imap": {
      "host": "imap.example.com"
    },
    "smtp": {
      "host": "smtp.example.com"
    }
  },
  "authentication": {
    "oauth-public": {
      "issuer": "https://auth.example.com/"
    },
    "password": true
  },
  "info": {
    "provider": {
      "name": "Example Provider"
    }
  }
}
```

3. Queries DNS for TXT record at \_ua-auto-config.example.com and receives:

===== NOTE: '\ ' line wrapping per RFC 8792 =====

```
_ua-auto-config.example.com.    TXT    "v=UAAC1; a=sha256; \
    d=K7gNU3sdo+OL0wNhqoVWVhr3g6s1xYv72o1/pe/Unols="
```

4. Computes the SHA-256 digest of the retrieved JSON configuration and verifies it matches the digest in the DNS TXT record.
5. Since validation succeeds, the user agent may proceed to use this configuration for account setup.



### 5.2.2. DNS MX Fallback

If the user agent is unable to retrieve a configuration from the well-known URL described in Section 5.2.1, the user agent **MUST** attempt to construct URLs for the configuration resource using DNS MX records as described in this section.

Conversely, if the user agent was able to retrieve a configuration from the well-known URL described in Section 5.2.1, the user agent **MUST NOT** perform the fallback described in this section.

This fallback mechanism allows user agents to discover configuration information when the primary method fails, using the email domain's MX records to identify alternative sources for the auto-configuration resource.

#### 5.2.2.1. MX Fallback Procedure

The user agent **MUST** perform the following steps to retrieve configuration using MX records:

1. Verify that the email domain supports MTA Strict Transport Security as described in Section 5.2.2.2. If MTA STS is not supported, **MUST** abort the MX fallback process.
2. Perform a DNS query for MX resource records for the email domain.
3. Identify all MX records that share the same highest priority (lowest numerical value). For example, if the MX records have priorities 10, 10, and 20, the highest priority MX records are those with priority 10.
4. For each MX record identified in the previous step:
  - a. Construct a well-known URI based on the MX hostname as described in Section 5.2.2.3.
  - b. Retrieve the JSON auto-configuration resource from the constructed URI.
  - c. Validate the retrieved resource using DNS-based digest validation as described in Section 5.2.1.2, but using the DNS query name `_ua-auto-config.{mx-hostname}` where `{mx-hostname}` is the hostname from the MX record.

5. Verify that all successfully retrieved and validated configurations are bitwise identical. If any configurations differ, the user agent **MUST** reject all configurations and treat the MX fallback as failed.
6. If at least one configuration was successfully retrieved and validated, and all retrieved configurations are identical, the user agent **MAY** use this configuration.

#### 5.2.2.2. MTA Strict Transport Security

MTA Strict Transport Security (MTA STS) defined in [RFC8461] provides a way to validate MX records against a resource retrieved over HTTP with TLS.

The user agent **MUST** validate that the email domain supports the MTA STS profile. If the email domain does not support MTA STS, the user agent **MUST NOT** use any MX records to perform auto-configuration.

When performing the HTTPS Policy Fetching outlined in Section 3.3 of [RFC8461], the user agent **MUST** use the same, strict TLS checks as for the auto-configuration JSON resource. See Section 7.4 of this document for detail.

#### 5.2.2.3. MX-Based Well-Known URI

The user agent constructs a Well-Known URI based on the MX hostname using this template:

===== NOTE: '\ ' line wrapping per RFC 8792 =====

```
https://ua-auto-config.{mx-hostname}/\
    .well-known/user-agent-configuration.json
```

For the MX hostname bar.mail.example.com, the user agent constructs the following URI:

===== NOTE: '\ ' line wrapping per RFC 8792 =====

```
https://ua-auto-config.bar.mail.example.com/\
    .well-known/user-agent-configuration.json
```

This URI construction follows the same pattern as described in Section 5.2.1.1, but uses the MX hostname instead of the email domain. The user agent **MUST** apply the same TLS validation requirements as specified in Section 7.4.

#### 5.2.2.4. MX Fallback Example

This example demonstrates the MX fallback process for a user with email address `user@example.com`.

First, the user agent attempts to retrieve the configuration from the primary well-known URI:

===== NOTE: '\ ' line wrapping per RFC 8792 =====

`https://ua-auto-config.example.com/.well-known/  
user-agent-configuration.json`

but this fails (perhaps the server is unreachable or returns an error).

The user agent then begins the MX fallback process:

1. The user agent verifies MTA STS support:

- a. Queries DNS for a TXT record at `_mta-sts.example.com` and receives:

```
_mta-sts.example.com.      TXT      "v=STSV1; id=20240101120000;"
```

- b. Retrieves the MTA STS policy from `https://mta-sts.example.com/.well-known/mta-sts.txt` and receives:

```
version: STSV1  
mode: enforce  
mx: mail1.example.com  
mx: mail2.example.com  
mx: *.backup.example.com  
max_age: 604800
```

- c. Queries DNS for MX records for `example.com` and receives:

```
example.com.      MX      10 mail1.example.com.  
example.com.      MX      10 mail2.example.com.  
example.com.      MX      20 backup.example.com.
```

- d. Validates that the MX records are consistent with the MTA STS policy. All MX hostnames (`mail1.example.com`, `mail2.example.com`, and `backup.example.com`) match entries in the policy, so MTA STS validation succeeds.

2. The user agent identifies that mail1.example.com and mail2.example.com both have the highest priority (10), so these are the MX records to process for auto-configuration.
3. For each highest priority MX record:
  - \* For mail1.example.com:
    - Constructs URI:  
  
===== NOTE: '\ ' line wrapping per RFC 8792 =====  
  
https://ua-auto-config.mail1.example.com/\  
    .well-known/user-agent-configuration.json
    - Retrieves the JSON configuration successfully
    - Validates the configuration against DNS TXT record at \_ua-auto-config.mail1.example.com
  - \* For mail2.example.com:
    - Constructs URI:  
  
===== NOTE: '\ ' line wrapping per RFC 8792 =====  
  
https://ua-auto-config.mail2.example.com/\  
    .well-known/user-agent-configuration.json
    - Retrieves the JSON configuration successfully
    - Validates the configuration against DNS TXT record at \_ua-auto-config.mail2.example.com
4. The user agent verifies that both retrieved configurations are bitwise identical.
5. Since both configurations were successfully retrieved, validated, and are identical, the user agent may proceed to use this configuration for account setup.

If any step in this process fails (MTA STS not supported, MX records don't match the MTA STS policy, no MX records found, configurations differ, or validation fails), the user agent treats the MX fallback as unsuccessful and may need to prompt the user for manual configuration.

### 5.3. Configuration JSON Validation

After successfully retrieving a configuration resource, user agents MUST validate that the configuration contains valid JSON syntax according to RFC 8259. Additionally, user agents MUST validate the retrieved configuration against the JSON schema specification provided in Appendix A. If the JSON syntax is invalid, user agents MUST ignore the configuration entirely and not use any portion of it.

User agents MUST process only the properties that they support and MUST ignore properties not specified in the schema. This requirement enables future extensions of the format without breaking existing user agent implementations.

### 5.4. Selecting Protocols and Authentication

After successfully retrieving and validating the configuration JSON, the user agent needs to determine:

- \* Which protocols to use
- \* Which authentication mechanism to employ

Both user agents and servers support multiple protocols. The user agent needs to decide which protocols to use and determine whether the protocols specified in the configuration are sufficient to proceed. This document does not provide recommendations regarding protocol preferences or minimum protocol requirements, as these decisions depend on the specific needs and implementation details of individual user agents.

The automatic configuration flow supports two distinct authentication types:

- \* Username and password-based authentication
- \* OAuth-based authentication

User agents can support one or both authentication methods. Similarly, servers for each protocol can support one or both methods. Additionally, the specific implementation details of authentication can vary between protocols.

User agents SHOULD probe each protocol and server of interest to determine compatible authentication methods. This probing process can influence the user agent's protocol selection and allows the user agent to verify server availability.

This document does not provide recommendations regarding protocol preferences. The user agent **MUST** make these decisions based on its needs.

If the user agent determines that it can use either password-based authentication or OAuth authentication, the user agent **SHOULD** prefer OAuth-based authentication.

#### 5.4.1. OAuth

The JSON configuration includes an `oauth-public` entry when the provider supports OAuth. The issuer value specifies the authorization server's issuer identifier. According to Section 2.2 of [OAuthPublic], the OAuth Authorization Server Metadata is served at a URL constructed using this issuer value with the template

```
{issuer}/.well-known/oauth-authorization-server
```

For example, if the JSON configuration contains this entry:

```
"oauth-public" : {  
  "issuer" : "https://auth.example.com"  
},
```

the OAuth Authorization Server Metadata would be at the URL `https://auth.example.com/.well-known/oauth-authorization-server`

Note that as defined in [RFC8414], the authorization server's issuer identifier **MUST** be a URL that uses the `https` scheme without any query or fragment components. Clients **MUST** verify that the issuer value is valid according to [RFC8414].

Before the user agent chooses to use OAuth for any protocols, it **SHOULD** make sure that it can retrieve the OAuth Authorization Server Metadata from the corresponding URI.

The user agent **SHOULD** connect to each protocol that it might be interested in to detect which authentication mechanism it supports. The user agent **MUST NOT** perform any authentication at this point, but it **SHOULD** record which mechanism(s) the server for each protocol of interest supports.

The user agent **SHOULD** still probe each server as described in the next sections 5.4.2 and 5.4.3 to check that the servers it is interested in have OAuth support.

#### 5.4.2. HTTP Authentication Mechanisms

To check which HTTP authentication schemes a particular HTTP server supports, the user agent SHOULD send a request to the server's endpoint without any Authorization header. For example:

```
GET /jmap/session HTTP/1.1
host: api.example.com
accept: application/json
```

As detailed in [RFC9110] the server SHOULD respond to this with a 401 Unauthorized status code and a www-authenticate response header indicating which authentication scheme(s) are supported.

The user agent SHOULD include an accept header with the content type it would expect for the given protocol. For JMAP, for example, the user agent SHOULD include accept: application/json as a header in this request.

If the server supports OAuth, the www-authenticate response header would include Bearer. [RFC6749] describes this in more detail. [RFC6750] and [RFC7616] describe username + password authentication using the so-called 'Basic' HTTP authentication scheme and the HTTP digest access authentication respectively. Other password based authentication mechanisms exist for HTTP, but their discussion is outside the scope of this document.

For example, a response header

```
HTTP/1.1 401 Unauthorized
www-authenticate: Bearer realm="api.example.com"
```

would indicate that the server supports OAuth.

Alternatively, a response such as

===== NOTE: '\ ' line wrapping per RFC 8792 =====

```
HTTP/1.1 401 Unauthorized
www-authenticate: Digest realm="api.example.com", qop="auth", \
algorithm=SHA-256, nonce="dcd98b7102dd2f0e8b11d0f600bfb0c093", \
opaque="5ccc069c403ebaf9f0171e9517f40e41"
```

would indicate that the server supports digest access authentication.

Details of HTTP authentication are described in [RFC9110] but it is worth noting that a server supporting multiple authentication methods can return either multiple `www-authenticate` header fields in its response or a single `www-authenticate` header field with multiple authentication methods.

#### 5.4.3. Other Protocols Authentication Mechanisms

For text-based protocols (IMAP, POP3, and SMTP) the user agent SHOULD connect to the server to check that:

- \* the user agent can reach the server,
- \* the server implements the expected protocol, and
- \* which authentication mechanisms the server supports.

The user agent MUST attempt to connect to the server on the default ports:

- \* port 993 for IMAP
- \* port 995 for POP3
- \* port 465 for SMTP

using TLS. See [RFC2595] and [RFC3207] for details about using TLS with these protocols.

The user agent SHOULD NOT attempt to connect to an IMAP, POP3, or SMTP server on their cleartext ports.

The user agent MUST NOT allow for configuration with a cleartext protocol that is not protected by TLS.

The user agent MUST validate that the connection is secured by TLS, and that the server certificate is valid and matches the expected domain name. See Section 7.4 for details on transport security validation.

If the server announces the OAUTHBEARER SASL authentication method, the user agent can assume that this server supports using [OAuthPublic]. For IMAP for example, if the server's CAPABILITY contains `AUTH=OAUTHBEARER` this would indicate this support.



Servers SHOULD NOT announce support for the OAUTHBEARER SASL mechanism if they do not support [OAuthPublic]. Servers MUST announce support for the OAUTHBEARER SASL mechanism if they support OAuth Profile for Open Public Clients. Servers SHOULD NOT use the XOAUTH2 SASL mechanism.

There are various SASL authentication mechanisms for password-based authentication, and additionally IMAP and POP3 also support password-based authentication through LOGIN and APOP respectively. The user agent needs to probe each server to determine which authentication methods are supported by both the user agent and the server.

#### 5.4.3.1. IMAP

The IMAP protocol provides various other authentication mechanisms. There are various SASL mechanisms for username + password authentication. [RFC4959] describes how to use SASL with IMAP.

Unless the server sends the LOGINDISABLED capability, clients know that they can use the LOGIN command for username + password authentication.

For IMAP, a sample session might look like this:

===== NOTE: '\ ' line wrapping per RFC 8792 =====

```
S: * OK [CAPABILITY IMAP4 IMAP4rev1 SASL-IR AUTH=PLAIN \
AUTH=OAUTHBEARER] IMAP Server
C: A1 LOGOUT
S: * BYE
S: A1 OK
```

In this case the server returned its IMAP capabilities as part of the so-called greeting messages. The support for the OAUTHBEARER SASL authentication mechanism indicates to the client that the server supports OAuth. Similarly the PLAIN SASL authentication mechanism indicates that the server supports username + password authentication. The absence of the LOGINDISABLED also indicates support for username and password authentication.

If the server doesn't include its capabilities in the server greeting, the client SHOULD send a CAPABILITY command as outlined in Section 6.1.1 of [RFC9051]. The client SHOULD send a LOGOUT command as outlined in Section 6.1.3 of [RFC9051] and check that the server sends an untagged BYE response.

#### 5.4.3.2. SMTP

SMTP similarly announces which authentication mechanisms it supports. [RFC4954] describes how to use SASL with SMTP.

For SMTP, the client would use the EHLO command to retrieve the SMTP server's supported authentication mechanisms. For example:

```
S: 220 smtp.example.com ESMTP service ready
C: EHLO client.example.com
S: 250-smtp.example.com
S: 250-PIPELINING
S: 250-SIZE 10240000
S: 250-AUTH PLAIN LOGIN OAUTHBEARER
S: 250-ENHANCEDSTATUSCODES
S: 250 8BITMIME
C: QUIT
S: 221 Bye
```

Section 3.2 of [RFC5321] describe this client initiation of the SMTP protocol. [RFC4954] describes SMTP authentication in detail. In the above example PLAIN and LOGIN indicate that the server supports username + password based authentication, and OAUTHBEARER indicates that the server supports OAuth.

The client SHOULD send a QUIT command and check for the server's 221 Bye response.

#### 5.4.3.3. POP3

For POP3 [RFC5034] describes how to use SASL. POP3 additionally supports password based authentication using its USER and PASS commands, or through the optional APOP command. The client can check which SASL authentication methods the server supports using the CAPA command.

For example:

```
S: +OK pop.example.com POP3 server ready
C: CAPA
S: +OK List of capabilities follows
S: SASL PLAIN OAUTHBEARER
S: IMPLEMENTATION BlurdyBlurp POP3 server
S: .
C: QUIT
S: +OK POP3 server signing off (maildrop empty)
```

The client SHOULD send a QUIT command and check for the server's +OK response.

### 5.5. Confirming Server Names

The client SHOULD display to the user the hostnames of all servers that it intends to authenticate with. This list of server hostnames gives the user a chance to validate if they want to move ahead.

The client MAY choose to limit the hostnames to their second-level domain names when displaying this list. Instead of displaying mail.example.com the client would display example.com if it chooses to do so. Limiting the hostnames to their second-level domain names helps users identify if this is the domain they intend to connect to or not.

The client MUST NOT cut off parts of long second-level domains, to avoid spoofing. At least 63 characters of the second-level domain names MUST be displayed.

If the user mistyped their email address in Section 5.1, letting the user confirm the server hostnames gives the user a chance to notice this.

Clients can enhance the user experience by using the info section of the configuration (described in Section 4.4) to display the provider's name and logo during this configuration step.

Section 7.1 list security considerations related to the user confirming these hostnames.

### 5.6. Username

For password-based authentication, the full addr-spec part of the email address MUST be used as the username. For example:

Text Entered by User	username
jdoe@example.com	jdoe@example.com
"J Doe" <jdoe@example.com>	jdoe@example.com
<jdoe@example.com>	jdoe@example.com

Table 3: Username from email address

For OAuth Profile for Open Public Clients, the client MUST send this username as the login\_hint in the authorization request URL.

The provider MUST ensure that any valid email address that the user might enter during setup is a valid username for all servers given in this configuration. This will require a mapping on the server level from email address to internal username. This mapping happens internally in the server and the client is not involved in this mapping.

### 5.7. Configuring OAuth

If the client and the provider both support OAuth Profile for Open Public Clients, and if the servers that the client wants to use support OAuth, the client can configure OAuth.

The authentication section in the JSON configuration described in Section 4.3 will let the client create a URL to retrieve the OAuth Authorization Server Metadata as described in section Section 5.4.1. With this metadata, the client can then use [OAuthPublic] to configure OAuth.

Part of this will require opening the authorization request URL in an external user-agent, which is typically the default browser. The client SHOULD make it very apparent to the user which hostname is being used for the authorization request URL. The client SHOULD make the user confirm least the second-level domain name(s) of the hostname of this URL. This is to minimize the risk of the user exposing their credentials to a third party.

As described in Section 5.5, the client SHOULD also confirm the server hostnames with the user. For OAuth authentication, the client SHOULD include the hostname of the authorization request URL in this list of hostnames.

### 5.8. Configuring Password-Based Authentication

If the client and provider both support password-based authentication, and if the servers that the client wants to use support password-based authentication, the client can configure itself to use these servers.

The client SHOULD at this point ask the user for the password for their account with the provider.

Once the user has entered their password, the client SHOULD validate that it is able to authenticate using the entered password with all servers that it is interested in. Only then would it save the new configuration.

## 6. Configuration Validation

### 6.1. User Approval

Regardless of the mechanism used to obtain the configuration, clients SHOULD display the configuration details to users and request explicit confirmation before use. During this confirmation process:

- \* At least the second-level domain names of all involved hostnames MUST be displayed clearly and prominently.
- \* Clients MUST NOT truncate long second-level domain names to prevent spoofing attacks. At least 63 characters MUST be displayed.

### 6.2. OAuth2 requirements

If OAuth2 is used, the OAuth2 server MUST adhere to [OAuthPublic].

Notably, the Dynamic Client Registration MUST be implemented and return a working Client ID in response HTTP calls defined by the specification.

The OAuth2 scopes defined in [OAuthPublic] MUST be included and MUST give access to the servers returned in the JSON configuration described in Section 4.

A single token MUST work for all servers in the JSON configuration, such that a single user login is sufficient for all services. For that purpose, the client will include all relevant scopes in the authentication requests.

## 7. Security Considerations

While the mechanism described in this document makes it easier for users to correctly configure their user agent, there's an associated risk with making it easier for users to expose their credentials to a third party.

User agents using the mechanism described in this document need to design their user interface and user experience such that this risk is minimized. Actual affordances depend on implementation details of the user interface and are outside the scope of this document.

### 7.1. Mistyped Domain Names

As part of the first step of the mechanism described in this document, the user enters their email address. If the user mistyped the domain part of their email address, and if the mistyped domain exists and supports the mechanism described in this document, the user could expose their credentials to the owner of that domain. An attacker could use this in an attempt to gain knowledge of the user's credentials.

As a result, user agents need to carefully design their user interface and user experience as to let the user know which domain is being used. It would make sense to display this very clearly to the user, before they enter any credentials.

The user agent would want to display a list of all second-level domains (SLDs) for all the servers that it intends to use. The user can then confirm these.

When the mechanism described in this document uses OAuth, it would make sense to ask the user to confirm the domains of the servers that will be used and additionally confirm the domains of

- \* the URL to retrieve the OAuth Authorization Server Metadata and/or
- \* the authorization request URL.

When asking the user to confirm these domains, it would make sense to only display the second-level domain (SLD) of those domains. This would make it more difficult for an attacker to do URL obfuscation and use subdomain phishing.

When using a browser for OAuth, the user agent would want to display the second-level domain (SLD) that the browser is currently displaying, and update this when redirects happen or new pages are loaded.

### 7.2. Attacker Controlled JSON Configuration

If an attacker can direct the user agent to use an attacker-controlled JSON configuration, the attacker would be able to direct the user to servers of the attacker's choosing.

In Section 7.1 some mechanisms to limit this attack vector are described.

However, the user agent needs to combine this with a conservative trust policy for its TLS when retrieving the JSON configuration.

### 7.3. DNS

If the user agent uses the DNS mechanisms described in Section 5.2.1.2, care needs to be taken to make sure that an attacker hasn't altered the DNS response. Using DNSSEC is one method of improving the security aspects of this approach. Alternatively, user agents MAY choose not use the DNS based mechanisms described in Section 5.2.1.2 at all.

### 7.4. Transport Security Validation

Whenever secure transport is used (including TLS for HTTPS connections and QUIC's TLS-based security layer for HTTP/3), user agents MUST check the certificates presented by the server. This certificate MUST be within its validity period (prior to its expiration date) and MUST chain to a root CA that is trusted by the user agent. The certificate MUST have a subject alternative name (SAN) ([RFC5280]) with a DNS-ID ([RFC9525]) matching the hostname, per the rules given in [RFC9525]. The certificate MAY also be checked for revocation via OCSP ([RFC6960]), CRLs ([RFC6818]), or some other mechanism. The general TLS usage guidance in [RFC9525] SHOULD be followed.

If these checks fail or the server certificate is otherwise invalid, the user agent MUST disconnect and MUST NOT use any configuration retrieved from that URI.

Certificate validation failures represent significant security risks, as they may indicate attempts to redirect users' credentials to an attacker. User agents SHOULD NOT allow users to override certificate validation checks.

User agents MAY implement more restrictive transport security policies for configuration retrieval than those typically required for web browsing, in order to provide stronger security guarantees. For TLS connections, user agents MAY want to limit the allowed protocol version(s) to recent versions, and MAY similarly want to restrict the allowed cipher suites. For QUIC connections, user agents MAY apply similar restrictions to the underlying TLS handshake parameters.

The HTTP server serving the Well-Known resource described in Section 5.2.1.1 MUST have support for TLS 1.3 ([RFC8446]) or higher.

### 7.5. Updating the Configuration

The mechanism described in this document can be used to upgrade a user's configuration. The user agent could check for configurations even when it has a working configuration for an account. If the user agent finds a configuration that is better (in some way) than the already existing configuration, it could then upgrade the existing configuration.

But in doing so, the user agent would increase the attack window that a potential attacker has. Instead of only giving an attacker the opportunity when the user configures their user agent for the first time, the attacker would now have an opportunity each time the user agent checks for a better configuration. That could be undesirable.

### 7.6. Provider Information

Image parsers are a common attack vector, and clients **MUST NOT** display the logo images described in Section 4.4.1 unless they can do so in a way that doesn't expose the client to such attacks.

## 8. IANA Considerations

### 8.1. The User-Agent Auto-Configuration Protocol Registry

This document establishes the user-agent auto-configuration protocol registry.

User-agent auto-configuration protocols are registered on the advice of one or more Designated Experts (appointed by the IESG or their delegate), with a Specification Required (using terminology from [RFC8126]). However, to allow for the allocation of values prior to publication, the Designated Expert(s) may approve registration once they are satisfied that such a specification will be published.

Registration requests are sent to the \_\_\_\_@ietf.org mailing list for review and comment, with an appropriate subject (e.g., "Request for well-known URI: example").

Before a period of 14 days has passed, the Designated Expert(s) will either approve or deny the registration request, communicating this decision both to the review list and to IANA. Denials should include an explanation and, if applicable, suggestions as to how to make the request successful. Registration requests that are undetermined for a period longer than 21 days can be brought to the IESG's attention (using the iesg@iesg.org mailing list) for resolution.



Registry Name:  
User-Agent Auto-Configuration Protocols

Registration Procedure:  
Specification Required (per [RFC8126])

#### 8.1.1. Registration Template

Name  
The commonly used name of the protocol

Protocol Key:  
The JSON key using in the protocols object in the JSON configuration described in Section 4

URL Scheme:  
(Optional) The URL scheme to be used for this protocol. HTTP based protocols specify https. If left empty, the protocols entry in the JSON configuration will only specify a hostname using host. If a URL scheme is specified, the JSON configuration entry will instead use url with a URL using this URL scheme.

Specification  
Which RFC(s) or document(s) specify the protocol

Additional Properties:  
Which additional property values are present in the protocol's JSON object.

#### 8.1.2. Initial Registrations

Name	Protocol Key	URL scheme	Specification	Additional Properties
JMAP	jmap	https	RFC 8620, RFC 8621, RFC 8887, RFC 9610	
IMAP	imap		RFC 9051	
POP3	pop3		RFC 1939, RFC 5034	
SMTP	smtp		RFC 5321, RFC 2822	
CalDAV	caldav	https	RFC 4791	

CardDAV	carddav	https	RFC 6352	
WebDAV	webdav	https	RFC 4918	
ManageSieve	managesieve		RFC 5804, RFC 5228	

Table 4: Initial registrations to the User-Agent Auto-Configuration Protocol Registry

The `_Additional Properties` field is empty in all of the initial values.

## 8.2. Registration

### 8.2.1. Registration of Well-Known URI user-agent-configuration

This registers the user-agent-configuration name from Section 5.2.1.1 in the "Well-Known URIs" registry as specified in [RFC8615].

URI suffix	Change controller	Specification document(s)	Related information
user-agent-configuration	IETF	This document	/

Table 5: Registration in Well-Known URIs Registry

### 8.2.2. Registration of DNS Underscore Label `_ua-auto-config`

This registers the DNS underscore label `_ua-auto-config` used in Section 5.2.1.2 in the "Underscored and Globally Scoped DNS Node Names" registry as specified in [RFC8552].

RR Type	_NODE NAME	Reference
TXT	<code>_ua-auto-config</code>	This document

Table 6: Registration in Underscored and Globally Scoped DNS Node Names Registry

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## Appendix A. Configuration JSON Schema

The following JSON schema defines the format of the JSON configuration in Section 4

===== NOTE: '\ ' line wrapping per RFC 8792 =====

```
{
  "$schema": "https://json-schema.org/draft/2020-12/schema",
  "$id": "ua-auto-conf",
  "title": "User-Agent Automatic Configuration",
  "description": "Automatic Configuration of Email, Calendar, \
    and Contact Server Settings",
  "type": "object",
  "properties": {
    "protocols": {
      "type": "object",
      "properties": {
        "caldav": { "$ref": "#/$defs/http-server" },
        "carddav": { "$ref": "#/$defs/http-server" },
        "imap": { "$ref": "#/$defs/text-server" },
        "jmap": { "$ref": "#/$defs/http-server" },
        "managesieve": { "$ref": "#/$defs/text-server" },
        "pop3": { "$ref": "#/$defs/text-server" },
        "smtp": { "$ref": "#/$defs/text-server" },
        "webdav": { "$ref": "#/$defs/http-server" }
      }
    },
    "authentication": {
      "properties": {
        "oauth-public": {
          "properties": {
            "issuer": {
              "format": "uri",
              "type": "string"
            }
          }
        },
        "required": [
          "issuer"
        ],
        "type": "object"
      }
    }
  }
}
```

```
    },
    "password": {
      "type": "boolean"
    }
  },
  "required": [ "password" ]
},
"info": {
  "type": "object",
  "properties": {
    "provider": {
      "type": "object",
      "properties": {
        "name": { "type": "string", "minLength": 1 },
        "shortName": { "type": "string", \
          "minLength": 1 },
        "logo": {
          "type": "array",
          "items": {
            "type": "object",
            "properties": {
              "url": { "type": "string", \
                "format": "uri" },
              "content-type": { \
                "type": "string", \
                "minLength": 1 },
              "width": { "type": "integer", \
                "minimum": 1 },
              "height": { "type": "integer", \
                "minimum": 1 }
            },
            "required": [ "url", "content-type" ]
          }
        }
      }
    }
  },
  "required": [ "name" ]
},
"help": {
  "type": "object",
  "properties": {
    "documentation": { "type": "string", \
      "format": "uri" },
    "developer": { "type": "string", \
      "format": "uri" },
    "contact": {
      "type": "array",
      "items": { "type": "string", \
        "minLength": 1 }
    }
  }
}
```



```
    }
  }
},
"required": [ "provider" ]
}
},
"required": [ "protocols", "info" ],
"$defs": {
  "http-server": {
    "type": "object",
    "properties": {
      "url": { "type": "string", "format": "uri" }
    },
    "required": [ "url" ]
  },
  "text-server": {
    "type": "object",
    "properties": {
      "host": { "type": "string", "format": "hostname" }
    },
    "required": [ "host" ]
  }
}
}
```

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