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L. Eggert, Ed.  
Mozilla  
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The IETF Chair May Delegate  
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## Abstract

This document proposes that the IETF Chair may delegate some of their responsibilities to other Area Directors, and updates several existing RFCs to enable that. It also proposes a succession of emergency stand-ins in case the IETF Chair becomes incapacitated.

## About This Document

This note is to be removed before publishing as an RFC.

The latest revision of this draft can be found at <https://ietf-wg-procon.github.io/ietf-chair-may-delegate/draft-eggert-procon-chair-delegate.html>. Status information for this document may be found at <https://datatracker.ietf.org/doc/draft-eggert-procon-chair-delegate/>.

Discussion of this document takes place on the procon Working Group mailing list (<mailto:procon@ietf.org>), which is archived at <https://mailarchive.ietf.org/arch/browse/procon/>. Subscribe at <https://www.ietf.org/mailman/listinfo/procon/>.

Source for this draft and an issue tracker can be found at <https://github.com/ietf-wg-procon/ietf-chair-may-delegate>.

## Status of This Memo

This Internet-Draft is submitted in full conformance with the provisions of BCP 78 and BCP 79.

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## 1. Introduction

Throughout the history of the IETF, the role of the IETF Chair has always been filled by a single person. None of the foundational documents of the organization precisely define the role, but most are written with an understanding that the role is filled by a single person who is then tasked with numerous responsibilities. The expired Internet-Draft [I-D.carpenter-ietf-chair-tasks] attempted to define the role of the IETF Chair more precisely but was not taken forward.

Few documents explicitly say that the IETF Chair may delegate some of these responsibilities. Over time, this has created a situation where even a full-time commitment by a single person may no longer be sufficient to fulfill all of these roles and duties. There may also be periods of high activity where not all duties can be performed due to other, higher-priority tasks.

Also, the role of the IETF Chair is a single point of failure for the organization, with no defined processes for allowing others to quickly and/or temporarily take over aspects of the role if the IETF Chair becomes partially or fully unable to serve. (The defined process is that for "mid-term vacancies" per Section 3.5 of [RFC8713], which can take up to six weeks to complete and only allows for the permanent replacement of the IETF Chair by another individual.)

Single bottlenecks like this have obvious scaling and fault tolerance issues. This document hence proposes to explicitly allow the IETF Chair to delegate some of their responsibilities to one or more other Area Directors. It leaves it up to each IETF Chair to determine if they would like to delegate some of their responsibilities, and if so, which ones, to whom and when.

One model that is specifically enabled by this proposal is a separation of the roles of the IETF Chair from that of the IESG Chair, allowing another Area Director to take over the chairperson role of the IESG and its associated responsibilities. It also enables delegation of the IETF Chair's full IAB membership and delegation or sharing of the role of the General Area Director.

This document does not require or even recommend that the IETF chair delegate any of their duties, it merely permits them to do so if they so choose. Specifically, with these changes, it should be possible

for the IESG to request the selection of a General Area Director who is not at the same time also the IETF Chair, to whom the IETF Chair may then delegate some of their responsibilities.

There must be community transparency about which roles the IETF Chair has delegated to which other Area Director, and for which time. This transparency can be guaranteed in several ways, such as through the IESG website or public email. Such operational details are left to the discretion of the IESG.

## 2. Emergency Stand-In

This section describes who may stand in for the IETF Chair in case of emergency if they become unable to fulfill their duties.

### 2.1. Background

As described in Section 1, the IETF Chair role is at the moment a single point of failure for the organization. In an emergency that incapacitated the IETF Chair, a recall petition followed by executing a "mid-term vacancy" replacement would need to be executed to name a new IETF Chair. This process will likely take several weeks at best, during which time there is no defined stand-in for the IETF Chair.

Section 7.1.1 of [RFC8713] currently prevents NomCom-ineligible IETF participants from being signatories on recall petitions. This includes anyone serving in a NomCom-selected role. This could be an issue, since IESG, IAB and LLC Board members may be first-hand witnesses to reasons that would merit an IETF Chair recall, but they are currently unable to initiate one directly.

### 2.2. Proposal

This document proposes that in the case the IETF Chair becomes incapacitated, the IAB Chair will automatically assume the role of the IETF Chair. If the IAB Chair is unable to do so, the IETF Chair role will automatically fall to the Chair of the IETF Administration LLC. As soon as the NomCom appoints a new IETF Chair this emergency delegation ends.

## 3. Separating the IETF Chair and IESG Chair Roles

This section analyzes which RFCs imply that the IETF Chair and IESG Chair roles need to be filled by the same person, and makes suggestions for updates that would allow a separation.

### 3.1. Background

[RFC2026] is surprisingly silent on the role of the IETF Chair, only mentioning it in Section 14 of [RFC2026] as part of the terminology:

Area Director - The manager of an IETF Area. The Area Directors along with the IETF Chair comprise the Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG).

Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG) - A group comprised of the IETF Area Directors and the IETF Chair. (...)

Similarly, the role of the IESG Chair is only briefly mentioned in Section 6.5.2 of [RFC2026] as part of how process failures are handled:

If an individual should disagree with an action taken by the IESG in this process, that person should first discuss the issue with the IESG Chair. If the IESG Chair is unable to satisfy the complainant then (...)

[RFC2026] does not require the IETF Chair to also fulfill the role of IESG Chair. Section 1.2 of [RFC1602], the earlier revision of the standards process that [RFC2026] obsoletes, is an Informational RFC and does include text to that effect, however:

The IESG is composed of the IETF Area Directors and the chairperson of the IETF, who also serves as the chairperson of the IESG.

Section 1.2 of [RFC1602] is likely the basis for [RFC2028], a BCP that includes similar text:

The IESG is composed of the IETF Area Directors and the chair of the IETF, who also serves as the chair of the IESG.

Section 3.3 of [RFC9281], a BCP that obsoletes [RFC2028], retains that text and also states that the IETF Chair is the Area Director for the General Area:

The IESG is composed of the ADs and the IETF Chair. The IETF Chair also chairs the IESG and is the AD for the General Area.

Section 4 of [RFC4949], an Informational RFC containing an Internet Security Glossary, contains this text under the "Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG)" glossary item:

The part of the ISOC responsible for technical management of IETF activities and administration of the Internet Standards Process according to procedures approved by the ISOC Trustees. Directly responsible for actions along the "standards track", including final approval of specifications as Internet Standards. Composed of IETF Area Directors and the IETF chairperson, who also chairs the IESG. (RFC 2026)

### 3.2. Proposal

To allow the IETF Chair to delegate the role of IESG Chair to another AD (as arguably intended to be allowed by [RFC2026]), the following updates to existing RFCs are proposed:

1. Remove the sentence "The IETF Chair also chairs the IESG and is the AD for the General Area." from Section 3.3 of [RFC9281].
2. Change the clause "The IETF chair, who is also the chair of the Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG)" in the second sentence of Section 1 of [RFC2850] to "The IETF chair or their delegate". (This is also part of the suggestions in Section 5.2.)
3. Remove the clause "who also chairs the IESG" from the "Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG)" glossary item in Section 4 of [RFC4949].

### 4. Delegation of the IAB Membership

This section analyzes which RFCs contain text about the full IAB membership of the IETF Chair, and makes suggestions for updates that would allow delegation of the IAB membership.

#### 4.1. Background

Section 1 of [RFC2850] requires the IETF Chair to be a full member of the IAB:

The Internet Architecture Board (IAB) shall consist of thirteen full members, composed of the chair of the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), and of twelve sitting members.

Appendix C of [RFC8713] contains a similar statement as part of the second item in a list of "oral traditions" recorded for "consideration by future NomComs":

No person should serve both on the IAB and as an Area Director, except the IETF Chair whose roles as an IAB member and Area Director of the General Area are set out elsewhere.

Section 3.4 of [RFC9281] says:

The IETF Chair is also a member of the IAB, and the Chair of the Internet Research Task Force (IRTF) is an ex officio member.

#### 4.2. Proposal

To allow the IETF Chair to delegate their full IAB membership to another AD, the following updates to existing RFCs are suggested:

1. Add "or their Delegate Area Director" at the end of the clause "composed of the chair of the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF)" in Section 1 of [RFC2850].
2. Add "With the publication of RFCXXXX, IETF guidance on this issue has changed as described there." to the second bullet item in Appendix C of [RFC8713].
3. Change the sentence "The IETF Chair is also a member of the IAB, and the Chair of the Internet Research Task Force (IRTF) is an ex officio member." to "The IETF Chair or their delegate is also a member of the IAB, and the Chair of the Internet Research Task Force (IRTF) is an ex officio member." in Section 3.4 of [RFC9281].

#### 5. Delegation of the General Area Director Role

This section analyzes which RFCs contain text about the responsibility of the IETF Chair to also serve as Area Director of the General Area, and makes suggestions for updates that would allow delegation of or sharing of the role.

##### 5.1. Background

Section 2 of [RFC3710] states that the IETF Chair is the General Area Director:

The IETF Chair, who also functions as the General Area Director when this area is active

Section 3.3 of [RFC9281] also makes a similar statement:

The IETF Chair also chairs the IESG and is the AD for the General Area.

## 5.2. Proposal

To allow the IETF Chair to delegate the Area Director role of the General Area, the following updates to existing RFCs are suggested:

1. Replace "who also functions as the General Area Director" with "who may also function as a General Area Director or may share that role with or delegate that role to another Area Director" in Section 2 of [RFC3710].
2. Change the clause "The IETF chair, who is also the chair of the Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG)" in the second sentence of Section 1 of [RFC2850] to "The IETF chair or their delegate". (This is also part of the suggestions in Section 3.2.)

## 6. Other Updates

This section collects updates to some text in existing RFCs that has become stale.

### 6.1. Staff Supervision

Section 7.1 of [RFC3710] says

The IETF Chair has primary responsibility for supervising the work of the IETF Secretariat, with the advice and consent of the IESG, the IAB Chair and the ISOC president.

With the publication of [RFC8711], this responsibility has moved to the IETF Executive Director. The proposal is to update Section 7.1 of [RFC3710] to remove the sentence above.

## 7. Other Roles

This section briefly summarizes other roles the IETF Chair has, but which require no updates, usually because delegation is already permitted.

### 7.1. Liaison Statements

Section 3.1 of [RFC4691] says

Liaison statements are only sent on the initiative of the IETF chair, the IAB chair, IETF Area Directors, or IETF working group chairs.

Section 4 of [RFC4052] says



For a liaison statement generated on behalf of the IETF as a whole, the IETF Chair must have generated or must agree with the sending of the liaison statement. If the liaison statement is not sent by the IETF Chair, then his or her agreement must be obtained in advance and confirmed by copying the IETF Chair on the message.

The combination of these two statements already allows another Area Director to send a liaison statement on behalf of the IETF with IETF Chair approval.

## 7.2. Transgressions of the IETF Guidelines for Conduct

Appendix A of [RFC7154] says "An individual can report transgressions of the guidelines for conduct to the IETF Chair or the IESG."

However, [RFC7154] does not define any reactions the IETF Chair or the IESG should or may take, so the IETF Chair only acts as a recipient here.

## 7.3. Appointments to the Ombuds-, Moderator and Last-Call List Moderation Teams

The IETF Chair is tasked with managing the constituency of the ombudsteam [RFC7776] and the moderator team of the IETF discussion list [RFC9245]. They also select moderators for the Last-Call mailing list, and other lists with an organizational scope encompassing the entire IETF.

This document does not suggest any changes here, but the community may consider allowing delegation of either of these responsibilities if revisions of [RFC7776] or [RFC9245] are undertaken.

## 7.4. Serving on the IETF LLC Board

[RFC8711] suggests that the IETF Chair, or a delegate selected by the IESG, will serve on the Board of Directors of the IETF Administration LLC. Because delegation of that role is already explicitly allowed, no changes are suggested here.

## 8. Security Considerations

The usual security considerations [RFC3552] do not apply to this document.

## 9. IANA Considerations

This document has no IANA actions.

## 10. Acknowledgments

These individuals suggested improvements to this document:

- \* Alvaro Retana
- \* Brian Carpenter
- \* Jari Arkko

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Author's Address

Lars Eggert (editor)  
Mozilla  
Stenbergintie 12 B  
FI-02700 Kauniainen  
Finland  
Email: [lars@eggert.org](mailto:lars@eggert.org)  
URI: <https://eggert.org/>