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IAB Processes for Management of IETF Liaison Relationships
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Abstract

This document discusses the procedures used by the IAB to establish and maintain formal liaison relationships between the IETF and other Standards Development Organizations (SDOs), consortia and industry fora. This document also discusses the appointment and responsibilities of IETF liaison managers, and the expectations of the IAB in establishing formal liaison relationships.

About This Document

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1. Introduction

The IETF, as an organization, has the need to engage in direct communication or joint work with various other formal organizations. For example, the IETF is one of several Standards Development Organizations, or SDOs, and SDOs including the IETF find it increasingly necessary to communicate and coordinate their activities involving Internet-related technologies. This is useful in order to avoid overlap in work efforts, and to manage interactions between their groups. In cases where the mutual effort to communicate and coordinate activities is formalized, these relationships are generically referred to as "formal liaison relationships".

In such cases, a person is designated by the IAB to manage a given formal liaison relationship; that person is generally called the "IETF liaison manager" to the other organization. Often, the other organization will similarly designate their own liaison manager to the IETF.

This document is chiefly concerned with:

- * the establishment and maintenance of formal liaison relationships
Section 2, and
- * the appointment and responsibilities of IETF liaison managers
Section 3.

The management of other organizations' liaison managers to the IETF, whether or not in the context of a formal liaison relationship, is outside the scope of this document.

The IETF has tasked the Internet Architecture Board to manage formal liaison relationships. As stated in its charter [BCP39] 2.(f), "The IAB acts as a representative of the interests of the IETF in technical liaison relationships with other organizations concerned with standards, and other technical and organizational issues relevant to the worldwide Internet. Liaison relationships are kept informal whenever possible, and must possess demonstrable value to the IETF's technical mandate. Individual participants from the IETF community are appointed as liaison managers to other organizations by the IAB."

In general, a formal liaison relationship is most valuable when there are areas of technical development of mutual interest. For the most part, SDOs would rather leverage existing work done by other organizations than recreate it themselves (and would like the same done with respect to their own work). Establishing a formal liaison relationship can provide the framework for ongoing communications to

- * prevent inadvertent duplication of effort, without obstructing either organization from pursuing its own mandate;
- * provide authoritative information of one organization's dependencies on the other's work;
- * allow for the collaboration and coordination of efforts between the IETF and other organizations.

It is important to note that participation in the IETF work is open to everyone, and all the working documents and RFCs are freely available to everyone without the need for a formal liaison

relationship. Hence, in almost all cases the need for a formal relationship is mostly driven by other organizations rather than by the IETF.

If tighter coordination is needed, e.g. in cases where there are a large number of document dependencies when specifications are developed in parallel, the IAB might consider additional activities such as meetings or calls with the relevant people (e.g. chairs, ADs, and authors). Such activities could be one-time events or organized in a standing groups. The liaison manager should be involved in the organization and the running of these activities.

Since the IAB is ultimately responsible for liaison management, anyone who has an issue with a relationship (whether an IETF participant or a person from the peer organization) should first consult the IAB's designated liaison manager, and if that does not result in a satisfactory outcome, then consult the IAB itself.

1.1. Changes compared to RFC4052

This version of the document contains the following updates:

1. Notes in the Introduction and Section 2.1 on "Liaison Relationships" that the IETF process itself does not require a formal liaison relationship, e.g. for document access or meeting participation, and therefore the need for a formal liaison relationship is often driven by processes of the peer organization.
2. Statement that the "IAB acts as representative of the interests of [...] the Internet Society" has been removed.
3. Role of the Liaison Representative (Section 2.3) has been removed since this role is not used in practice.
4. Clarification in section on "Liaison Communication" (now 2.3; was 2.4) that informal channels are preferred, with and without a formal liaison relationship, and further that liaison statements have no "special standing" in the IETF process.
5. Section on Summary of IETF Liaison Manager Responsibilities reworked.
6. Section 4 on "Approval and Transmission of Liaison Statements" has been moved to 4053bis.
7. Better description of both the aspects and requirements for establishing a formal relationship

8. Clarified there are no specific establishment procedures for informal collaboration and formal liaison communications in form of liaison statement don't require a formal liaison relationship
9. Update of description of aspects for establishing a formal relationship and clarifications about informal collaborations
10. Merged liaison manager responsibilities sections
11. Removal of one level in the document structure
12. Move "Liaison Communication" into a subsection of "Establishing a Liaison Relationship" and merge some redundant text
13. Align wording to consistently use "formal liaison relationship"
14. Small clarification that the appointment of a liaison manager establishes the formal relationship

2. Establishing Formal Liaison Relationships

There is no set process or form for establishing a formal liaison relationship; the IETF participants and the peer organization can initiate a conversation with the IAB, and after discussion may come to an agreement to form the formal liaison relationship. Once the IAB and the other organization mutually agree that a formal liaison relationship is beneficial, the IAB appoints a liaison manager to establish it. In some cases, the intended scope and guidelines for the collaboration are documented specifically (e.g., see [RFC3113], [RFC3131], and [RFC3356]).

2.1. IETF's Preference for Informal Collaboration

Generally informal collaboration between the IETF and peer organizations is preferred whenever direct working relationships between the members of both organizations is possible. Specifically, there are no processes in the IETF that require a formal liaison relationship as our work is conducted in open public meetings and on mailing lists where anyone can contribute. Inputs from all participants in the IETF, regardless of the type of relationship, are given equal weight and standing. When a similar structure exists in the peer organization and all participants have access to open working documents and communication mechanisms, there may not be a need for a more formal structure.

There is no specific procedure to enable informal collaboration. Such an working relationship simply exists by defacto when members of both organizations cross-collaborate and participate in the groups with overlapping interest.

2.2. Purposes and Expectations for Formal Liaison Relationships

From the IETF's perspective a formal liaison relationship is needed only when required for specific purposes, such as:

1. There is an overlap in work between one or more groups in each organization that requires close collaboration that would not be possible without a formal liaison relationship. This might include situations where one group in one organization has a dependency on a document produced in the other organization and is requesting in-depth support or would like feedback on internal documents. However note that the agreed need for close collaboration is a pre-condition for establishing a formal liaison relationship but is not alone sufficient for the IETF to require the establishment of a formal liaison relationship.
2. The peer organization of the IETF may require a more formal communication structure in order to allow the IETF to work directly within the peer organization's processes. Some potential formal requirements from the peer organizations include:
 - * Access restrictions for accessing the peer organization's working documents or standards.
 - * Ability to participate and contribute directly in the peer organization's groups and forums.
 - * Ability to participate in and contribute to the ongoing work of the peer organization.

In setting up a formal liaison relationship, the IAB expects that there will be a mutual exchange of views and discussion of the best approach for undertaking new standardization work items. Any work items resulting for the IETF will be undertaken using the usual IETF procedures, defined in [BCP9]. The peer organization often has different organizational structures and procedures than the IETF, and these differences will require some flexibility on the part of both organizations to accommodate. There is an expectation that both organizations will use the formal liaison relationship appropriately, allowing sufficient time for the requests they make on the other organization to be processed.

2.3. Liaison Communications

Communications between organizations use a variety of formal and informal channels irrespective of established relationships. The stated preference of the IETF, which is largely an informal organization, is to use informal channels (e.g., discussion on expert level in a specific working group meeting or mailing list), as these have integrated better into IETF process and historically worked well to expedite matters. In some cases, however, a more formal communication is appropriate, either as an adjunct to the informal channel or in its own place with or without a formal liaison relationship. In the case of formal communications, the established procedures of many organizations use a form known as a "liaison statement" (LS). Procedures for sending, managing, and responding to liaison statements are discussed in [I-D.iab-rfc4053bis].

Formal communications in the form of liaison statements, if needed, can be used without establishing a formal liaison relationship. In this case, since a formal liaison manager does not exist, the IAB itself will be responsible for ensuring liaison statements are handled appropriately, as also further explained in [I-D.iab-rfc4053bis].

Note that communications between organizations have no impact on any other IETF contributions, and should follow the same IETF process and policies and should be open to everyone for inputs and contributions, e.g., input discussion in a specific working group in the IETF.

3. Liaison Manager Responsibilities and Expectations

The main responsibility of the liaison manager is to ensure good, productive, and timely (formal and informal) communication between the organizations. This often includes:

- * Ensure received liaison statements are recorded and delivered to the relevant groups.
- * Ensure replies are sent in time or it is appropriately communicated why a reply is delayed or not sent.
- * Ensure liaison statements from the IETF adhere to the formal requirements of the peer organization (e.g. structure/formatting) and are delivered to the appropriate groups. If a communication from a peer organization is addressed to an inappropriate party, such as being sent directly to the WG but not recorded otherwise or being sent to the wrong WG, the liaison manager will help redirect or otherwise augment the communication.

- * Provide additional communication regarding e.g. process or known consensus positions in the IETF. This may also require participation in relevant meetings of the peer organization and potentially report back to the appropriate IETF organization any material information that is intended to be shared by the peer organization.

Formal messages from the IETF to the peer organization are usually carried in liaison statements. The liaison manager must not send liaison statements on their own initiative to a liaised organization on behalf of IETF, or any of its areas and working groups.

IETF liaison managers should also communicate and coordinate with other liaison managers where concerned technical activities overlap.

Liaison managers also provide updates to the IAB on technical matters, especially if concerns regarding technical overlap or incorrectness are detected. However, given that most organizations are quite large, it is not expected that the liaison manager needs to have a complete overview of everything that is going on there.

3.1. Speaking for the IETF

In certain situations, the liaison manager may carry additional messages for providing further context. For such additional communication, liaison managers may use any applicable businesslike approach, from private to public communications, and bring in other parties as needed. However, the mandate for IETF liaison managers is strictly limited to conveying IETF consensus to the liaised organization. The liaison manager speaks on behalf of the IETF on the subject matter of the liaison, but only after making sure that the IETF consensus is understood. Specifically, if these communications aim to "represent the IETF", they must have consensus, e.g. by being based on an RFC or some other formal statement by a group within the IETF.

4. Security Considerations

The security of the Internet is enhanced by robust coordination between SDOs.

5. IANA Considerations

This document has no IANA actions.

6. Appendix A: Document Process

RFC 4052 was published as a BCP. Since the IAB cannot publish BCPs, this document will follow a two step process. The current draft is marked as Informational until the IAB completes its process and formally approves it. After IAB approval, a member of the IESG needs to sponsor the document, and the document will enter the IETF process to update its intended status to BCP. This appendix should be removed at the time of publication.

7. References

7.1. Normative References

- [BCP39] Best Current Practice 39,
<<https://www.rfc-editor.org/info/bcp39>>.
At the time of writing, this BCP comprises the following:
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- [BCP9] Best Current Practice 9,
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7.2. Informative References

[I-D.iab-rfc4053bis]

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[RFC3113] Rosenbrock, K., Sanmugam, R., Bradner, S., and J. Klensin, "3GPP-IETF Standardization Collaboration", RFC 3113, DOI 10.17487/RFC3113, June 2001, <<https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc3113>>.

[RFC3131] Bradner, S., Calhoun, P., Cuschieri, H., Dennett, S., Flynn, G., Lipford, M., and M. McPheters, "3GPP2-IETF Standardization Collaboration", RFC 3131, DOI 10.17487/RFC3131, June 2001, <<https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc3131>>.

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Acknowledgments

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