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Procedures for Handling Liaison Statements to and from the IETF
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Abstract

This document describes the procedures for generating and handling liaison statements between the IETF and other Standards Development Organizations (SDOs), so that the IETF can effectively collaborate with other organizations in the international standards community.

About This Document

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Status information for this document may be found at
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Discussion of this document takes place on the Internet Architecture Board Internet Engineering Task Force mailing list (<mailto:iab@iab.org>), which is archived at <https://mailarchive.ietf.org/arch/browse/iab/>. Subscribe at <https://www.ietf.org/mailman/listinfo/iab/>.

Source for this draft and an issue tracker can be found at
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1. Introduction

This document describes the procedure for generating and handling liaison statements within the IETF, covering both statements sent by the IETF as well as statement received from other Standards Development Organizations (SDOs). This process is managed by the IAB and designed such that the IETF can effectively collaborate with other organizations in the international standards community. The IAB also serves as contact point for any matters regarding liaison management beyond the scope of this document.

Most organizations have a process to send liaison statements that provides a more formal way of communication, beyond just sending an informal email. However, every organization has slightly different procedures to handle the sending and receiving of liaison statements. In some cases sending formal liaison statements might be the only way of communicating with a certain organization.

The IETF process, described in this document, is intended to be as simple as possible while still accommodating the process or format requirements of various other SDOs. One key property of the IETF liaison statement handling process is the requirement to record all sent and received liaison statements in a publicly accessible central location, which makes it more formal than other direct communications. However, liaison statements do not have any special standing within the IETF process. This means that any input provided through a liaison statement, even if that statement reflects consensus in the other organisation, does not have a different standing in the IETF process than other (individually-provided) inputs.

Further, liaison statements sent by the IETF usually do not go through the normal IETF consensus process (e.g. an IETF-wide last call) and therefore do not automatically represent IETF consensus. Depending on the nature of the liaison statement, it might refer to existing IETF consensus as documented in IETF-stream RFCs or working group chairs might ask for working group consensus on a technical matter not (yet) documented in an RFC. While the existence of a formal liaison statement does not automatically imply any form of consensus within the IETF process, liaison statements still reflect an official position supported by leadership approval and particularly underline when the stated position is based on existing community consensus. When sending a liaison statement from the IETF, it is highly recommended to clearly indicate any level of consensus or non-consensus as part of the liaison statement content. Further consideration on consensus in IETF liaison statements are provided in Section 4.2.

The exchange of liaison statements does not require a formal liaison relationship (see [I-D.iab-rfc4052bis]). The procedures described in this document encompass all liaisons statements received from or sent to other SDOs, whether or not a formal liaison arrangement is in place between the SDO and the IETF. The IAB is generally responsible for ensuring liaison statements are handled appropriately and can assist with any liaison matter. If a formal liaison relationship with an IAB-appointed liaison manager is in place, the liaison manager assists the IAB in this responsibility and is the first contact point for liaison statements sent to or received from the respective SDO, as also further explained in [I-D.iab-rfc4052bis].

Especially, the liaison manager should be consulted before sending a liaison statement to ensure formal requirements or agreements of the liaison relation are followed.

Receipt of a liaison statement does not automatically impose an obligation of sending a response by the other party. The decision to send a response depends on the content and kind of request. A liaison statement, just like any other input into the IETF process, is considered for its relevance, importance, and urgency. However, if a formal liaison relationship exists, it is the responsibility of the liaison manager to ensure appropriate communication between the organisations (see Section 3 of [I-D.iab-rfc4052bis]) even if no response is sent.

If no response to an incoming liaison statement is provided, this does not indicate agreement or consensus on the topic raised to the IETF. IETF positions require community rough consensus via processes managed by the working group chairs and the Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG).

Liaison communication is intended for coordinating information relevant to the standards process, such as information about standard track documents or other process related information. Usually liaison coordination does not cover other RFC publications such as those by the IRTF, the Independent Stream, or the RFC editorial series. If reference to such non-consensus documents are needed, their status should be clearly indicated, as further discussed in Section 4.3.

Sometimes liaison statements sent from other SDOs may cover topics that are relevant for research done in the IRTF. In this case the IAB consults with the IRTF chair who might choose to forward them to any relevant IRTF research group(s). The IRTF chair as a member of IAB can work with the IAB, as well as specific research group chairs, to decide whether a response to the liaison statement is needed. Research groups do not initiate sending of liaison statements.

1.1. Changes compared to RFC4053

The major change in this revision of the document is that all tooling details have been removed. Particularly, some text in the introduction, Section 3.1.1. (Liaison Statement Submission), Section 3.1.2. (Mechanism for Displaying Liaison Statements), Section 3.2.2.4. (Generating Liaison Statements) and the appendix have been removed.

Further, the following has been updated:

1. The abstract and introduction as been shortened, and a clarification was added in the introduction about obligations to send replies.
2. The definition section (2.1) has been removed as "assignee" is not used anymore, and the "addressee" is now simply called the receiver.
3. The section on "Content of a Liaison Statement" has been revised to
 - * be less detailed about tooling, e.g. not talking about concrete fields anymore,
 - * introduce a new concept to handle contact information, replacing "Response Contact" and "Technical Contact" as well as additional fields ("CC", "From Contact", "To Contact") that exists in the tooling but are actually not specified in [RFC4053] and therefore often caused confusion,
 - * add new address information ("Send Reply To"/"Send To") that can be used to support processes where one central address is used to receive all liaison statements. This is also the process preferred now by the IETF where the central address is either the liaison manager or the IAB coordination contact.
4. The purpose "For Comment" was removed as either "For Information" or "For Action" can be used instead; depending if a deadline is needed or not. In the current record of statements, "For Comment" has been rarely used indicating that this purpose is not needed or at least its meaning was not clear.
5. New section was added on "Recording Liaison Statements" that replaces Section 2.4. on "Lifetime of a Liaison Statement" to underline how important the public record of a liaison statement is and clarify the responsibility of the receiver to ensure that all incoming statements get appropriately recorded.
6. Section 4 from [RFC4052] on "Approval and Transmission of Liaison Statements" has been merged to this document
7. New text was added in the intro regarding consensus and liaison statements having no special standing, as well as the role of the IRTF
8. Section on "Sending Liaison Statements from the IETF" was re-worked and shortened, which noew includes the subsections on approval and consensus.

9. Section 3 (Responsibilities when Receiving a Liaison Statement), Section 4 (Recording), and 6 (Responding) were merged and shorted in one new section.

2. Content of Liaison Statements

A Liaison Statement is a formal letter sent by one SDO to another. These organizations may be at any level (WG, Area, etc.). A liaison statement may have any purpose, but generally the purpose is to solicit information or request an action, like share a document, or ask for a review or a technical question.

Liaison statements may be very formal or informal, depending on the rules of the body generating them. Any liaison statement, however, will always contain certain information to enable effective communication. Further, in order to be able to process and record these statements in the IETF, the information should include the following:

2.1. Contact Information

The following contact information are expected to be part of a liaison statement:

From: The statement needs to indicate from what body it originates; for example, it may be from an IETF Area or WG, an ITU-T Study Group, Working Party, or Question, etc. A statement may be sent from more than one group, e.g. multiple IETF working groups, but usually all groups are from the same organization.

From-Contact: One or more email addresses belonging to the "From" body. This includes the addresses associated with the "From" group(s), e.g. in the IETF these are the working group chairs, working group mailing lists, and Area Director(s), and contacts that are required for the management of the liaison, like the liaison manager (if one exists) and/or an IAB liaison contact in case of statements sent by the IETF or the staff person from the external organisation that has sent the incoming liaison by mail, as well as any additional technical experts who should be informed.

From-Liaison-Contact ("Send Reply to"): An explicit "Send Reply To" address may be provided that is used for processing the liaison statement reply. This address is usually not a personal address but rather a generic address associated with a role or process. For liaison statements sent by the IETF, this address should be the alias of the liaison manager, if applicable, or an address maintained by the IAB for liaison management such as liaison-

coordination@iab.org. If a "Send Reply To" address is provided, the expectation is that a statement sent in reply will only be sent to this address and will then be distributed in the receiving organisation, following their internal process.

To: The statement needs to indicate to which body it is sent. A statement may be sent to multiple bodies or groups within one body.

To-Contact: One or more email addresses from the receiving body to which this statement should be sent. Similar to the "From-Contact" this includes all addresses associated with the "To" information, additional contacts that are required for liaison management, as well as any additional experts.

To-Liaison-Contact ("Send to"): If this address is present, the liaison statement is only sent to this address and not to the addresses in the "To-Contact". If a liaison statement is a reply, this "Send to" address is the "Send Reply To" address provided by the other organisation in the original statement. This supports processes where an organisation has a central contact address to receive statements and then distributes the statement using their own process to the appropriate groups and persons internally.

2.2. Purpose

A liaison statement generally has one of three purposes and should clearly state its purpose using one of the following labels:

For Information: The liaison statement is to inform the receiving body of something and expects no response. This includes calls for review comments if the expected response is optional.

For Action: The liaison statement requests that the receiving body does something on the sender's behalf, usually within a stated time frame. This is also used if a document is sent out for comment, and the review feedback is expected in the stated time frame.

In Response: The liaison statement includes a response to a liaison statement from the peer organization on one or more of its documents and expects no further response.

Liaison statements that request action indicate a deadline when the action is required. If the receiving body cannot accomplish the request within the stated period, a preliminary response could be sent requesting a more doable deadline or offering an alternative course of action.

2.3. Body, Subject, and Attachments

Most importantly, the liaison statement contains content explaining the issues or questions at hand.

Usually, the statement also contains a short (single line) subject providing a statement of its context and content.

Attachments, if enclosed, may be in the form of documents sent with the liaison statement, or may be URLs to similar documents, including Internet Drafts.

IETF participants use a wide variety of systems, thus document formats that are not universally readable are problematic. As a result, documents enclosed with the body or attachments should be in PDF, W3C HTML (without proprietary extensions), or UTF-8 encoded plain/text format. If they were originally in a proprietary format, such as Microsoft Word, the file may be sent, but should be accompanied by a generally readable file.

Different organisations have different requirements on the format of liaison statements. There are no requirements from the IETF on the format of the actual liaison statement; however, we require the metadata (address information and purpose) as indicated in the previous section to be recorded explicitly. As such, when receiving statements from other organisations, these metadata should be extracted. Further, the content of the statement must be recorded. This content may be recorded by archiving a received document in its original format, such as PDF or word, or may be transformed into another format, such as plain text or markdown, when it is reasonable to do so.

For statements sent from the IETF, it is recommended to provide the content in plain text but also provide an attachment following the formatting requirements of the receiving organisation if possible. In cases where we have a liaison manager, it is the responsibility of the liaison manager to check or convert the formatting requirements. It is further recommended to convert received documents in proprietary formats into PDF and upload both versions as attachments.

This ensures that our process can comply with all formatting requirements from other organisations.

3. Recording Liaison Statements

For the IETF, a liaison statement is a message that was sent or received (usually in an email directly or attached as some formal letter) and is recorded in the IETF liaison management tool. The value of sending a liaison statement for an organization compared to an informal email, is that it will officially be recorded and the public record will attest that certain information has been communicated between the organizations.

3.1. Incoming Liaison Statements from Other SDOs

The IETF will record any received liaison statement and make it publicly available.

For received liaison statements with a formal liaison relationship, it is the responsibility of the liaison manager to create that public record. However, even if a formal liaison relationship exists, it is possible that liaison statements arrive without knowledge of the liaison manager. Therefore, it is generally the responsibility of the receiver to ensure a public record is created.

Liaison statements that are sent to the IETF without a liaison manager are generally handled by the IAB. Ideally, statements are sent to a contact point appointed by the IAB, who records them and further distributes them within the IETF to the right groups and experts. This enables a better control to ensure that liaison statements are received by the relevant parties.

However, it is difficult to ensure that liaison statements will always be sent to the right group or person, as statements are sometimes sent directly to WG mailing lists or individuals. For example, an SDO might send a liaison statement to a specific IETF Area whose Area Director (AD) deems it better handled by one of the WGs, or it might be sent to one WG when it should have gone to a different, more relevant one. If a liaison statement arrives that appears misdirected, it is recommended to manually forward it to the right groups and inform the liaison manager or the IAB so that informal feedback can be provided to the sender for the future.

3.2. Outgoing Liaison Statements from the IETF

IETF participants (usually WG chairs or ADs), of course adhering to the requirements on approval and consensus as outlined in the next section, can send liaison statements to other SDOs, and all sent liaison statements must be publicly recorded. Therefore, it is recommended to use an IETF-provided tool to send liaison statements, rather than send them directly by email and record them after the

fact. This approach is possible if, e.g. a certain form of submission other than email is required by the other organization.

4. Sending Liaison Statements from the IETF

There are different reasons for an IETF group to send a liaison statement to another organization, such as

- * A working group might request additional information from another organization, for example, to resolve an impasse (i.e., don't waste time arguing over what the real meaning or intent of another SDOs document is, just ask the other SDO and base further work on the "official" answer).
- * A working group might request comments for a document under development in the IETF that would benefit from the input of experts in another relevant SDO, consortium, or forum. Generally, this is done before the text is completely finalized so that input from experts in another organization can be included in the final result.
- * In the case of overlapping or related work in another organization, a request could be made that the other organization change something to align with the IETF work.
- * A request could be made for another organization to start a new work item (on behalf of the IETF).
- * A request could be made for another organization to stop a work item (presumably because it overlaps or conflicts with other work in the IETF).

Further, a group might reply to an incoming liaison statement, as discussed in more detail in the next section; however, of course, the same requirements on consensus and approval as discussed in this section must be applied.

Liaison Statements can be generated at a WG, Area, or IETF level to another organization. The respective (co)chair(s) or Area Director (AD) are responsible for deciding the content and judging the level of consensus that is needed for sending the respective content. This section outlines approval requirements and gives guidance about the level of consensus that should be sought before sending a liaison statement to another organization.

Generally, it is recommended to base liaison statements on existing consensus (in the form of references to RFCs or other IETF documents) or focus on information sharing related to e.g. process like expected

timelines, rather than aiming to communicate technical matters beyond the active work of the respective group. Further, the level of consensus implied or not implied by the liaison statement should be spelled out clearly in the liaison statement itself, as this provides the most clarity and avoids potential confusion.

4.1. Approval

All liaison statements sent by any group in the IETF need AD approval to ensure that those writing such statements, who claim to be speaking on behalf of a group in the IETF, are truly representing IETF views. This does not include statements sent by the IAB, which require IAB approval. Statements sent from an area, respectively, need approval by at least one of the responsible ADs. Statements sent by the IETF or IESG require IETF Chair approval.

Sometimes it is beneficial or required to send a statement that indicates the IETF as the originator rather than a specific working group or area. This might be the case e.g. for questions related to the scope of work of the IETF as a whole rather than a specific chartered group. In this case, approval of the IETF Chair is required; however, it is usually expected that other matter experts, sometimes from the IESG or IAB, are involved in generating the content of the statement.

Statements sent by the IESG do not have different approval requirements than statements sent by the IETF: both require IETF Chair approval. This is to avoid heavy processes when sending liaison statements. However, statements from the IESG might imply there is consensus among the IESG and, as recommended earlier in this document, it is best to clarify in the statement itself if that is intended or not.

In cases where prior approval was not obtained as outlined above, and the designated authority (AD, IETF Chair, or IAB Chair) in fact does not agree with the message, the designated authority will work with the liaison manager or IAB to follow up as appropriate, including emitting a revised liaison statement if necessary. Clearly, this is a situation best avoided by assuring appropriate agreement in advance of sending the liaison message.

4.2. Level of Consensus

A liaison statement does not automatically imply any level of consensus. It is therefore the responsibility of the chairs or the responsible AD to determine whether working groups consensus should be strived for before sending a liaison statement. This is equally true for both, liaison statements initiated by the IETF as well as for liaison statements that are sent in response to a received liaison statement from another organization.

Even if the responsible chairs or ADs intend to send a liaison statement without establishing additional consensus, the originator should inform the group it represents prior to its transmission and not only when the statement is already sent and recorded.

The simplest case of sending a liaison statement from the IETF is when the information being transmitted is based on established consensus, e.g., by referencing an IETF document that has some level of agreement within the IETF, as further discussed in the next section, or general information about the process or working group scope. In such cases, where the statement is sent for pure information sharing purposes, the chairs or ADs may choose to not seek for additional consensus.

Similarly, when the IETF is working on documents that relate to peer organizations and information from the other organization is needed that is not publicly available, chairs may use Liaison Statements to request the needed information or documents from the peer organization without seeking for additional group consensus.

Other requests, that might often be initiated by a specific group discussion, such as soliciting comments for a standards track WG Internet Draft, usually benefit from some level of consensus to be reached in the WG, or another appropriate, open mailing list.

4.2.1. Handling of Incoming Requests for Actions

If an incoming liaison statement requests information that goes beyond what is documented in existing IETF documents, such as asking for comments on a document from the other organization or a specific technical question not addressed in existing RFCs, the chairs should seek group input. Usually, such a request is received on the mailing list of a group, and a discussion will occur on the mailing list where participants can provide their comments. Based on that list discussion there are two possible outcomes: * If a clear consensus is evident from the pattern of comments made to the mailing list, the (co)chair(s) can summarize the conclusions in a liaison statement reply to the originating organization. * If no clear consensus is

evident from the comments on the mailing list, or if there is no further discussion, a response is still anticipated to the originator. The reply may summarize the email comments, or indicate a lack of interest in the issue. The reply should clearly indicate that it represents "collected comments" rather than a consensus of the IETF group. It is possible to send this kind of reply even if some of the comments are contradictory.

For requests for actions received from another organization, for example, a request for initiating or stopping a work item that requires a charter change, the consensus of the receiving group within the IETF or even IETF-wide consensus is clearly necessary to fulfill the request. However, as already indicated, a liaison statement has no special standing and should be considered equal to all other inputs. Still, if there is a need for this work by the other organization the request should be considered seriously, as further discussed in Section 5.

4.3. Transmitting (References to) Documents

Any Standards Track RFC (Draft Standard, Proposed Standard, Internet Standard, BCP), and any WG document expected to be placed on the standards track, may be transmitted without concern. Informational documents may also be exchanged readily when they represent a WG position or consensus, such as a requirement or architecture document.

Individually submitted Internet Drafts, Experimental or Historical RFCs, and non-WG informational documents should not be transmitted without either developing further consensus within the relevant group or without explicitly including the context related to their state and noting that they are not documents that represent IETF consensus.

In all cases, the document status must be appropriately noted. In the case of a WG Internet Draft, it must be clear that the existence of the draft only indicates that the WG has accepted the work item and, as the standard disclaimer says, the actual content can be treated as nothing more than as 'Work in Progress'.

5. Receiving Incoming Liaison Statements

A liaison statement calls for appropriate consideration of its contents. Liaison Statements are always important to the body that sent them. Having arrived at the appropriate body, the liaison statement may be more or less important to the receiver depending on its contents and the expertise of the sender.

If the liaison statement seeks to influence the direction of a WG's development, it should receive the same consideration as any input document receives. This could be the case if a liaison statement provides input to a working group document, requests modifications, or new work, or comments on the scope of work. The WG chair may request the sender to make their case to the IETF WG in the same manner that an author of an Internet-Draft makes their case.

5.1. Responding to Incoming Requests for Actions (by the Deadline)

If a reply is requested (usually marked as "For Action"), the originating organization expects a response by the deadline. The urgency of a liaison statement is usually reflected in its deadline. A liaison statement specifying a deadline gives the receiver a finite opportunity to influence the activity of another body; if it fails to react in a timely fashion, it may miss the opportunity.

If the request itself cannot be fulfilled by the deadline, it is appropriate for the chairs to still send a response (by the deadline) and explain the process, or invite experts of the other organization to participate directly. Potential follow-up liaison statements might be sent to provide a status update, e.g. when a document gets adopted or is ready for publication.

Examples of the kinds of actions that may be requested are:

- * Access to IETF documents or information about the IETF process and timelines.
- * Comments from the IETF on a document of the other organisation.
- * Technical questions related to an RFC or working group document.
- * A request for the IETF to align its work with that of the other organization, in the case of overlapping or related work.
- * A request for the IETF to undertake a new work item.
- * A request for the IETF to stop a work item (presumably because it overlaps or conflicts with other work in the originating organization).

The originating organization should always be informed of what, if anything, the IETF has decided to do in response to the request, either by sending a formal liaison statement back or utilizing informal communication, like a simple email reply, if appropriate. If a formal liaison relationship with a liaison manager exists, it is the responsibility of the liaison manager to ensure appropriate communication. Otherwise, the IAB can be consulted and should be integrated into any additional informal communication.

There is, of course, no requirement that the IETF performs the requested action. But the request should always be taken seriously, and generally, a response is anticipated. The reply may be that the information was useful or not useful, that the requested action has been accomplished, it will be accomplished by a specified date, it will not be done for a specific reason, an answer to a question posed, or any other appropriate reply. If the IETF decides not to honor the request, or to honor it with modifications, ideally, the response should include the reasons and, if applicable, an alternate course of action.

It is the responsibility of the (co)chair(s) of the addressed group, supported by the liaison manager if one exists, to ensure that a response is generated by the deadline if a response is intended. In some cases, a liaison statement may require consideration by multiple groups within the IETF; in such cases, potentially multiple chairs and area directors have to coordinate, but ideally one of them takes the lead and responsibility for developing a response.

As discussed in Section 4.2, it is the responsibility of the chairs and ADs to decide about the necessary level of consensus needed for a certain response. As further discussed in Section 4.3, if another organization requests information that can be found in an IETF document, this can be transmitted by the (co)chair(s) of the addressed group, indicating the level of agreement for the relevant document.

6. Security Considerations

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

7. IANA Considerations

This document has no IANA actions.

Acknowledgments

[RFC4053] was authored by Stephen Trowbridge, Scott Bradner, Fred Baker. The text in RFC4053 further has been prompted by discussions with numerous individuals within the IETF and other SDOs and fora, including Gary Fishman and Bert Wijnen. It has been developed in cooperation with [RFC4052], which is to say with the express cooperation of the chair of the IAB at that time, Leslie Daigle.

This document contain parts of text from [RFC4053], however, all tooling details were removed and the remaining text will be reworked step by step with the goal to end up with a shorter and clear document that outlines requirements and gives high-level guidance to people sending and receiving liaison statements.

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Informative References

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