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Current Process for Handling RFC Errata Reports
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Abstract

This document describes the current web-based process for handling the submission, verification, and posting of errata for the RFC Series. The main concepts behind this process are (1) distributing the responsibility for verification to the appropriate organization or person for each RFC stream, and (2) using a Web portal to automate the processing of erratum reports. This system was launched in November 2007.

This draft documents the existing system as a means to facilitate discussion to revamp how errata are reported, reviewed, and publicized.

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1. Introduction

This document describes the procedures and mechanisms for handling RFC erratum reports. The main concepts are (1) distributing responsibility for report verification to the appropriate body or person for each RFC stream, and (2) using a Web portal to automate the tasks for verifying and posting erratum reports.

This process assumes the organization of RFC publication into five document streams [RFC8729]: (1) the IETF Stream, which includes both working group and individual submissions (also known as "AD Sponsored" or "non-working group" documents) plus all RFCs that were published before a formal source (e.g., working group or stream) existed or was recorded (known as legacy RFCs), (2) the IAB Stream, (3) the IRTF Stream, (4) the Independent Submission Stream, and (5) the Editorial Stream. Personnel representing each stream, called the stream-specific party (SSP), are responsible for verifying the erratum reports for that stream's RFCs.

At the organizational level, the SSPs are:

- * IESG for legacy RFCs
- * IESG for IETF Stream documents
- * IAB for IAB Stream documents
- * IRSG for IRTF Stream documents
- * Independent Submissions Editor for Independent Submission Stream documents
- * RFC Series Approval Board for Editorial Stream documents

In addition, the RFC Production Center reviews editorial errata reports from all streams and marks them as verified when possible, as per [IESG-Err-Proc-2021].

1.1. Background on RFC Errata

The RFC Production Center (RPC) began to collect and post RFC errata in 2000. A very early snapshot (<https://web.archive.org/web/20001029084225/http://www.rfc-editor.org/errata.html>) can be seen at the Wayback Machine. The idea was to discourage readers from repeatedly pointing out the same typos in published RFCs. Initially, errata were not separated into technical and editorial errata. This classification started in 2002. This evolved into an errata verification and posting process that was a manually operated, email-based task. Errata were listed on one page and grouped by RFC number. See this snapshot from 2003 (<https://web.archive.org/web/20031202151009/http://www.rfc-editor.org/cgi-bin/errata.pl>). Errata from this period have been made available in the current system and marked as Reported or Verified, as appropriate. Generally, the name of the verifier is not given as this information was not associated with errata records until the new system was put in place.

Because the number of errors reported turned out to be significantly greater than anticipated, and the process of vetting and posting required more human resources, a web-based process [ERRATA_SYS_PROPOSAL] was created and launched in November 2007.

Another reason for the current, web-based approach to handling erratum reports is that about half the reports apply to the technical contents of RFCs, and the posting of technical errata for Standards Track documents should always involve the IESG, as a matter of correct process. Technical errata may require much review and

discussion among the author(s), Area Directors, and other interested parties. (See [HOW_TO_REPORT] for guidelines regarding editorial vs. technical classification.)

We note that allowing technical errata is a slippery slope: there may be a temptation to use errata to "fix" protocol design errors, rather than to publish new RFCs that update the erroneous documents. In general, an erratum is intended to report an error in a document, rather than an error in the design of the protocol or other entity defined in the document, but this distinction may be too imprecise to avoid hard choices. For the IETF Stream, these choices are made by the IESG and are discussed in their guidelines on errata processing [IESG-Err-Proc-2021].

After consulting with the RPC in 2021, the IESG requested that the RPC perform the initial review of editorial errata reports (including the backlog of open editorial reports) and resolve those that are clearly editorial in nature [IESG-Err-Proc-2021]. The other streams adopted the same processing for editorial reports.

1.1.1. The Creation of the 'Hold For Document Update' State

When errata reports started to be collected and posted, there were only two states: Verified and Rejected.

The IESG proposed the "Held for Document Update" (HFDU) state in 2008. See [IESG-Err-Proc-2008]. HFDU initially applied to the following:

- * Things that are clearly wrong but could not cause an implementation or deployment problem
- * Trivial grammar corrections
- * Typographical errors which would not cause any confusions to implementation or deployments
- * Changes which are simply stylistic issues or simply make things read better
- * Changes that modify the working of a protocol to something that might be different from the intended consensus when the document was approved should be either Hold for Document Update or Rejected. Deciding between these two depends on judgment. In unclear situations, small changes can be Hold for Document Update.

The application of HFDU changed when the IESG updated their guidelines in 2021 (see [IESG-Err-Proc-2021]). The first three items above were moved from HFDU to Verified. Currently, HFDU applies to the following:

- * Changes that are stylistic issues or simply make things read better
- * Clearly wrong technical items that do not have a clear resolution or requires further discussion

2. Current Errata Process Using the Web Portal

To manage and automate the reporting, verifying, and posting of errata, the rfc-editor.org website provides a web application ("portal"). This web portal allows for a more uniform reporting process, eases communication among the parties responsible for verification, and automates the posting of erratum reports as soon as they are reported.

There are four possible states for an erratum report:

1. Reported - The erratum has been reported but is unverified.
2. Verified - The erratum has been edited as necessary and verified.
3. Rejected - The erratum was redundant or incorrect and has been discarded.
4. Held for Document Update - The erratum is not a necessary update to the RFC. However, it should be considered in future revisions of the RFC.

Currently, reports in all states are posted (see Section 2.3 for more details).

For more information on the states and their definitions, and the guidelines by which the IESG classifies erratum reports into the above states, see [IESG-Err-Proc-2021].

The Web interface supports the following functions:

1. Retrieve -- display all posted errata for a specific RFC number or display a particular erratum by its errata ID number.
2. Report -- report a new erratum, as described below. (See [HOW_TO_REPORT] for instructions on reporting a new erratum.)

3. Edit/Verify/Reject -- used by an SSP to edit the contents of an erratum and change its status.

The following sections describe the process in more detail.

2.1. Reporting Errata

A member of the Internet community (the "reporter") navigates to the RFC errata page [ERRATA_PAGE], enters the RFC number of the document containing the error, and clicks the Search button. All earlier erratum reports for that RFC are displayed. This includes reports of any status (Verified, Reported, Held for Document Update, and Rejected). The reporter is asked to check that the erratum does not already appear on the errata page for any given RFC. This step is to prevent multiple reports of the same error.

The reporter then reports the erratum using a Web form to create a report record in the RFC errata database. The report is composed of information provided by the reporter and is supplemented by data drawn from the primary rfc-editor.org database. The erratum report record includes the following fields:

The following information is requested from the reporter. All fields must be filled in:

- * Reporter name
- * Reporter email address (Note that the address is provided for communication purposes with the relevant SSPs and authors, but it is not displayed in the online erratum report.)
- * Publication format: Text, PDF, HTML (This field is present for only RFC 8650 and higher.)
- * Type: editorial, technical
- * Section #
- * Original text
- * Corrected text
- * Notes

The reporter is asked to make a judgment on the erratum type -- technical vs. editorial. If the reporter has both editorial and technical errors in the same RFC, the two classes of errata must be entered as separate reports. This initial classification is useful

to the SSP; for example, it might allow technical errata to be processed with higher priority than editorial errata, and it allows the RPC to verify editorial erratum reports and to note frequent editorial errors that could possibly lead to improvements in the editorial process.

With the aid of published guidelines (see [HOW_TO_REPORT]), the reporter should make the right technical/editorial classification. However, if the reporter does misclassify the report, the SSP can fix the classification when logged in as a verifier.

The reporter should enter a new erratum using the Original and Corrected Text fields, as this allows for easier verification. The reporter can use the free-text Notes field to provide the rationale or to describe those errata that cannot easily be put into the Original/Corrected format.

When the reporter submits the report, they are shown a preview of it. They can choose to edit the report, cancel, or submit. They must successfully navigate a reCAPTCHA in order to complete the report submission.

The information provided by the reporter is supplemented by information pulled from the database:

- * Errata ID number
- * RFC title and associated draft string (if available)
- * Publication Date
- * Author(s)
- * Category ("status") of RFC
- * Source (working group name, IETF - NON WORKING GROUP, IAB, IRTF, INDEPENDENT, or Editorial)
- * Area (for IETF Stream)
- * Stream (IETF, IAB, IRTF, INDEPENDENT, or Editorial)
- * Verifying Party (SSP Identity)
- * URL to the distinct erratum report

When a report is successfully submitted, a notification is sent via email (see Section 2.2), and the report is posted to the rfc-editor.org website (see Section 2.3).

2.2. Notification of Open Reports

Submitting the report triggers an email notification message to multiple parties; see the notification lists below. Including multiple parties facilitates cooperation in verifying the error and transparency in the process.

Notifications are determined by stream and type of erratum report and are sent by rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org to the following SSPs.

Note that while SSP email addresses are maintained by the database, author email addresses, especially for older RFCs, are often out of date. In these cases, the SSP has the option of seeking current author contact information or relying on other individuals with knowledge of the subject matter to help determine the validity of the erratum report.

2.2.1. Technical Erratum Reports

Technical erratum reports are sent to SSPs, and the reporter and rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org are CCed.

Legacy RFCs:

- * To: IESG
- * CC: reporter, rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org

IETF Stream (working group):

- * To: authors, ADs of the area from which the document came, document shepherd
- * CC: reporter, working group, rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org

IETF Stream (non-working group):

- * To: IESG, authors
- * CC: reporter, rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org

IAB Stream:

- * To: authors, IAB

- * CC: reporter, rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org

IRTF Stream:

- * To: authors, IRSG

- * CC: reporter, rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org, research group

Independent Submission Stream:

- * To: authors, ISE

- * CC: reporter, rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org

Editorial Stream:

- * To: authors, RSAB

- * CC: reporter, rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org, RSWG

2.2.1.1. Monthly Summary Messages

At the beginning of each month, an email message is sent to all SSPs that has the following information organized by Stream and Area:

- * Counts of open technical reports

- * Links to verifier pages

- * Links to the public lists of open technical reports

2.2.2. Editorial Erratum Reports

All editorial erratum reports are sent to rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org, and other SSPs are CCed:

Legacy RFCs:

- * To: rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org

- * CC: reporter

IETF Stream (working group):

- * To: rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org

- * CC: reporter, authors, working group

IETF Stream (non-working group):

- * To: rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org
- * CC: reporter, authors

IAB Stream:

- * To: rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org
- * CC: reporter, authors, IAB

IRTF Stream:

- * To: rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org
- * CC: reporter, authors, research group

Independent Submission Stream:

- * To: rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org
- * CC: reporter, authors

Editorial Stream:

- * To: rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org
- * CC: reporter, authors, RSWG

The message includes the information listed in Section 2.1.

2.3. Posting Erratum Reports

As soon as an erratum report is submitted, it is available online as described below. The erratum report is marked Reported until its state is updated by verifiers as described in Section 2.4. Duplicate and junk reports are available and marked as Reported only until they are deleted from the database by the RPC.

In this document, posting an erratum report means that:

- * The report can be discovered through the RFC errata search page: <https://www.rfc-editor.org/errata.php> (<https://www.rfc-editor.org/errata.php>).
- * A link to the RFC's errata page appears on the following:

- the results of the RFC search engine: <https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfcsearch.html> (<https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfcsearch.html>).
- the RFC's info page. For example, see <https://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc2119> (<https://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc2119>).
- On the HTML format of the RFC. For example, <https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc2119.html> (<https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc2119.html>).
- On the datatracker status page for the RFC. For example, <https://datatracker.ietf.org/doc/rfc2119/> (<https://datatracker.ietf.org/doc/rfc2119/>). The datatracker learns that at least one erratum report exists via <https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc-index.xml> (<https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc-index.xml>) and sets a badge on the RFC's datatracker status page.

All erratum reports for a single RFC, except for obvious spam reports, are posted in the following order:

- * Verified Technical
- * Verified Editorial
- * Held for Document Update Technical
- * Held for Document Update Editorial
- * Rejected Technical
- * Rejected Editorial
- * Reported Technical
- * Reported Editorial

All erratum reports are also available at <https://www.rfc-editor.org/errata.json> (<https://www.rfc-editor.org/errata.json>).

2.4. Verifying Erratum Reports

The initial notification message starts the verification process.

The RPC determines the validity of editorial erratum reports and also handles any junk or duplicate reports, whether they are labeled as editorial or technical.

Junk erratum reports contain bogus content in the Original text, Corrected text, and/or Notes fields. The RPC deletes such a report from the database and sends an email message to all recipients of the report notification, except for the reporter, notifying them that the report has been deleted.

If an erratum report duplicates an existing report, the RPC deletes the report and sends a reply-all to the notification message to say the report has been deleted.

The SSP and the authors are expected to determine the validity of any technical erratum report, by whatever procedure the SSP or the stream owner determines.

The RPC does not track the verification process for technical erratum reports. The SSP, not the author(s) or the RPC, has final responsibility for verifying or rejecting each technical erratum report. This helps to avoid a great deal of complexity and confusion.

Each SSP has a login account on the errata portal to edit and verify erratum reports. The SSP identity is added to the record and the individual is able to edit, verify, hold, or reject each erratum.

The Notes field allows reporters to submit information in any fashion they like, so there is a possibility of multiple errors being reported in this field. The SSP is able to split the report into multiple records to maintain one record per erratum report, as necessary.

Some erratum reports require significant email discussion between the reporter and the author(s) and/or SSPs (in particular, the IESG) before the final decision on a report can be made. The final outcome is captured in the erratum entry, and any controversy or explanatory material is recorded in the Notes field.

Once verified, the erratum is available for viewing in the RFC's HTML format "inline" (for example, see <https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/inline-errata/rfc3261.html> (<https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/inline-errata/rfc3261.html>)) in addition to being on the RFC's errata page and discoverable through errata search functionality.

In addition, once a report is verified, it is locked against further updates to ensure the stability of the report. However, sometimes there are mistakes in the report that need correction. In this case, the RFC Editor can update the report as requested by an SSP or can grant an SSP temporary write access to the report that needs to be updated.

2.5. Erratum Report Announcements

Like the notification of submissions, the announcement of a verified (or held or rejected) erratum report varies by stream and type of erratum report.

2.5.1. Technical Erratum Reports

The announcement of technical erratum reports are sent from `rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org` to the following:

Legacy RFCs:

- * To: reporter, authors
- * CC: verifier, IESG, `rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org`

IETF Stream (working group):

- * To: reporter, authors
- * CC: verifier, IESG, working group, IANA, `rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org`

IETF Stream (non-working group):

- * To: reporter, authors
- * CC: verifier, IESG, IANA, `rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org`

IAB Stream:

- * To: reporter, authors
- * CC: verifier, IAB, IAB chair, `rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org`

IRTF Stream:

- * To: reporter, authors
- * CC: verifier, IRSG, research group, IANA, `rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org`

Independent Submission Stream:

- * To: reporter, authors
- * CC: verifier, ISE, Document Shepherd, IANA, rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org

Editorial Stream:

- * To: reporter, authors
- * CC: verifier, RSAB, RSWG, IANA, rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org

2.5.2. Editorial Erratum Reports

The announcement of verified editorial erratum reports are sent from rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org to the following:

Legacy RFCs:

- * To: reporter, author
- * CC: verifier, rfc-ed@rfc-editor.org, IESG, IANA

IETF Stream (working group):

- * To: reporter, authors
- * CC: verifier, rfc-ed@rfc-editor.org, IESG, working group, IANA

IETF Stream (non-working group):

- * To: reporter, authors
- * CC: verifier, rfc-ed@rfc-editor.org, IESG, IANA

IAB Stream:

- * To: reporter, authors
- * CC: verifier, rfc-ed@rfc-editor.org, IAB, IAB chair

IRTF Stream:

- * To: reporter, authors
- * CC: verifier, rfc-ed@rfc-editor.org, IRSG, research group, IANA

Independent Submission Stream:

- * To: reporter, authors
- * CC: verifier, rfc-ed@rfc-editor.org, ISE, IANA

Editorial Stream:

- * To: reporter, authors
- * CC: verifier, RSAB, RSWG, IANA, rfc-ed@rfc-editor.org

3. Role of the RPC

The role of the RPC in errata processing is to:

1. Operate the Web portal.
2. Maintain the errata database.
3. Make changes in previously posted errata at the request of the corresponding SSP, or give the SSP temporary write access to the record.
4. Act as verifier for editorial erratum reports.
5. Remove junk and duplicate reports.
6. Track SSP and community requests for various features that will make the job of reporting and verifying errata more efficient.

4. Security Considerations

It is necessary to have access control in order to process erratum reports. A logged-in SSP is able to edit, verify, or reject any erratum report on an RFC that is the product of their stream. Once the SSP has submitted an erratum's final state (Verified, Held, or Rejected) and the record entry has been committed to the erratum database, the SSP loses write access to it. This is to prevent inadvertent or malicious changes to the database, even if the passwords for some SSP logins may become fairly widely known. However, the RPC continues to have write access to posted entries and can make later changes if necessary.

The portal uses HTTPS as a reasonably secure login mechanism. Also, the rfc-editor.org website has a signed certificate from a CA, so that SSPs have confidence that they are logging into the rfc-editor.org website.

5. IANA Considerations

This document has no IANA actions.

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