



I E T F®

Second Internet Administrative Support Activity version 2.0 (IASA2) Retrospective Report

Released by the IETF Administration LLC

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Reason for This Document

BCP 101 / RFC 8711 specifies a requirement to conduct a [three-year retrospective](#) of the IETF Administrative Support Activity version 2.0 (IASA2). That was completed in 2021 (https://www.ietf.org/media/documents/IASA2_Retrospective.pdf), and the first recommendation in that report was that additional retrospectives should occur every three years (see below).

This is the second IASA2 retrospective, and future retrospectives should be published in 2027, 2030, 2033, and so on every three years.

The IETF LLC should conduct a regular assessment of the IASA structure and IETF LLC every three years, with a report to the IETF community in the final IETF meeting of each of those years. Based on this IASA2 retrospective being completed in 2021, the next IASA assessments should occur in 2024, 2027, 2030, 2033, and so on.

The point of performing a regular assessment is that the IETF's way of working and its needs will continue to evolve, while the external environment will also change. Thus, periodically checking in to see whether there are structural, process, financial, operational, legal, or other administrative adaptations are needed makes sense. As well, by making small changes on an incremental basis, the risks associated with each change is likely to be smaller because the changes are correspondingly smaller, and there is a regular check-in every three years at which point the IETF can assess the effectiveness of any change so that modest course corrections can be made. Finally, keeping up with internal and external changes may also potentially help the IETF avoid large once-a-decade administrative structure changes that are multi-year efforts like IASA2 - and this is not only a time-saver but also lets IETF leaders and participants remain more focused on the core standards work of the IETF.

In addition, as the IETF evolves how the organization wishes to work and meet in a post-COVID world, such as potentially changing meeting frequency, reducing in-person venue size requirements, shifting to hybrid meetings, and so on, the IETF LLC will need to adapt to provide the necessary administrative, operational, legal, financial, and other support to meet the changing needs of the IETF.

Note on Form

In the first IASA2 retrospective, we reviewed a list of 62 requirements. Most of those were met, so in order to reduce the length of this document and focus on what has changed since 2021, we will not reproduce the full list here. The original IASA2 retrospective is available at https://www.ietf.org/media/documents/IASA2_Retrospective.pdf.

Review of Key Issues, Requirements and Responsibilities

Sponsorships and Donations to the IETF LLC

1. **Requirement:** Fundraising. The IETF LLC is responsible for raising money on behalf of the IETF.

Status:  In Progress

Comments: This remains a significant focus of the IETF LLC.

Sponsorship income has been stable but has not dramatically increased to the extent hoped. To try to increase sponsorship funding, the IETF LLC has modernized our sponsorship offerings by creating [new programs](#), such as Diversity & Inclusion, Running Code and Sustainability. However, existing sponsorship revenues remain a risk as some traditional IETF sponsor companies reduce their standards-related spending.

Donations to the IETF Endowment have been disappointing. As a result, the IETF LLC eliminated a staff role and redesigned its fundraising approach to be sector-specific and targeted rather than general. Board attention on and prioritization of this activity should continue to be high. It may require additional staff, contractor, or other resources to reach its full potential.

IETF Meeting Revenues

2. **Requirement:** Meeting revenues are another important source of funding that supports the IETF, coming mainly from the fees paid by IETF meeting participants. The IETF Executive Director sets those meeting fees, in consultation with other IETF LLC staff and the IETF community, with approval by the IETF LLC Board. Setting these fees and projecting the number of participants at future meetings are a key part of the annual budget process.

Status:  In Progress

Comments: Since 2020, driven by the COVID pandemic, more people have remotely participated in IETF meetings and to provide a good experience, the IETF has invested in technical tools to provide a good experience for those participants. The IETF LLC has adjusted in-person registration fees and introduced remote participation fees in order to maintain a consistent level of funding that partly covers the cost of meetings and associated costs (such as the Secretariat). Registration income is still down from pre-COVID times and continues to fluctuate but the underlying trend is one of improvement.

At the same time, the employers of some IETF participants have sought to control or reduce travel-related expenses for meetings, and there are an increasing number of self-funded, grant-funded and not-for-profit-funded participants who have the same aim. This has prompted a range of questions about the IETF's approach to meetings, including the cost of where we meet, how to maximize the benefits when we do meet, what form of funding support the IETF can provide to IETF participants, and whether the three meeting per year cadence remains the best operating model for the IETF. These issues must be addressed, if at all, by the IESG; the IETF LLC would then operationalize any change in approach to the conduct of meetings. The IESG may therefore wish to conduct a community assessment to determine whether any future changes are appropriate.

IETF Technical Tools

3. **Requirement:** Improve the IETF's Technical Environment.

Status:  Ongoing / Major Improvements Delivered and In Progress

Comments: This remains a key focus for the IETF LLC, as there continues to be technical debt that needs to be addressed, and the IETF wishes to move towards more modern software architecture, systems architecture, software development practices and user-centered design. Currently there are two major elements to the work. The first is implementing the new [IT services infrastructure strategy](#) that was agreed with the community after consultation. This involves separating out services, moving them into the cloud and through significantly enhanced instrumentation, tuning their performance to match community expectations. The second element is rewriting the many applications used by the community to provide more features, modern UIs, better performance and a consistent architecture, addressing the many issues raised by the community over the years.

Resourcing is no longer a limiting factor and the IETF LLC has invested in three further senior developers since the last review. This step was not taken lightly and only committed to when very few bids were received in response to our RFPs for software development services.

With the growth of the internal team and the rapid progress in some areas, greater care is now being taken to check with the community that the LLC is delivering the changes that the community has prioritized. The Tools Team has a monthly virtual interim and the format of those calls has switched from asking for questions, to explicitly asking people to review development plans and provide feedback on priorities and the new public [Tools Roadmap](#).

Other Gaps

Legal Risks (Action Needed – Plan Community Consultation on Ombudsteam Topic)

The IETF LLC is responsible, on behalf of the IETF, for legal compliance, which includes managing legal risks and third-party legal activity. Since 2018, this has included things such as responding to subpoenas, initiating litigation to recover debt and responding to threats of litigation. This recent experience has identified two important gaps that need to be resolved.

First, is how the IETF as a whole responds when a third-party makes a credible threat of litigation against the IETF or initiates litigation against the IETF. In these cases, the best practice is to minimize risk by only communicating with the litigant through counsel. However, with an organization as distributed and volunteer-based as the IETF, it is not clear how this affects the roles and activity of such groups as the IESG or Ombudsteam when communication with or engaging with third-parties that have threatened or are engaged in litigation against the IETF.

To address this first gap, we propose consulting with the IESG, IAB, IRTF, Ombudsteam, and any other parts of the IETF to agree a legal protocol to be used to communicate with a third-party who makes a credible threat of litigation or initiates litigation, and to document this in an official IETF LLC policy. As with other policies, this would be developed with community input.

Second, the work of the Ombudsteam function can have significant legal implications for the IETF. For example, if the Ombudsteam excludes an individual from any part of the IETF process then that person, or their employer, may litigate this decision. However, under the current operating practices defined in [RFC 7776](#), the Ombudsteam is required to keep their decisions confidential and so IETF LLC Board does not have any visibility into those possible legal issues and risks, and is therefore unable to properly implement risk management procedures. This issue remains even though [RFC 8716 / BCP 25](#) updated RFC 7776, because that update was not substantive (the name of the IAOC function was simply updated to the IETF LLC).

To address the second gap, we propose to initiate a community proceeding to update RFCs pertaining to the Ombudsteam function to enable information sharing with the IETF LLC in order to allow the IETF LLC to properly discharge its duty to manage legal risk.

Suitability of the IETF NomCom for the IETF LLC & IETF Trust (Action Needed – BoF)

The first IASA2 retrospective ([see pages 9 - 10](#)) highlighted a concern over the suitability of the IETF NomCom for selecting IETF LLC board members. This concern remains and should be addressed by scheduling a BoF at a future IETF meeting to discuss the issue and identify potential alternatives, such as a new nominating committee solely focused on the selection of board members for the IETF LLC and IETF Trust. Such a new committee might be comprised from a pool of prior IETF LLC and IETF Trust/IETF Intellectual Property Management board members, prior IETF chairs, etc. and would need to include a means to include IETF community directional input equivalent to what is provided by the current IETF NomCom.

RFC Production Center (Action Needed – Investment in Tools Modernization & Efficiency Improvement)

The [RFC Production Center](#) (RPC) edits documents and creates Requests for Comment (RFC). Publishing RFCs is the output of the IETF standards process (and similar processes), and as such is a critical productivity metric for the IETF LLC in operating the IETF. These are metrics such as the volume of RFCs published over time and how long it takes the RPC to edit and publish RFCs once they have entered their work queue.

For quite some time, the RPC [has not met the Service Level Agreement \(SLA\) targets](#) established by the IETF. One reason can be attributed to the age and complexity of the publishing tools used by the RPC, most of which are several decades old. The IETF LLC is investing in a complete rewrite of these tools, but supporting that project is stretching limited RPC resources. A second reason is attributable to the changes introduced by [RFCXML v3](#), which has significantly increased the work the RPC is required to carry out pre-publication. The third reason can be attributed to the ongoing requests for the RPC to support GitHub and Markdown editing, now used extensively by many Working Groups.

In addition, the whole RFC Editor function has been going through a major change, with the new RFC Editor model in [RFC 9280](#) that introduced the RFC Series Working Group (RSWG) and RFC Advisory Board (RSAB), and removing the RFC Series Editor (RSE) role. This change has brought the RPC closer to the IETF community by giving it more responsibility for editing decisions, more direct contact with community members who want different services, and more direct community reporting requirements. Ultimately, these developments acknowledge the integral and vital role of the RPC, but they have put the RPC leadership in a difficult position as arms-length contractors.

As a result, the IETF LLC needs to provide additional operational direction and support to the RPC, including establishing internal workflow metrics, and investing in significant improvements to the technical tools used by the RPC to perform their work. This should have positive upstream effects over document publishing tools, which should become easier to use and ensure that the RPC is provided with consistently high-quality document input.

The IETF LLC expects to announce steps being taken in this area soon. For the next retrospective in 2027, the community should expect significant improvements to have been made in the RPC.

IETF Secretariat – Managing Director Role (Action Needed – Write New Internet Draft)

Prior to the IASA2 changes, the only IETF staffer was the then IAD. The outsourced IETF Secretariat worked directly for the community in certain places/processes as specified in RFCs. RFC 8717, one of the IASA2 outputs, partially maintained this by creating the new role of "Managing Director, IETF Secretariat" (MD) and updated a number of RFCs that included the old concept of "Executive Director" to now refer to that MD role. Separately, RFC 8711, which created the IETF LLC and the IETF Executive Director role, put the IETF LLC and IETF Executive Director in charge of all contractors and their work, including the IETF Secretariat.

With the implementation of IASA2, the dynamic around administrative support changed in two key ways. The first of these was the development of a broad leadership role for

the IETF Executive Director driven both by community expectations, and the needs of the IETF Secretariat. The second was the switch for processes that were defined as being handled by a particular individual, to being delivered by a team, generally involving both the Secretariat and the LLC and often supported by new tools. There is no longer a clear boundary between the IETF LLC and the IETF Secretariat for much of the operational support of the IETF - which is a positive outcome of IASA2. This would appear to obviate the need for a special Managing Director role.

The IETF LLC proposes to address this by requesting the IETF to publish a new RFC that replaces references to the IETF Secretariat with the more generic term 'IASA' and removes any references to individual administrative support roles that do not require a nominated individual to deliver them.

IETF Meeting Network (Action Needed – BoF)

Operating the network to support an IETF meeting is a significant undertaking and is at the core of people's meeting experience. Today, we rely on some contractors to lead the deployment and operation of the network, supported by volunteers from the IETF community. There are a range of costs that are associated with the meeting network, some of which may be related to supporting things that the community does not want or need. Alternatively, there may be things the network does not provide that the community would like to add.

It seems like this is a good opportunity to convene a BoF session to discuss the community's future expectations for the meeting network. These expectations can then be used to create technical requirements that the IETF meeting network team can consider for future meetings.

Realistically Describing IETF Functions (No Action – Informational)

The IETF LLC has observed over time that there is sometimes difficulty within the IETF community in understanding the true legal structure and operation of the IETF. This can sometimes be seen via the expression within the IETF community of some informal views that certain functions or parts of the IETF are totally independent of the IETF. This is not in fact the case, and it can hinder a clear understanding and discussion of critical IETF matters and decisions about the future of the IETF.

The IETF LLC is the legal, financial and administrative home of the IETF; there are no other legal entities. The core functions of the IETF structure today include the IAB, IESG, IRTF, RSE, RPC, and so on. None of those organizations are legally independent of the IETF LLC. Further details are defined in BCP 11 ([RFC 9281](#)).

However, the IETF Trust (and its restructured form known as the IPM or IETF Intellectual Property Management) is a separate nonprofit legal entity which holds and manages intellectual property rights using in the IETF process and published works. [IETF IPMC bylaws](#). The IETF LLC budget includes supporting funds provided to the IETF Trust listed as a discrete line item in the [IETF LLC's annual budget](#).

Community Comments (No Action)

The IETF LLC also asked an open-ended question of the IETF community, seeking suggestions on any additional administrative, financial, legal, or operational gaps; areas of improvement; and any areas of under-specification or over-specification in IASA2 documents that the IETF LLC Board, IETF Secretariat, IETF Executive Director, or the IETF community perceive that have not already been addressed in prior sections of this document. No comments were received in this area that have not already been addressed in prior sections of this document.

Future IASA2 Retrospective Reports (Action Needed in 2027)

Continue performing a regular assessment of the IASA structure and IETF LLC every three years, with a report to the IETF community in the final IETF meeting of each of those years. The next IASA assessments should occur in 2027, 2030, 2033, and so on.

Notes

1 Paraphrased

from: <https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc8711.html#name-board-design-goals>