

IETF LLC 2021 Strategic Planning Retreat Minutes

Conducted Online
23-24 March 2021

Day One - 23 March 2021

Board:

Maja Andjelkovic
Lars Eggert
Jason Livingood
Sean Turner
Peter Van Roste

Secretariat & Staff:

Jay Daley
Alexa Morris
Laura Nugent
Greg Wood
Sean Croghan

Guests:

Barbara Stark (Fundraising section only)
Brad Biddle, IETF Counsel

Scribe:

Liz Flynn

Administrative Notes: Due to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, this retreat was held online. In addition, the majority of the agenda was open to public participation. In advance of the meeting, the Board invited advance comments and input from the community (none was received). The Board also invited live comments from public participants during the meeting itself.

1. Conflict of Interest Declarations:

None.

2. Community Engagement & Transparency

The feedback to the Board on engagement in the 2020 annual satisfaction survey was generally positive, indicating the general view that the Board is doing well here (though there were not a large number of respondents). In contrast to the survey results, the recent IETF-110 report from the recently concluded NomCom was that the LLC should provide more opportunities to engage with the community and to generally be more available.

The LLC will continue to find ways to achieve our goal of radical transparency. Although the LLC regularly solicits engagement in ways like open sections of all Board meetings, asking for questions and comments in advance of this retreat, soliciting direct feedback via the end-of-year 2020 survey, and holding office hours during IETF meetings, there has not been much engagement yet by the community side.

The Board will continue to provide such opportunities in the future and the Board expressed hope that with an eventual return to in-person meetings, engagement may increase as a result of the opportunity of in-person interactions such as informal hallway discussions, coffee breaks, shared meals, etc.

Some specific ideas for further improvement were discussed, such as inviting certain individuals to Board meetings for short presentations or discussions. For example, the Board could invite a community member who may want to present details of an interesting project they are working on, a volunteer may wish to share operational details of their work, or someone who has raised an issue on a mailing list and may want to discuss it with the LLC. The objective is for the Board to become better informed about some of the detailed work of the IETF and explore whether/how the LLC might allocate additional resources or other support in future budgets, and expressly not to try to assert detailed oversight of the work of community members.

In addition, Board members discussed participating more actively in administration-related mailing list discussions on lists like SHMOO.

* Actions:

- Lars and/or Jay will alert the Board if their input may be specifically helpful in SHMOO or another list discussion.
- The Board will keep an eye out for opportunities to have community members present at future Board meetings.

3. IASA2 Retrospective Part 1 - Planning

BCP 101 / RFC 8711 requires a [three year assessment](#): "The IETF LLC, with the involvement of the community, shall conduct and complete an assessment of the structure, processes, and

operation of IASA 2.0 and the IETF LLC. This should be presented to the community after a period of roughly three years of operation. The assessment may potentially include recommendations for improvements or changes to the IASA 2.0 and/or IETF LLC." November 2021 is the three year mark, so we have a few months to design the assessment process & complete this work.

The Board discussed several ideas, including whether or not the assessment should be done by an independent auditor, the LLC itself, or any combination thereof. As a first step, the LLC will talk with some of the original IASA2 design team and document editors to discuss their original visions for this assessment and what they think it should look like now. Then the community can be consulted on the proposed assessment process.

The Board then moved on from a discussion of how to conduct the assessment to potential gaps and areas of improvement. Jason identified a few potential areas which could be improved. One area for improvement was how the LLC Board and Trust are selected by the Nomcom. There has been some Nomcom feedback that it's difficult for the Nomcom to fill those seats because its members don't necessarily have the same experience with the desired skill set that they do for area directors or IAB members. There is also an option for the Board to add more members, so part of the assessment process may be discussing whether the Board has the right number of people with the right experiences. The Board agreed that a mix of backgrounds and IETF experiences is useful and that the IASA2 process sought to have a mix of people close to the IETF community as well as independent Board members, and that this was also a Board best practice. But it appears to have been under-specified in the IASA2 documents so it may be an area of improvement.

One related idea was to try to explain to the community why independent viewpoints are important for any Board and for the IETF LLC in particular. It was suggested that Peter could write a blog post about his experience coming into the Board as a non-IETFer.

Some other areas for improved clarity were mentioned. The interaction between the LLC and IESG in terms of strategy can be confusing, especially for outsiders, and some further demarcation of the LLC responsibilities may be needed. There also may be some overlap with the new EMODIR in terms of outreach and participant-oriented activities that might need clarification.

* Actions:

- Jason to email original IASA2 design team members and document editors for their input, prior to circulating a draft proposal for community comment.
- Peter volunteered to write a blog post from his perspective as an independent "outsider" serving on the Board. This could be timed to coincide with the assessment and collection of community input on this issue.
- A potential timeframe might be:
 - Community input on the assessment process: April-May 2021
 - Conduct the assessment: June-September 2021

- Develop report to the community: October 2021
- Present the report: November 2021 at IETF-112

4. Fundraising

Jay provided a status report on hiring the fundraiser. The final round of interviews have been scheduled, with Alexa, Lars, and Jason set to have brief interviews with the leading candidate. A projected on-boarding date of late April or early May 2021 is projected.

The Board discussed the current 2021 financial targets for fundraising and agreed that one of the first tasks of the fundraising lead will be to develop their own plan based on their experience and eventually to present this to the Board.

As it currently stands, the FY 2021 goal is to raise \$500,000. The matching funds from ISOC should significantly help our fundraising efforts. It seems likely that the first few years will be focused on filling the funnel of potential donors, which will bear fruit in three to five years. Donors may include existing IETF supporters, high net worth individuals, individual charitable trusts, foundations, non-profit organizations, government or other grant funds, and so on. It is expected that the Board will need to help develop or validate prospective donor lists, join pitch meetings as requested by the fundraiser, make introductions, and support this work in other ways.

5. IASA2 Retrospective Part 2 - IETF Trust Legal Structure

This discussion was held during a closed session limited to the Board, support staff and IETF counsel Brad Biddle. The group discussed matters relating to the legal structure of and relationship between the LLC and Trust.

Brad explained that Trust members are personally financially liable for the work of the Trust. Jason noted that the LLC board has previously heard from the Trust that they are reportedly having difficulty obtaining additional liability insurance, which is a concern for them. It was noted that this could in the future limit the number of people willing to serve or continuing to serve on the Trust. The Trust is well aware of these issues and has been considering for the past year or two what may be some alternative structures to eliminate this liability concern.

The Board also discussed the IASA2 retrospective and how it related to the Trust. Prior to IASA2, the members of the IAOC and Trust were the same but post-IAASA2 they are different. This appears to bring some benefits, such as having a Trust with specific IPR and trademark expertise, but may also have inadvertently created some gaps with the new LLC structure. It was also noted that the NomCom has faced challenges assessing potential Trust candidates, as with LLC candidates, earlier in this meeting. As a result, the Board agreed to add this to the list of issues for community feedback during the IASA2 assessment.

Finally, the Board also discussed the history of how the Trust was formed in 2005 in an agreement between CNRI and ISOC. This led to discussion of some additional stakeholders that should be consulted on any Trust-related matters. That agreement became fully amendable by the IETF Trust alone in 2010. An additional agreement was made in 2016 with ICANN pertaining to the IANA function. As a result, the Board acknowledged the importance of seeking community input on the current structure as well as any potential changes as part of the IASA2 retrospective process.

It was agreed that the Board should be very clear that there are no decisions being made to change the relationship between the IETF LLC and IETF Trust - merely that we'd like to solicit feedback on issues related to this during the IASA2 retrospective, which is of course only an assessment.

* Actions:

- Jason will confirm with Glenn that we will ask for input about this subject during the IASA2 retrospective.
- Lars will talk with Ted, Russ, and Glenn about the Trust and report back to the rest of the Board.
- Brad will reach out to Patrice (CNRI) and potentially other stakeholders to advise them that the IETF will soon begin the IASA2 retrospective and that as part of this assessment may ask the community for input regarding the relationship between the IETF LLC and the IETF Trust.

6. Wrap Up

The Board discussed the need to review and revise the SWOT/PESTL assessment that was conducted previously.

* Actions:

- Jason to identify a 45 minute time slot in an upcoming Board meeting for this activity, potentially in May 2021.
- Peter will once again facilitate this assessment.
- Peter will share the prior assessment with Lars, since he is new to the Board. [Complete]

Day Two - 24 March 2021

Board:

Maja Andjelkovic
Lars Eggert
Jason Livingood
Sean Turner

Peter Van Roste

Secretariat & Staff:

Jay Daley
Alexa Morris
Laura Nugent
Greg Wood
Sean Croghan

Guests:

Alvaro Retana

Scribe:

Liz Flynn

1. Conflicts of Interest

None.

2. Improving Diversity & Inclusion

A few efforts are already underway in the IETF to improve diversity and inclusion (D&I). A new proposed working group called TERM (Effective Terminology in IETF Documents) will be working on a document related to inclusive language. Authors of another document are examining potential barriers to participation in the IETF and the Board discussed this in our last meeting on the OFAC issue about which they had asked. The community has expressed a potentially quite broad definition of diversity, inclusive of more typical criteria but which may also include items whether someone is in a developed or developing country, type of technical background, whether someone has or can write software, whether someone has operational experience, educational level and background, language, manner of funding, and more.

While it's useful to see what problems IETF participants think exist, not all of them are solvable by the LLC. Rather, the LLC can provide support or resources and for the work being performed by or requested by the community, IESG, etc. At the same time, D&I issues pose both risks and opportunities for the future of the IETF, so it is appropriate for the Board to remain focused and engaged on these issues.

Jay has been thinking about how to document the IETF participant journey, capturing the multiple entry and exit points people have. This is something that the Education, Mentoring and Outreach Directorate (EMODIR) can hopefully help with as well, with community oversight and

leadership. The Board expressed an interest to learn more about EMODIR and will ask someone to brief the Board at a future meeting.

Another difficulty when discussing how to improve diversity in the IETF is that we do not have much data about what the IETF community currently looks like. Jay has been developing a community survey which is planned for April. The optional survey will be sent to every IETF mailing list and will be a broad demographics and perception survey. We want to know a few aggregated/anonymous personal demographics of participants, like gender, ethnicity, and region, as well as how people are able to participate (i.e. funded by an employer, self-funded, etc).

A new sponsorship category for D&I will be focused on funding some existing and new efforts, like the Systers, fee waivers, and onsite childcare when we return to in-person meetings.

A refactored EMODIR group, which is subsuming the existing EDU Team, will also have a role to play here. The LLC will help with resources for EMODIR where they can. Lars also pointed out that he would like to see some continuous data gathering happening in conjunction with EMODIR activities, so we can find out what works for participants and newcomers, what doesn't work, and what can improve.

Alvaro Retana pointed out that while diversity is important and discussed a lot, he feels that inclusion is more important. If we gather a diverse group of people but don't listen to what they need or what ideas they have, we're not really making them part of the organization. The IETF needs to be more deliberate about making sure more diverse voices are not just present, but heard and included. He suggested gathering input from existing resources like the Systers and some casual regional groups and making sure everyone has a chance to share their views.

Lars added that we should not forget about Colin Perkins and the IRTF, as they have a lot of unique ways to involve newcomers and be as inclusive and accessible as possible. Not everything the IRTF does can be useful to the IETF because of their specific context, but it's an area where we regularly see new participants and there may be ideas there that could work for the IETF as well.

Greg has been working with the EMODIR and suggested that we think about more activities that aren't necessarily based around IETF meetings. We can improve introductory materials to encourage participation that don't rely on meeting attendance. Greg has also been working on training for WG chairs related to D&I.

Lars suggested that, if the tooling permits, we can improve the automatic message new subscribers receive from Mailman when they sign up for their first IETF list (sort of a "first time user experience"). For example, we can include some pointers to get started and make the template email a little friendlier & more informative to newcomers.

Another question is how to assess progress on D&I in the future. One way this issue has been historically raised was looking at NomCom candidates or final slates. But this is rather far down the pipeline of participation. To broaden the funnel to that pipeline likely means attracting more new participants, improving retention of participants over time, new document authors/editors, and new WG chairs.

* Actions:

- Jay to determine how we could technically identify a unique new email list subscriber (e.g. new participant).
- Lars to contemplate the content of any welcome email to be ready once Jay has investigated the technical work.
- Jay to conduct the IETF-wide survey on engagement in the next 1 - 2 months.

3. Post-COVID Return to Normal

The consultation for whether to move IETF-111 online will finish on April 2. Corporate travel policies alone mean that it's highly unlikely the San Francisco venue will pass the assessment in April. The cancellation clause with the hotel is generous and we can rebook the venue for another time in the future - or potentially cancel it completely without penalty and choose a different North American venue in the future ([noting prior community feedback on this issue](#)). We are already contracted to hold IETF-117 at this venue.

The SHMOO working group began before COVID, but much of the recent meeting survey feedback has indicated that participants are impatient to return to in-person meetings and there does not seem to be much general support from the community to reduce from three meetings per year.

Across the industry, nobody is sure yet what a return to in-person meetings will look like, but venues are eager for business to return and are implementing lots of safety measures. For our next in-person meeting we will work with the IETF community, Secretariat, and venue to determine new guidelines and potential actions for things like temperature/symptom checks at entry points - possibly leveraging a mobile app, handwashing/sanitation stations, contact tracing, participant spacing, methods of food service and what types of breaks are prudent, on-site rapid testing, on-site or on-call medical support (doctor/nurse), pre-planned arrangements for potential quarantine, among many other issues. Budgeting is based on pre-COVID assumptions and it's too soon to tell what financial impact post-COVID meetings will have until these issues become more clear.

From a technical standpoint, Sean Croghan reported that he's already been discussing this with the NOC team and Meetecho team and while there are some specifics to nail down, in general they are comfortable that we will be able to provide the right technical support for the first post-COVID meeting, which is expected to be a hybrid sort of meeting with blended online and

in-person participation. The Board noted that it seems possible that hybrid meetings will become the new normal and this may end up also helping on D&I.

* Actions:

- If the decision is made to move IETF-111 online, open a consultation with the community about whether or not to rebook San Francisco for a future meeting, given prior concerns related to San Francisco and the United States.
- Continue assessing what the first in-person meeting will need to look like operationally and seek comment from the community on potential optional or required mitigations, such as on-site testing, temperature checks, symptom reporting apps or mechanisms, contact tracing, whether vaccination should be required to attend or whether it may be required to cross borders to enter the country, etc.
- Consider whether a blog post is appropriate to begin to socialize these issues in the community.

4. Strategic Administrative & Technical Debt

The Board discussed the RFC Production Center (RPC) which partners with the RFC Series Editor (RSE). Previously the work of the RPC was prioritized by the RSE but this has changed somewhat since Heather's departure. The primary focus of the RPC is on the quality and speed of output. The RPC includes experts with deep experience in the technical work of the IETF, which is invaluable to the IETF. But the RPC may feel they are overworked, which may be related to the tools they use to conduct their work. Many of these tools are extremely dated so it seems possible that helping to develop new tools to make the RPC more efficient & productive, as well as make them happier.

The Tools migration was also discussed and Jay provided an update on hiring a software development engineer. The migration work appears to be progressing well.

Lars noted that while many of the tools supporting the IETF are working, perhaps we can ask whether they can help the IETF work better. For example the Datatracker integrates a large number of disparate technical functions, so it may be logical to ask whether it will be easier to maintain and better matched to community needs if it was separated into more distinct functional parts.

There is no data on what parts of the Datatracker are most used, or even if they are used at all. There is also no formal definition of user types or regression testing of these user flows, which results in regular bugs following new releases or patches. Lastly, there is no open community process for new feature request decision-making and development prioritization.

The tools of the IETF really break down into two categories - authoring tools and general operational tools (e.g. mailing lists). The Tools Architecture & Strategy (TAS) team is focused on the authoring tools for the most part. Authoring tools improvements may also help improve the experience and retention of newcomers.

In terms of general operational tools, work continues to make improvements. This includes wikis, chat tools, the speed of the IETF's various web sites, and more.

The LLC has previously identified the need to provide funding and support to improve technical platforms and processes and this is in the 2021 budget.

In terms of administrative debt, we discussed the need to improve the rigor of the terms of contracts for operational support tools, which can be done on the next renewal of any of those agreements. It was noted that the IETF's website content is complicated & voluminous. The content needs updating over the next year & improved navigation for distinct user journeys and Greg continues to work on that.

The Board also observed continued concern over potentially blurred roles, ethics, conflict of interest and legal issues related to vendor and contractor relationships when those parties are also members of the IETF community or adjacent/related communities (e.g. ISOC). This will likely arise again during the SWOT/PESTL analysis. It was in the IASA2 design recommendations so will likely be something on which we seek community guidance during the IASA2 retrospective.

5. Wrap Up

The Board did a final review of action items and closed the meeting.