

IETF Meeting Fee Review 2023

Summary

The IETF holds three plenary meetings a year and charges a fee to participate in these meetings in order to offset the cost. The IETF does not charge any form of membership fee and makes all of its publications freely available, making the meeting fee the sole monetary cost of participation, and the IETF provides remote registration fee waivers to ensure that the fee is not a barrier to participation.

It has been eight years since the IETF last increased onsite meeting fees while, over that time, IETF meeting costs have risen significantly, in line with global inflation, and IETF meetings now incur an ongoing deficit that is unsustainable beyond the short term.

The IETF Administration LLC has conducted a review of IETF meeting registration fees and proposes to increase them, largely in line with inflation, effective from IETF 117 San Francisco, 22-28 July 2023. It further proposes to review fees annually in future.

Background

Current Registration Types and Fees

The current meeting registration fees are as follows:

	Reg Type	Notes	Onsite	Remote
	Early Bird	7 weeks before the meeting	\$ 700	\$230
	Standard	2 weeks before the meeting	\$ 875	\$280
	Late		\$ 1,000	\$330
	Student	Full-time students with proper ID	\$ 150	\$50
	Fee Waiver	Self-declaration	N/A	No Fee
	Hackathon		No Fee	No Fee
	One Day		\$ 375	\$125

Previous Changes

The meeting registration fees have been regularly revised as follows (most recent changes first):

September 2020: We introduced the fees for remote participants and the fee waiver scheme. Prior to that there had been no fee for remote participation.

July 2018: We introduced the Late onsite registration fee.

October 2014: Registration fees were last reviewed and changed¹ (later revised²) effective from March 2015 as follows:

- Early Bird - from \$650 to \$700 (7.7%)
- Standard - from \$800 to \$875 (9.4%)
- One Day - from \$350 to \$375 (7.1%)
- Student - no change at \$150

March 2011: Registration fees increased as follows:

- Early Bird - from \$635 to \$650 (2.4%)
- Standard - from \$785 to \$800 (1.9%)

November 2009: The One Day (Day Pass) fee was introduced and made permanent at the end of 2010.

March 2008: Registration fees increased as follows:

- Early Bird - from \$600 to \$635 (5.8%)
- Standard - from \$750 to \$785 (4.7%)

March 2007: Registration fees increased as follows:

- Early Bird - from \$550 to \$600 (9%)
- Standard - from \$700 to \$750 (7.1%)

The Full Time Student fee has been \$150 since at least March 2006.

Inflationary Context

From March 2015 until January 2023, US CPI inflation was 26.70%³ with a greater loading towards the end of that period as from March 2020 to January 2023 it was 15.91%.

From March 2011 to March 2015 it was 5.66%. The fee increase in March 2015 was higher than this.

¹ <https://mailarchive.ietf.org/arch/msg/ietf-announce/JUBwYCKsB2WDSt9h4IDkoe9gc/>

² <https://mailarchive.ietf.org/arch/msg/ietf/SfGUeeCNqaQow8vzy8AcDnzU9-E/>

³ https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm

From March 2008 to March 2011 it was 4.65%. The fee increase in March 2011 was roughly in line with that.

From March 2007 to March 2008 it was 3.98%. The fee increase in March 2008 was higher than this.

Meeting Finances

The accounts for our 2022 meetings are still being finalized, but they are likely to show a substantial deficit for all three meetings:

- Deficit of \$355k against budgeted deficit of \$274k for IETF 113 Vienna
- Deficit of \$304k against budgeted deficit of \$147k for IETF 114 Philadelphia
- Deficit of \$234k against budgeted surplus of \$163k for IETF 115 London

All three meetings had far fewer onsite registrations than pre-COVID levels.

A full breakdown of only the income from registration fees is as follows (all dollar figures in \$'000s rounded to nearest thousand and deficits in red):

Reg Type	IETF 113					IETF 114					IETF 115				
	Budget		Actual		Var	Budget		Actual		Var	Budget		Actual		Var
	#	\$	#	\$	\$	#	\$	#	\$	\$	#	\$	#	\$	\$
ONSITE															
Early Bird	300	210	155	109	-102	750	525	312	218	-307	750	525	369	258	-267
Standard	100	88	58	51	-37	170	149	152	133	-16	170	149	211	185	15
Late	100	100	14	14	-86	20	20	27	27	7	20	20	52	52	32
Student	20	3	27	4	1	30	5	24	4	-1	30	5	61	9	4
One Day	20	8	17	6	-2	30	11	41	15	4	30	11	74	28	17
TOTAL	540	408	271	184	-224	1000	710	556	397	-313	1000	710	767	532	-178
REMOTE															
Early Bird	500	115	378	87	-28	250	58	200	46	-12	250	58	139	32	-26
Standard	0	0	156	44	44	0	0	120	34	34	0	0	122	34	34
Late	0	0	90	30	30	0	0	62	20	20	0	0	80	26	26
Student	0	0	40	2	2	0	0	36	2	2	0	0	41	2	2
One Day	0	0	149	19	19	0	0	133	17	17	0	0	132	17	17
TOTAL	500	115	813	181	66	250	58	551	118	60	250	58	514	111	53
TOTAL	1040	523	1084	365	-158	1250	767	1107	516	-251	1250	767	1281	643	-124

We have worked hard to keep meeting costs low, through price negotiation, supplier competition and eliminating unnecessary costs, but nonetheless our costs have risen substantially due to the following factors:

- Our suppliers have been impacted by inflation. Our long-standing suppliers have quite reasonably asked for fee increases as a result.
- Venues have taken a significant hit with COVID and are trying to claw that back in their terms, often with quite significant price increases.
- Prior to COVID we received additional meeting income in the form of hotel commissions, which has now dried up as fewer participants take rooms from the negotiated blocks.
- We have invested heavily in extending the feature set and quality of our remote participation services to provide a better experience for remote participants.

Concurrent with this fee review, the IETF LLC has reviewed the IETF meeting requirements (RFC 8718) and proposed changes to enable a more flexible approach to venue booking and thereby deliver overall cost reductions.

While the IETF is in a good position financially, with a broad set of meeting sponsors and sufficient reserves to cover any shortfall in the short term, continuing at this level of attrition is unsustainable.

Analysis

Meetings Financial Projections

We are still far from registration numbers returning to those levels or even settling into a new normal that could be used for forward planning.

For 2023 we are again budgeting significant deficits:

- Deficit of \$668k budgeted for IETF 116 Yokohama
- Deficit of \$216k budgeted for IETF 117 San Francisco
- Deficit of \$314k budgeted for IETF 118 Prague

We have traditionally aimed for a surplus of about \$200k per meeting, partly as a buffer in case of unforeseen circumstances and partly to secure our long-term funding.

Our budgets for registration fees for these meetings are as follows. Our budgets are intentionally optimistic and so this table also includes a more optimistic scenario to assist with the projection (all dollar figures in \$'000s rounded to nearest thousand):

	IETF 116		IETF 117		IETF 118		Optimistic	
Reg Type	#	\$	#	\$	#	\$	#	\$
ONSITE								
Early Bird	400	280	400	280	400	280	500	350
Standard	150	131	200	175	200	175	300	263
Late	100	100	100	100	100	100	125	125
Student	50	8	25	4	25	4	75	11
One Day	50	19	50	19	25	9	100	38
TOTAL	750	538	775	578	750	568	1100	786
REMOTE								
Early Bird	400	92	350	81	350	81	200	46
Standard	0	0	0	0	0	0	125	35
Late	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	33
Student	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	3
One Day	0	0	0	0	0	0	125	16
TOTAL	400	92	350	81	350	81	600	133
TOTAL	1150	630	1125	658	1100	649	1700	919

Even under the optimistic scenario, we would still run at a deficit for two of the three meetings. In addition, we would need our room blocks to be sold at close to 100% capacity for us to receive the budgeted commissions.

Our relatively low budgeted numbers for onsite participation are due to a number of factors. Some of these are short to medium term:

- COVID is still with us and still severe enough to see governments impose travel restrictions and individuals avoid travel.
- The travel industry is a long way from recovery and so costs are high and availability is problematic.

Some of these are one-way trends:

- People and employers are increasingly concerned about the carbon cost of travel.
- Remote participation technology has increased in quality of experience immeasurably.

We therefore believe that while there could be an uplift in registrations, we cannot rely on onsite numbers to return us to break-even across a year.

Impact on Participation

As we all know, people participate in the IETF as individuals and we expect people to be able to participate fully without requiring external financial support. High meeting fees work against this, more acutely for those without employer support and those from countries with a lower average wage, and less acutely for those traveling long distances to the meetings as the travel and accommodation costs generally significantly exceed the registration fee. These factors are not mutually exclusive.

It is important to note that the IETF does not charge any form of membership fee and makes all of its publications freely available. The meeting fee is therefore the sole monetary cost of participation and the IETF provides remote registration fee waivers to ensure that the fee is not a barrier to participation. Our improvements in our remote participation service have gone a long way towards providing remote participants a similar working experience to that of onsite participants, with the ongoing exception of social/hallway interaction that is generally recognised as usefully contributing to the work of the IETF. We continue to try to make the remote experience as good as possible.

In this context, the principle of increasing the registration fee roughly in line with inflation, should neither exacerbate nor improve the impact of the fee on participation.

However, in this specific instance as it has been 8 years since the last fee increase, there is likely to be an adverse impact on participation because there has been a 25% drop in the fee in real-terms since 2015. While this long gap can be explained by a number of factors, not least the appearance of COVID in early 2020 and the resulting switch to fully online meetings for 2020 and 2021 (IETF 107 to IETF 112, it is clear that we should avoid such large increases in future. A shift to an annual fee revision based on trailing inflation will address that.

Proposal

We propose therefore to increase the registration fees, effective from IETF 117:

1. Fees that have not changed since 2015 (or earlier) will increase by approximately 25%:
 - a. Early Bird - from \$700 to \$875 (25%)
 - b. Standard - from \$875 to \$1095 (25.1%)
 - c. One Day - from \$375 to \$470 (25.3%)
2. The Student fee will not change:
 - a. Student - remains at \$150
3. The Late fee, which was set in 2018, will increase by 20%:
 - a. Late - from \$1000 to \$1200 (20%)
4. The Hackathon now incurs a fee for onsite participation, but this is waived if someone registers for the full meeting (i.e. Early Bird, Standard, Late, Student). It remains without fee for remote participation:
 - a. Onsite (Early Bird, Standard, Late) from \$0 to \$100. Waived if an onsite registration is made for the full meeting.
 - b. Onsite Student from \$0 to \$25. Waived if an onsite registration is made for the full meeting.
 - c. Remote remains at \$0.
5. The remote fees, which were set in 2020, will increase by approximately 10%:
 - a. Early Bird - from \$230 to \$250 (8.7%)
 - b. Standard - \$280 to \$310 (10.7%)
 - c. Late - \$330 to \$360 (9.1%)
 - d. Student - \$50 to \$55 (10%)
 - e. One Day - \$125 to \$140 (12%)

In addition, the IETF LLC will schedule a fee review every year. While fee reviews and consultations can be resource intensive and somewhat contentious, we believe that an annual adjustment will, in the medium term, become simpler and less contentious. It should be noted that an annual review will not automatically result in a fee increase; there may be years when prices are adjusted downwards following a year of high meeting surpluses.

The new fees would now be as follows:

Reg Type	Notes	Onsite	Remote
Early Bird	7 weeks before the meeting	\$ 875	\$250
Standard	2 weeks before the meeting	\$ 1095	\$310
Late		\$ 1200	\$360
Student	Full-time students with proper ID	\$ 150	\$55
Fee Waiver	Self-declaration	N/A	No Fee
Hackathon	Free if purchased with any of the above	\$ 100	\$30
One Day		\$ 470	\$140

This would change our budgeted figures to the following (not accounting for any reduction in meeting participation as a consequence of the fee change). This includes the optimistic scenario (all dollar figures in \$'000s rounded to nearest thousand):

Reg Type	IETF 117			IETF 118			Optimistic		
	#	Old \$	New \$	#	Old \$	New \$	#	Old \$	New \$
ONSITE									
Early Bird	400	280	350	400	280	350	500	350	438
Standard	200	175	219	200	175	219	300	263	329
Late	100	100	120	100	100	120	125	125	150
Student	25	4	4	25	4	4	75	11	11
One Day	50	19	24	25	9	12	100	38	47
TOTAL	775	578	717	750	568	705	1100	786	975
REMOTE									
Early Bird	350	81	88	350	81	88	200	46	50
Standard	0	0	0	0	0	0	125	35	39
Late	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	33	36
Student	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	4	4
One Day	0	0	0	0	0	0	125	16	18
TOTAL	350	81	88	350	81	88	600	133	147
TOTAL	1125	658	805	1100	649	793	1700	920	1122

With these increases our surplus/deficit for IETF 117 and IETF 118 would be as follows (all dollar figures in \$'000s rounded to nearest thousand and deficits in red):

IETF 117				IETF 118			
Original Budget	Optimistic	Original + Increase	Optimistic + Increase	Original Budget	Optimistic	Original + Increase	Optimistic + Increase
-216	45	-69	248	-314	-44	-170	159

Even with these increases we are still relying on registration numbers significantly exceeding our estimates to return to break-even let alone a sustainable surplus.

Consultation

The IETF LLC now seeks community feedback on these proposals.

Please provide feedback on this proposal either to the public list admin-discuss@ietf.org or directly to me at exec-director@ietf.org before Monday 3 April 2023..