

Interim planning guidelines for IETF meetings in COVID-impacted venues

Introduction

As the IETF looks forward to a return to in-person meetings, it is highly likely that a venue will pass the assessment allowing an in-person meeting but some COVID-related protocols and restrictions will remain in place. While there are several community RFCs covering meetings with more being drafted, some interim guidelines are needed for in-person IETF meetings held under COVID protocols or restrictions, given the complexity of the situation. These guidelines are likely to be replaced by the community following the normal community processes.

These guidelines apply to all onsite participants at an IETF meeting including all attendees, volunteers, contractors, and IETF staff.

Responsibilities

The IETF Administration LLC (IETF LLC) has both a legal liability and a duty of care to all participants to hold a safe meeting in compliance with US and local laws. This may require COVID-related protocols and restrictions to be contractually imposed by the IETF LLC and action taken during a meeting if those restrictions are not met.

Onsite participants are responsible for complying with the COVID-related travel protocols and restrictions specific to their own country of origin and their travel to the venue. They are also responsible for their own health and wellbeing, which includes deciding what protocols and restrictions they are willing to tolerate and under what conditions they are willing to participate onsite.

The Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG) is responsible for several aspects of the IETF meeting, including the meeting structure and agenda. In order to provide a single source of information on how COVID-impacted meetings will differ from normal meetings, this document also covers those areas with the agreement of the IESG.

Key principles

1. The existing process for assessing if an in-person meeting can go ahead, as documented in draft-ietf-shmoo-cancel¹, will be followed and these guidelines will only apply if the in-person meeting can go ahead.
2. If a meeting passes that assessment then the IETF LLC will not rule out an in-person meeting because of any COVID protocols and restrictions in place, so long as those protocols and restrictions are well understood and the local situation appears to be stable or improving.
3. The only protocols and restrictions imposed on participants will be those that are externally imposed either by the venue or local regulation or in order to travel. The IETF LLC will not impose any additional protocols or restrictions, such as only allowing vaccinated people to participate onsite where that would not be required by local regulations, though it will enforce all protocols it is required to.
4. The IETF is not a medical body and so will not make any medical decisions, leaving those to local regulations and qualified third parties.
5. The IETF LLC will work on the assumption, until advised differently by the IESG, that the meeting structure and agenda for a COVID-impacted meeting is the same as that for a pre-COVID meeting, with some possible adjustments as outlined in the associated plan.
6. Lacking other guidance from the community, the aim is for an in-session experience, onsite or remote, that is as similar as possible to attending a regular IETF meeting that isn't held under COVID restrictions.
7. The actions taken to enable the IETF to meet in COVID-impacted venues will not set a precedent for future meetings that are not impacted by COVID unless they are later explicitly consulted on.

Individual meeting plan

An individual plan will be created for each COVID-impacted venue using the templates in the conditional plan. This will document the protocols and restrictions that the IETF LLC is required to implement, either by the venue or local regulation.

¹ <https://datatracker.ietf.org/doc/draft-ietf-shmoo-cancel-meeting/>

Participant compliance statement

A participation compliance statement will be drawn up for each meeting based on the specific protocols and restrictions in place. Agreement to and compliance with this statement will be a condition of onsite participation:

- If any participant does not agree to the protocols in advance they will not be permitted to participate onsite.
- If any participant does not comply with the protocols then they may be excluded from further onsite participation for this meeting.
- If any participant is judged by a qualified medical professional to be an infection risk, then they may be excluded from further onsite participation.

This compliance statement will contain generic clauses as below and additional clauses as required:

- Participants agree to follow all COVID-related protocols and restrictions as requested by the IETF, the venue or local regulations, including but not limited to social distancing, wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE), and infection control practices.
- Participants agree to temporarily or permanently exclude themselves from onsite participation in the meeting and any other IETF events during the IETF meeting, whether official or unofficial, if requested to by the COVID Coordinator, at their own expense. This decision can be appealed to the IETF Chair.

Communication

The IETF will communicate with participants with the aim of ensuring that all participants are aware of the COVID-related protocols and restrictions in place at the venue, in sufficient detail and time for individuals to make an informed decision on their participation, though that may not be possible given the fluidity of the global situation. This communication should include providing participants with information on:

- Protocols and restrictions in place at the venue, including social distancing, wearing of PPE, and infection control practices.
- Protocols and restrictions in place at local bars and restaurants
- Protocols and restrictions in the venue city/state/country.

Risk and refunds

The global situation remains highly uncertain and there is always the risk that circumstances will change adversely at short notice. These changes could include:

- The protocols and restrictions at the venue tightened significantly.
- Changes to travel restrictions.
- Enough people choosing to cancel their registration such that the physical meeting is no longer viable.

Given this uncertainty, the IETF LLC will offer full refunds to all participants at any time with no fee withheld or provide for a switch to an online registration with a partial refund.

As documented in draft-ietf-shmoo-cancel, in the event that a physical meeting is moved fully online at short notice or during the meeting then the IETF LLC will only be responsible for refunding registration fees, which will be prorated if the move is during an IETF meeting, and no other costs incurred by participants.