                    A Model for IETF Process Experiments

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Abstract

   The IETF has designed process changes over the last ten years in one
   of two ways: announcement by the IESG, sometimes based on informal
   agreements with limited community involvement and awareness, and
   formal use of the same mechanism used for protocol specification.
   The first mechanism has often proven to be too lightweight, the
   second too heavyweight.

   This document specifies a middle-ground approach to the system of
   making changes to IETF process, one that relies heavily on a "propose
   and carry out an experiment, evaluate the experiment, and then
   establish permanent procedures based on operational experience" model
   rather than those previously attempted.

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1. Introduction

   This document specifies a middle-ground approach to the system of
   making changes to IETF process, one that relies heavily on a "propose
   and carry out an experiment, evaluate the experiment, and then
   establish permanent procedures based on operational experience" model
   rather than those previously attempted.

2. Background and Specification

   Since the 1992 changes documented in [RFC1396], the IETF has used two
   mechanisms for process changes.

   1. IESG has adopted a number of procedural changes on its own
      initiative and documented them informally, utilizing the wide
      discretion implicitly granted to them by [RFC2026]. This provided
      a lightweight mechanism for change, but the lightness came with a
      cost: There was sometimes too little alignment with the larger
      IETF community.

   2. The IETF has also used the [RFC2026] protocol standards
      development process to identify a community of interest, hold one
      or more BoFs, charter a working group, discuss proposed changes
      within the community, develop IETF-wide consensus on the changes,
      and publish (usually) Best Current Practice specifications. This
      provided full community involvement but also came with a cost in
      flexibility. The IETF does not change its formal processes often
      (the IPR clarifications in [RFC3667, RFC3668] are the first
      documented changes to [RFC2026] since 1996), and the community is
      understandably reluctant to permanently alter or extend formally
      adopted processes with untried new procedures.

   There is a middle ground between BCP process updates and informal
   agreements. This document specifies regularizing and formalizing the
   informal IESG mechanisms listed in 1 above as a means of moving
   forward with procedural changes that might prove valuable.

   The mechanisms outlined here add to the IESG's range of tools for
   dealing with process issues on an ongoing basis. They supplement the
   existing tools rather than attempting to replace them with a single
   "magic bullet". The choice of using the procedure outlined in this
   document or other mechanisms available to the IESG and the community
   -- present or future -- remains in the IESG's hands. If the IESG
   does not exercise this discretion wisely, this document provides no
   additional remedies.

Some have interpreted the current procedures as giving the IESG all
of the capabilities outlined here. If this were true, this document
only encourages the IESG to use this type of mechanism more
frequently in preference to less streamlined ones, and to more
explicitly document its actions and decisions.

This specification permits and encourages the IESG to adopt and
institute "process experiments" by using the following procedure:

1. An I-D is written describing the proposed new or altered
   procedure. A statement of the problem expected to be resolved is
   desirable but not required (the intent is to keep the firm
   requirements for such an experiment as lightweight as possible).
   Similarly, specific experimental or evaluative criteria, although
   highly desirable, are not required -- for some of the process
   changes we anticipate, having the IESG reach a conclusion at the
   end of the sunset period that the community generally believes
   things to be better (or worse) will be both adequate and
   sufficient. The I-D must state an explicit "sunset" timeout
   typically, not to exceed one year after adoption.

2. If the IESG believes the proposal is plausible and plausibly
   useful, a four-week IETF Last Call is initiated. The IESG can
   institute whatever procedures it wishes to make this determination
   and to avoid denial of service attacks from large numbers of
   spurious or unimportant proposals. In particular, they might
   institute a procedure requiring a number of endorsements, or
   endorsements of a particular type, before the IESG considers the
   proposal. The IESG is, however, expected to understand that
   procedures or review processes that act as a mechanism for
   significant delays do not fall within the intent of this
   specification.

3. At the conclusion of the Last Call, the IESG reevaluates the
   plausibility and appropriateness of the proposal. If they
   conclude that the proposed experiment is appropriate, a second I-D
   is generated (either by the IESG or by the original authors with
   IESG advice) that cleans up any definitional issues exposed in the
   Last Call and that explicitly identifies and responds to issues
   raised during the Last Call.

4. The document and experiment are then announced, the experiment is
   begun, and the document is forwarded for publication as an
   Experimental RFC.

The IESG is explicitly authorized to use this mechanism (based on
Experimental RFCs) to gain experience with proposed changes to BCP
specifications. There is no requirement to approve a BCP
specification for the experiment until the experiment is found to
have value.

The IESG could, of course, reach a "bad idea" conclusion at any stage
in this process and abandon the experiment. It might recommend
publication of the experimental document, with a discussion of why it
was a bad idea, but is not required to do so. The list above is
deliberately vague about where the I-Ds come from: a WG, design team,
individual contribution, editing group, or other mechanism could be
used in the first and/or third steps, but no specific mechanisms are
required, and the IESG is explicitly permitted to generate such
proposals internally.

In each case, the IESG's decision to go forward (or not) with a
procedural experiment, or the steps leading up to one, is expected to
reflect their judgment of the existence of rough consensus in the
community. That judgment may be appealed using the usual procedures,
but the IESG and the community are reminded that an experimental
attempt to try something for a fixed period is typically a better
engineering approach than extended philosophical discussion without
any experience to back it up.

Nothing above is to be construed as requiring an IETF-wide attempt
for any given process experiment. A proposal for such an experiment
may specify selected areas, selected working groups, working groups
meeting some specific criteria (e.g., those created after a
particular time or of a specified age), or be specific in other ways.

At or before the end of the "sunset" timeout, the IESG would either
revise (or cause to be revised) the document into a BCP RFC or the
procedure would expire and, presumably, not be tried again unless
something changed radically. A document describing why the
experiment had succeeded or failed would be desirable but could not,
realistically, be a requirement. If the procedure went to BCP, the
BCP would reflect what we would call "operational experience" in the
real world.

We note that, if the procedures the IESG has adopted (and the
procedural exceptions it has made) over the last decade are
legitimate, then the IESG has the authority to institute the changes
specified here by bootstrapping this process.

3. Security Considerations

   This document specifies a mechanism for evolving IETF procedures. It
   does not raise or consider any protocol-specific security issues. In
   considering experimental changes to procedures, the IESG should, of
   course, exercise due caution that such changes not reduce the quality
   of security review and consideration for protocols or, at least, that
   the process experiment proposals contain early detection and
   correction mechanisms should quality deterioration occur.

4. Acknowledgements

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   list discussion, considerable explanatory material was removed to a
   separate document for the current version.

   The first version of this document was posted as an Internet Draft on
   February 7, 2004.

5. References

5.1. Normative References

   [RFC2026] Bradner, S., "The Internet Standards Process -- Revision
             3", BCP 9, RFC 2026, October 1996.

5.2. Informative References

   [RFC1396] Crocker, S., "The Process for Organization of Internet
             Standards Working Group (POISED)", RFC 1396, January 1993.

   [RFC3667] Bradner, S., "IETF Rights in Contributions", BCP 78, RFC
             3667, February 2004.

   [RFC3668] Bradner, S., "Intellectual Property Rights in IETF
             Technology", BCP 79, RFC 3668, February 2004.

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