The Tao of IETF

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About This Document

The current version of this web page can always be found at [https://www.ietf.org/tao.html]. To contribute to this document or to discuss its content, please join the "tao-discuss" mailing list [https://www.ietf.org/mailman/listinfo/tao-discuss]. A history of the major versions of the Tao can be found here. This particular version was created on 2018-11-08.

This web page is in English. There is a list of translations of the Tao of the IETF.

Abstract

This document introduces you to the 'ways of the IETF': it will convey the might and magic of networking people and packets in the Internet's most prominent standards bodies. Underneath we describe the inner workings of IETF meetings and Working Groups, discuss organizations related to the IETF, and introduce the standards process. This is not a formal IETF process document but an informal and informational overview.

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1. Introduction

Since its early years, participation in the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) has grown phenomenally. In-person attendance at face-to-face meetings is now averaging between 1000 and 1400 participants [https://datatracker.ietf.org/stats/meeting/overview/]. Many of the attendees are new to the IETF at each meeting, and many of those go on to become regular participants. When the IETF was smaller, it was relatively easy for a newcomer to adjust. Today, however, a newcomer meets many more new people, some previously known only as the authors of documents or thought-provoking email messages.

This document describes many aspects of the IETF, with the goal of explaining to newcomers how the IETF works. This will enable them to make meetings and the Working Group discussions more productive for everyone. This document started out fairly short, but expanded over time in response to suggestions from IETF newcomers about what more they would have wanted to know before attending their first face-to-face meeting or becoming active in their first Working Group.

Of course, it's true that many IETF participants don't go to the face-to-face meetings at all. Instead, they're active on the mailing lists of various IETF Working Groups. Since the inner workings of Working Groups can be hard for newcomers to understand, this document provides the mundane bits of information that newcomers will need in order to become active participants.

The IETF is always in a state of change. Although the principles in this document are expected to remain largely the same over time, practical details may well have changed by the time you read it; for example, a web-based tool may have replaced an email address for requesting some sort of action.

Many types of IETF documentation are mentioned in the Tao, from BCPs to RFCs and STDs. The IETF publishes its technical documentation as RFCs, politely known as "Requests for Comments"; and STDs are RFCs identified as "standards". BCPs are the community's best current think about Best Current Practices in the Internet and are also RFCs; All three types of documents are in the RFC document series; see Section 6 for more information.

This web page is a continuation of the series of the "Tao of the IETF" RFCs. See RFC 6722 for an explanation of how the last RFC in that series became

this web page. This web-based version of the Tao is based on RFC 4677, was co-authored by Paul Hoffman and Susan Harris. The original version of this document, published in 1994, was written by Gary Malkin.

So, why "the Tao"? Pronounced "dow", Tao is the basic principle behind the teachings of Lao-tse, a Chinese master. Its familiar symbol is the black-and-white yin-yang circle. Taoism conceives the universe as a single organism, and human beings as interdependent parts of a cosmic whole. Tao is sometimes translated "the way", but according to Taoist philosophy the true meaning of the word cannot be expressed in words.

1.1 Acronyms and Abbreviations Used in the Tao

Some of the acronyms and abbreviations from this document are listed below.

Term	Meaning
AD	Area Director
BCP	Best Current Practice (a type of RFC)
BOF	Birds of a Feather
FAQ	Frequently Asked Question(s)
FYI	For Your Information (a type of RFC)
IAB	Internet Architecture Board
IAD	IETF Administrative Director
IANA	Internet Assigned Numbers Authority
IAOC	IETF Administrative Oversight Committee
IASA	IETF Administrative Support Activity
ICANN	Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers
I-D	Internet-Draft
IESG	Internet Engineering Steering Group