Guidelines for Acting as an IETF Liaison to Another Organization

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Abstract

Whenever the IETF decides to enter into a liaison relationship with another organization, such as a Standards Development Organization (SDO), a consortium, or an industrial forum, a liaison manager is appointed. The procedures used by the IAB to establish and maintain liaison relationships between the IETF and other organizations are described in RFC 4052. This document expands on the role of liaison managers and liaison representatives, giving guidelines on their mandate and the expectations, tasks, and responsibilities placed on them.

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1. Introduction

   In the course of developing Internet standards, the IETF needs to
   communicate extensively with various other peer organizations,
   including the following:

   o Standards Development Organizations (SDOs) such as the
      Telecommunication Standardization Sector of the International
      Telecommunication Union (ITU-T) or standardization working groups
      of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (e.g.,
      IEEE 802)

   o Consortia such as the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)

   o Industrial forums such as the Global Grid Forum (GGF)

   These organizations are usually concerned with developing related
   standards and technical specifications, so that from time to time
   issues of coordination and mutual interest may arise. To facilitate
   communications, the IETF, through the Internet Architecture Board
   (IAB), establishes permanent liaison relationships with appropriate
   parts of these organizations according to the processes described in
   RFC 4052 [RFC4052].

   Whenever the IETF decides to enter into a liaison relationship, a
   liaison manager and possibly some liaison representatives are
   appointed by the IAB to act as a channel between the IETF and the
   peer organization, typically in tandem with counterparts appointed by
   the peer organization.

   Sections 2.2, 2.3, and 3 of RFC 4052 briefly set out the basic
   functions of the tasks of liaison managers and representatives. Over
   time, the number and importance of liaisons have grown, and the
   importance of the personal role of IETF liaison managers and
   representatives in maintaining effective relationships with peer
   organizations has grown concomitantly. This document supplements
   [RFC4052] by providing guidelines for liaison managers and liaison
   representatives in maintaining communications to peer organizations.

2. IETF Liaison Relationships

   A major goal of the IETF is to develop standards for the Internet,
   enabling the development of interoperable implementations. In order
   to develop Internet standards, it is frequently necessary for the
   IETF to communicate with other organizations that develop standards
   for other types of networks, for Internet applications, or for
   technologies that the Internet uses.

   In some cases, the IETF and peer organizations consider it mutually
   beneficial to have a permanent formal relationship with certain rules
   governing the relationship. The organizations then enter into a
   "liaison relationship". At a high level, both sides agree to
   undertake certain responsibilities with respect to each other. The
   most basic liaison responsibility is to communicate information as
   necessary, and to respond to requests from peer organizations to
   which liaisons are maintained.

   Decisions on IETF liaison relationships are the responsibility of the
   IAB. This includes whether or not the IETF should have a liaison
   relationship with a particular organization.

2.1. Related Documents

   The IETF liaison process is specified in several documents. RFC 4052
   [RFC4052] specifies how the IAB manages the IETF liaison
   relationship; RFC 4053 [RFC4053] specifies how liaison statements
   should be treated. Organization-specific agreements and documents
   may also be generated in some cases, e.g., RFC 3356 [RFC3356]
   describes the collaboration between the IETF and ITU-T, RFC 3113
   [RFC3113] describes the relationship with the 3rd Generation
   Partnership Project (3GPP), and RFC 3131 [RFC3131] describes the one
   with the Third Generation Partnership Project 2 (3GPP2).

2.2. Liaison Managers and Liaison Representatives

   Whenever the IETF enters into a liaison relationship with another
   organization, a liaison manager (often referred to as "the IETF
   liaison") is appointed by the IAB. This document expands on the
   mandate of and the expectations, tasks, and responsibilities placed
   on the liaison manager by Section 2.2 of RFC 4052.

   In some cases, it may be necessary to have more than one person
   handling the liaison relationship with a given organization. For
   example, the time commitment required may be too substantial, or the
   technical scope of the liaison relationship may be too broad to be
   handled by a single individual.

In such cases, the IAB may appoint one or more liaison
representatives to supplement the work of the liaison manager by
managing different aspects of the liaison relationship between the
IETF and the other organization.

The value of personal relationships between the IETF liaison manager
and representatives and members of the peer organization is central
to the roles. The IAB will be looking for people who have both a
good technical understanding of the work being carried out and
effective personal relationships within the peer organization.
Ongoing face-to-face interactions between the IETF liaisons and
members of the peer organization are seen as critical to the
effective functioning of the role. These interactions should allow
the liaisons to keep the IETF abreast, and preferably ahead, of
matters of mutual interest or potential conflict. When the liaison
is working effectively, it should facilitate the IETF and the peer
organization working synergistically and reduce the chance of
overlapping or conflicting standards being created.

2.3. Written Communications

Aside from the personal contacts between liaisons and the peer
organization, extensive communication may occur between the IETF and
the peer organizations through written materials. Much of this
communication is through liaison statements that typically contain
plans, new developments, and time schedules of which one party
believes that the other party should be aware.

The liaison manager should be aware of these written communications
and assist both parties to see that appropriate action is taken in
relation to liaison statements passing in both directions.

For example, when a liaison organization, such as ITU-T, needs to
reference material that is under development in the IETF: the final
reference in the peer organization's document needs the permanent
identifier (RFC number) that will be assigned to the Internet Draft
when it is approved and published. To meet the publication schedule
of the peer organization, a liaison statement is often sent to the
IETF requesting that an RFC number be assigned within the required
timeframe. In response, the IETF can provide the RFC number or
explain why it is not possible to provide this within the timeframe
requested.

An alternative situation that involves more specific action by the
liaison manager also involves requests for this kind of expedited
action on RFCs. For example, 3GPP/3GPP2 and the Open Mobile Alliance
(OMA) provide the IETF with an updated list of dependencies between
their documents and IETF documents on a monthly basis, indicating

what documents are needed and the required timeframe. In this case,
the liaison manager tracks the dependency list and, when necessary,
conveys the request for expedited assignment to the appropriate IETF
Area Director (AD).

2.4. Terminology and Conventions

Terminology relating to IETF liaison procedures is found in
[RFC4052]. Terms defined below are valid for this document only.

Liaison manager

A person appointed to manage an IETF liaison relationship with
another organization.

Liaison representative

A person appointed to manage a certain (sub-)aspect of an IETF
liaison relationship with another organization. Since it is only the
scale of the responsibilities, mandate, and tasks that is different,
the rest of this document only explicitly mentions liaison managers.

IETF consensus

RFC 2026 [RFC2026] and RFC 2418 [RFC2418] discuss the IETF consensus
process. In this document, the term "IETF consensus" is used to
indicate either consensus of the IETF as an organization, an area
within IETF, or a working group. There the term "IETF consensus"
needs to be interpreted in the context in which it is used.

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT",
"SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this
document are to be interpreted as described in RFC 2119 [RFC2119].

3. Guidelines for Liaison Managers and Representatives

Since liaison relationships are intended to be mutually beneficial,
the IETF liaison to another organization must act as a bi-directional
communication link between the IETF and the other organization.
Since the liaison manager has been appointed by the IETF, the liaison
manager needs to be responsive to the needs and aims of the IETF.

RFC 4052 lists some of the tasks and expectations relating to liaison
managers and liaison representatives. This document expands on their
mandate, provides more detailed discussion, and describes how the
role is executed.

3.1. Mandate

   The mandate for IETF liaison managers is strictly limited to
   conveying IETF consensus to the liaised organization. The liaison
   manager MUST NOT on their own initiative send liaison statements to a
   liaised organization on behalf of IETF, or any of its areas and
   working groups. Liaison statements are only sent following the
   process specified in [RFC4052]. Liaison statements are only sent on
   the initiative of the IETF chair, the IAB chair, IETF Area Directors,
   or IETF working group chairs.

   In Section 3.3 and Section 3.4, responsibilities and tasks are listed
   that enable the IETF to obtain the information to correctly interact
   with the liaised organizations and to develop and clearly communicate
   IETF consensus.

3.1.1. Speaking for the IETF

   The IETF functions based on rough consensus, which means that the
   right to speak for the IETF cannot be delegated. The liaison manager
   speaks on behalf of the IETF on the subject matter of the liaison,
   but only after making sure that the IETF consensus is understood.
   Some guidelines for understanding IETF consensus are provided above;
   however, the most important requirement is close and detailed
   coordination/consultation with the IETF community.

3.2. Expectations

   There are certain expectations placed on liaison managers appointed
   by the IETF. Examples of these expectations are listed below.

   Competences required

      The key competence needed in the liaison manager or representative
      role is effective management of the liaison process according to
      the rules that have been agreed upon. The liaison acts as a
      representative of the IETF and not an independent voice with
      respect to topics of discussion in the liaison relationship. The
      liaison must therefore be careful to distinguish his or her own
      views from documented IETF consensus in dealings with the peer
      organization.

      To this end, the liaison manager or representative must be able to
      communicate effectively with members of the peer organization,
      especially in face-to-face situations. This is important both to
      communicate the IETF's viewpoint and to gather information about
      the issues in the peer organization that the IETF needs to
      understand.

In support of the liaison process, a person appointed to act as a
liaison manager or representative on behalf of the IETF is
expected to have a good technical understanding of the key issues
in the subject area, as well as an understanding of the concerns
important to stakeholders in both organizations.

An IETF liaison needs to have knowledge of the IETF's consensus
process in general, as well as the consensus process(es) applying
to the key issues within the liaison relationship.

The liaison must also have a good understanding of the processes
used by the peer organization involved.

Perspective

Liaison relationships are designed for the mutual benefit of the
organizations participating in the liaison. As such, swift
information flow in both directions is a firm requirement. The
role of an IETF liaison manager is to promote the interests of the
IETF with respect to all topics within the scope of the liaison
relationship. Since the liaison manager "wears an IETF hat", it
is NOT the task of a liaison manager to promote the interests of
the liaised organization within the IETF.

Distance

A liaison may not be able to maintain the required perspective if
he or she is closely involved in the outcome of the work in the
peer organization. A conflict of interest might arise if the
liaison is involved in the management of the relevant part of the
peer organization, has a close technical involvement in the work
that is the subject of the liaison, or has a close interest in the
outcome of the work in the peer organization through his or her
employment. When appointing an appropriate person to manage a
liaison relationship, the IAB needs to take into account any
conflicts of interest that the individual being considered might
have. Before a person is appointed to manage a liaison
relationship, he or she will be asked to explicitly state any
conflicts of interest. The IAB will not appoint a person to a
liaison manager position if there is a strong conflict of
interest. For example, an individual with an industry or
organizational leadership position in an organization would
typically not be suitable for appointment as an IETF liaison to
that organization.

Commitment and opportunity

   A liaison manager needs to be committed to addressing the issues
   relevant to the liaison relationship. To handle the job properly,
   it is necessary that the liaison be able to allocate sufficient
   time to the task.

Timeliness

   It is expected that a liaison manger will make the IETF aware of
   new developments in the subject area in a timely fashion.

3.3. Responsibilities

The liaison manager and representatives provide information to the
IETF community in order to enable the IETF to make decisions based on
the best possible information regarding the work in the peer
organization. In turn, information communicated by the IETF liaison
to the liaised organization MUST be based on the relevant IETF
consensus. The liaison manager works with the liaised organization
to ensure that communication is clear. As part of this, the liaison
must clearly differentiate his or her own independent positions from
those that represent IETF consensus.

It is the responsibility of the liaison manager to ensure that the
liaised organization communicates its requirements to the IETF in a
timely fashion and that the IETF consensus is clearly understood.
This is particularly important in situations where the IETF and the
liaised organization differ substantially in their positions. In
this situation, the liaison manager needs to facilitate prompt
communication so that the IETF and the liaised organization can stay
in close communication and avoid misunderstandings.

The liaison manager and representatives are responsible for clearly
and correctly communicating the IETF consensus position to the
liaised organization. This includes, when specifically instructed,
carrying any messages from the IETF to the peer organization.
Generally, these communications "represent the IETF", and therefore
due care and consensus must be applied in their construction.

The liaison manager and representatives are responsible for ensuring
that relevant information originating from the liaised organization,
or other information coming to the attention of the liaison, reaches
the correct destination within the IETF, in a timely and effective
way.

3.4. Tasks

   Examples of tasks performed by the liaison manager are provided
   below. Depending on the nature of the liaised organization, the task
   may vary in frequency and relative importance.

   1. Attend relevant meetings and participate in conference calls and
       mailing lists within the liaised organization to gather
       information relevant to the liaison relationship. Note
       developments of interest for onward communication to the IETF.
       Communicate the point of view of the IETF consensus to the peer
       organization.

   2. Communicate information relevant to the liaison relationship to
       the relevant part of the IETF either by written reports or
       verbally; this may involve briefings with a team of IETFers
       involved in the liaised organization and other interested parties
       within the IETF, e.g., working group chairs and ADs.

   3. Understand the concerns of both the IETF and the peer
       organization, while ensuring that interests of the IETF are
       maintained; where there appear to be problems to solve or
       conflicts between approaches, work with both parties to encourage
       engineers from both organizations to collaborate on solving the
       problem and facilitate the development of engineering solutions
       in the appropriate organization.

   4. Prepare reports giving updates on developments in the peer
       organization as requested by the IAB or other interested parties
       in the IETF. The target for these updates (e.g., the IAB, an AD,
       a WG) will typically be identified upon establishment of the
       liaison relationship and/or the appointment of the liaison
       manager.

   5. Oversee delivery of liaison statements addressed to the IETF.
       This includes ensuring that liaison statements are delivered to
       the appropriate destination within the IETF, as well as
       shepherding the timely creation of responses by the IETF.

   6. Work with the liaised organization to ensure that the IETF's
       liaison statements are appropriately directed and responded to in
       a timely fashion. To accomplish this, the liaison needs to build
       a contact network.

   7. Communicate and coordinate with other IETF liaison managers where
       the activities of two or more liaised organizations overlap.

8. Assist with the preparation of IETF liaison statements based on
    IETF consensus.

9. From time to time, liaison managers and liaison representatives
    will have to report to the IETF on the status of the liaison
    relationship. For this purpose, they will need to keep track of
    outstanding issues on behalf of the IETF. The frequency of the
    reports and the recipients of the reports within the IETF will be
    decided when the liaison relationship is set up and may be
    changed at any time by an IAB decision. IAB or other parties
    within the IETF may probe for liaison reports as needed or at
    regular intervals.

3.5. Relationship Management

Liaison managers will be involved in activities for which they are
not directly responsible, but that might greatly benefit from their
expertise. Some of these activities are outlined below.

3.5.1. IETF Consensus Process on Liaison Statements

Liaison statements and other messages sent to a liaised organization
should be based on rough consensus within the IETF or one of its
working groups or areas. Though the liaison manager is not
responsible for determining consensus, it is important that the
liaison manager participate in the process and makes his or her
expertise and knowledge available.

How consensus is arrived at may vary according to the circumstances.
Some issues are new, and in these cases an open discussion on a
mailing list should be undertaken. For some issues, consensus has
already been arrived at or the liaison statement is a mere statement
of facts (e.g., to inform the liaised organization that an IETF Last
Call had started on a document it had previously expressed interest
in) and in these cases the liaison statement can be written and sent
(such as by a working group chair), possibly involving the liaison
manager.

3.5.2. Incoming Liaison Statements

When the IETF receives a liaison statement or other communication
from an organization with which it has a liaison relationship that
includes a request for a response to the communication, the IETF is
committed to providing a timely response. This means that the IETF
will respond within the time requested and provide information as
accurately as possible. This commitment has been one of the key
discussion points in the past, such as within the (g)mpls change
process [GMPLS].

This commitment does not mean that the IETF will uncritically accept
the content in the incoming liaison statement. To the extent that
the liaison contains requirements on IETF technology or protocols,
they will be taken into consideration based on their technical merit.

3.5.3. Ambiguous Incoming Liaison Statements

Sometimes the IETF, an IETF area, or an IETF working group receives
liaison statements from a liaised organization that are sent to the
wrong destination. At other times, the liaison statement is sent to
working groups that are not chartered to do the work that the liaison
statement addresses. In some cases, it might be the situation that
no working group is chartered to do the work.

In such cases, the liaison manager should assist in finding the
appropriate recipient within the IETF that might respond to the
incoming liaison statement. Sometimes this might require that the
intended response is made available for review on one of the IETF
mailing lists.

3.5.4. Liaison Managers Representing Peer Organizations

Liaised organizations may appoint a person to act as a liaison
manager for "their side" of the relationship. This is the person
that will speak authoritatively, within the IETF, on the activities
performed by the other organization. The other organization needs to
make this person known to the IETF. This person might request a slot
on a working group agenda to discuss developments and plans of the
liaised organization.

Opinions expressed by a liaison mangers of other SDOs, other than
reports on work within the liaised organization, are given equal
weight with opinions expressed by other working group participants.
RFC 3356 [RFC3356] describes this in the context of the relationship
between the IETF and the ITU-T; however, the same model is applicable
to all other organizations with which the IETF has a liaison
relationship.

The mandates of liaison managers from other organizations are
recognized by the IETF to the extent needed to understand the
information received from the liaison manager. In all other respects
he or she participates in IETF activities under the same conditions
and rules as any other IETF participant. It is important that the
IETF liaison manager understands the extent to which the peer liaison
manager is mandated or delegated to speak on behalf of the peer
organization, and to inform the relevant part of the IETF if the peer
liaison manager appears to be stepping outside the role or stance
given to him or her by the peer organization.

IETF liaison managers should work to include the liaison manager from the liaised organization within their contact network, and to understand the positions being communicated by the peer liaison manager.

4. Security Considerations

This document does not specify any protocol or "bits on the wire". However, since interaction with other standards-making organizations often relates to security, the liaison manager can assist with security-related issues, resulting in improved security for Internet protocols.

5. IANA Considerations

There are no requests to the IANA herein. Note that the liaison manager very often has to understand and convey questions regarding IETF namespaces managed by IANA.

6. Acknowledgements

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