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Defining the IETF

Status of this Memo

This document specifies an Internet Best Current Practices for the Internet Community, and requests discussion and suggestions for improvements. Distribution of this memo is unlimited.

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Abstract

This document gives a more concrete definition of "the IETF" as it understood today. Many RFCs refer to "the IETF". Many important IETF documents speak of the IETF as if it were an already-defined entity. However, no IETF document correctly defines what the IETF is.

1. Introduction

Many RFCs refer to "the IETF". Many important IETF documents speak of the IETF as if it were an already-defined entity. However, no IETF document correctly defines what the IETF is. This document gives a more concrete definition of "the IETF" as it understood today.

2. Defining the IETF

BCP 9 ("The Internet Standards Process -- Revision 3") [BCP 9], the primary document that describes the Internet standards process, never defines the IETF. As described in BCP 11 ("The Organizations Involved in the IETF Standards Process") [BCP 11], the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) is an open global community of network designers, operators, vendors, and researchers producing technical specifications for the evolution of the Internet architecture and the smooth operation of the Internet.

It is important to note that the IETF is not a corporation: it is an unincorporated, freestanding organization. The IETF is partially supported by the Internet Society (ISOC). ISOC is an international non-profit organization incorporated in the US with thousands of individual and corporate members throughout the world who pay membership fees to join. The Internet Society provides many services to the IETF, including insurance and some financial and logistical support.

As described in BCP 11, Internet standardization is an organized activity of the ISOC, with the ISOC Board of Trustees being responsible for ratifying the procedures and rules of the Internet standards process. However, the IETF is not a formal subset of ISOC; for example, one does not have to join ISOC to be a member of the IETF.

There is no board of directors for the IETF, no formally signed bylaws, no treasurer, and so on. The structure of the IETF (its leadership, its working groups, the definition of IETF membership, and so on) are described in detail in BCP 11. Procedures for choosing leadership are described in detail in BCP 10.

Thus, when RFCs say "the IETF", they are describing the group that acts in accordance with BCP 9, BCP 10, and BCP 11.

3. Security Considerations

All IETF protocols must describe the security aspects of the environment in which they will be used. Also, the IETF has a Security Area which discusses the security aspects of IETF protocols. However, descriptive documents such as this one do not affect the security of the Internet.

A. References

- [BCP 9] Bradner, S., "The Internet Standards Process -- Revision 3", BCP 9, RFC 2026, October 1996.
- [BCP 10] Galvin, J., "IAB and IESG Selection, Confirmation, and Recall Process: Operation of the Nominating and Recall Committees", BCP 10, RFC 2727, February 2000.
- [BCP 11] Hovey, R. and S. Bradner, "The Organizations Involved in the IETF Standards Process", BCP 11, RFC 2028, October 1996.

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