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IETF-ISOC relationship

Status of this Memo

Abstract

This memo summarises the issues on IETF - ISOC relationships as the have been discussed by the Poised Working Group. The purpose of the document is to gauge consensus on these issues. And to allow further discussions where necessary.

Introduction

The Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) is the body that is responsible for the development and maintenance of the Internet Standards. Traditionally the IETF is a volunteer organization. The driving force is dedicated high quality engineers from all over the world. In a structure of working groups these engineers exchange ideas and experience, and through discussion (both by e-mail and face to face) they strive to get rough consensus. The engineers then work on building running code to put the consensus to the test and evolve it into an Internet Standard.

The growth of the Internet has also led to a growth of the IETF. More and more people, organizations and companies rely on Internet Standards. The growth of responsibility as well as amount of participants has forced the IETF to more and more structure its processes. Non technical issues, such as legal issues, liaison issues etc., have become an undesirable but a seemingly unavoidable part of the IETF organization. To address these issues the IETF established the Poised95 working group. The working group is now trying to structure and document the IETF processes in such a way as to keep the maximum flexibility and freedom for the engineers in the IETF to work in the way the IETF has always been most successful, and to honour the IETF credo: "Rough consensus and running code".

One of the more obvious recommendations that came out of the Poised WG was to move all non technical issues that can be moved safely, to another related organization. The Poised WG finds that the Internet

Society (ISOC) is the obvious choice for this task. A straw poll at the open plenary session of the IETF in december 1995 in Dallas clearly confirmed this notion.

However, since this is an issue that is crucial to the functioning of the IETF as a whole it is necessary to get a broad (rather than a rough) consensus on this issue. At the same time it is necessary to clearly indicate the extend of the relationship between the IETF and ISOC. So both the IETF participants and the ISOC board of trustees get a clear picture on the division of responsibilities.

The details of the Poised WG recommendations on the IETF - ISOC relationships can be found in the appropriate places in a series of Poised documents in progress: - The IETF Standards Process - The IETF organizational structure - The IETF charter - The Nomcom procedures - The Appeals procedures

The current document is meant to summarize the Poised WG recommendations in order to gauge the consensus. This document does not have, and is not intended to get, a formal status. The current and upcoming working documents of the Poised WG will become the formal documents. Readers who are interested in the nitty gritty details are referred to these working documents of the Poised WG.

Main boundary condition

The IETF remains responsible for the development and quality of the Internet Standards. The ISOC will aid the IETF by facilitating legal and organizational issues as described below. Apart from the roles described below, the IETF and ISOC acknowledge that the ISOC has no influence whatsoever on the Internet Standards process, the Internet Standards or their technical content.

All subgroups in the IETF and ISOC that have an official role in the standards process should be either:
- open to anyone (like Working Groups); or
- have a well documented restricted membership in which the voting members are elected or nominated through an open process.

The latter means that within the IETF the IAB and the IESG need to be formed through a nomination process that is acceptable to the IETF community and that gives all IETF participants an equal chance to be candidate for a position in either of these bodies. For the ISOC this means that the Board of Trustees should be elected by the ISOC individual membership, where all individual members have an equal vote and all individual members have an equal opportunity to stand as a candidate for a position on the Board of Trustees.

ISOC will, like the IETF use public discussion and consensus building processes when it wants to develop new policies or regulations that may influence the role of ISOC in the Internet or the Internet Technical work. ISOC will always put work related to Internet standards, Internet technical issues or Internet operations up for discussion in the IETF through the IETF Internet-drafts publication process.

The legal umbrella

To avoid the fact that the IETF has to construct its own legal structure to protect the standards and the standards process, ISOC should provide a legal umbrella. The legal umbrella will at least cover:

- legal insurance for all IETF officers (IAB, IESG, Nomcom and WG chairs);
- legal protection of the RFC series of documents; In such a way that these documents can be freely (i.e. no restrictions financially or otherwise) distributed, copied etc. but cannot be altered or misused. And that the right to change the document lies with the IETF.
- legal protection in case of Intellectual property rights disputes over Internet Standards or parts thereof.

The standards process role

ISOC will assist the standards process by

- appointing the nomcom chair
- approving IAB candidates
- reviewing and approving the documents that describe the standards process (i.e. the formal Poised documents).
- acting as the last resort in the appeals process

Security considerations

By involving ISOC into specific parts of the Standards process, the IETF has no longer absolute control. It can be argued that this is a breach of security. It is therefore necessary to make sure that the ISOC involvement is restricted to well defined and understood parts, at well defined and understood boundary conditions. The Poised WG attempts to define these, and they are summarised in this document.

There are three alternatives:

- Do nothing and ignore the increasing responsibility and growth; the risk here is that the IETF either becomes insignificant, or will be suffocated by US law suits.

- The IETF does everything itself; this keeps the IETf in control, but it would distract enormously from the technical work the IETF is trying to get done.

- The IETF finds another organization than ISOC to take on the role described above. But why would another organization be better than ISOC?

All in all a certain risk seems unavoidable, and a relationship with ISOC, under the restrictions and boundary conditions as have been described above, seems more like an opportunity for the IETF than like a risk.

Acknowledgement and disclaimer

The author is chair of the Poised 95 WG. The author has tried to summarise e-mail and face to face discussions in the WG. All the good ideas in this paper are the result of the WG, all the mistakes and errors are probably due to the author or his lack of command of the American language as well as the American legal system.

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