                  Thoughts on IETF Finance Arrangements
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Abstract

   This short memo outlines the author's thoughts of current status and
   future development questions around IETF's financing mechanisms.

   This memo is also input for discussion that the IETF community should
   have. The memo is the first part of the author's goal to document
   the status and various challenges and opportunities associated with
   the IETF Administrative Activity (IASA), in the context of the so
   called "IASA 2.0" project.

   The memo has no particular official standing, nor does it claim to
   represent more than the authors' thinking at the time of writing.

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   This Internet-Draft is submitted in full conformance with the
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   material or to cite them other than as "work in progress."

   This Internet-Draft will expire on September 1, 2017.

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1. Introduction

   The purpose of the IETF is to "... produce high quality, relevant
   technical and engineering documents that influence the way people
   design, use, and manage the Internet ..." [RFC3935]. This is of
   course only possible when the organisation offers a platform:
   process, and basic services that allow IETF participants to work
   Internet technology in an effective way. One part of this platform
   is sufficient funding to run those services, maintain archives, have
   web presence, have staff that can do the final publication editing,
   etc.

   The IETF's funding situation is generally in good shape: The IETF has
   multiple sources of funds, from corporate supporters to participants
   to Internet Society and to donors interested ensuring in the long-
   term sustainability of the efforts.

   But there are issues as well, such as a rising cost trend in a
   setting where the basis of our funding from attendees and sponsors is
   staying largely the same.

   And, it is always good to evaluate our arrangements, and the ongoing
   "IASA 2.0" effort to assess the IETF Administrative Activity (IASA)
   organisation is a good moment to do this analysis [RFC4071] [IASA20].
   For the finance aspects as well as other organisational matters.

   This short memo outlines the author's view of the current status and
   future development questions around IETF's financing mechanisms. The
   memo is the first part of the author's goal to document the status
   and various challenges and opportunities associated with IASA.

   This memo is also input for discussion that the IETF community should
   have.

The memo has no particular official standing, nor does it claim to
represent more than the author's thinking at the time of writing.

2. Discussion

Some of the trends affecting our financing arrangements include:

Community size is stable

   The size of the IETF community both in participants and
   participating companies has been relatively stable for over ten
   years. This is by itself neither good or bad, and it reflects
   IETF's role in the world. While the Internet technology business
   keeps growing tremendously, standards for core Internet technology
   are only one part of the overall picture. That is a very
   important part, and one where there has been a lot of activity.
   But one should not necessarily expect a tremendous growth.

Continuously rising costs

   On the other hand, costs for running the operation have increased,
   and are predicted to increase. This is partially due to external
   cost pressures, for instance the of cost hotel services such as
   meeeting space continue to increase. But the trend is also
   affected by the need to provide more services, for instance
   related to remote attendance or tools migrating to the
   secretariat.

Over-the-net participation

   The ability to work together without being in the same place
   continues to improve; global communities can be built based on -
   at least to large extent - over-the-net collaboration. As
   engineers working on real-time communication among other things,
   this trend should be apparent to IETF participants. This is not
   to say that in-person meetings will cease to be useful.

   This will affect one leg of the IETF's funding structure:
   participant fees. Even where remote participation might be an
   activity that can have a fee associated with it, such fees are
   likely smaller than those in physical meetings.

   While the IETF financing models have recently started evolving,
   they are still based primarily on meeting fees and meeting-based
   sponsorship. It would be useful to build also sponsorship models
   that allow supporting the IETF's work, not just a given meeting
   for instance.

Professionally run services

   IETF services are increasingly run on a professional, commercial
   model, as overall number of services continues to grow, volunteer
   tools are left to be run by the secretariat as the volunteers move
   on to develop more tools, etc.

Different types of sponsors

   There are many willing supporters of the IETF's work. But it is
   important to recognise how they -- due to their background or in
   some cases even legal or accounting reasons -- have different sets
   of expectations.

   It is useful to cater for different classes of donors, for
   instance both large corporations capabable of, for instance,
   hosting a meeting, as well as smaller corporations still
   interested in supporting the IETF but unable to take a hosting
   commitment.

   Similarly, most corporate sponsorships are typically to support
   the current activities. Meeting sponsorships are an example of
   this. On the other hand, IETF Endowment donations are an example
   of a more long-term support for the long-term. Both models are
   necessary, and useful.

   Finally, the IETF is backed by Internet Society, and the support
   of the IETF is one of core missions that the organisation was
   founded for.

 The sponsor experience

   While there has been a lot of support for, e.g., meeting hosting,
   getting support for the full sponsorship program is not easy.

   The value to sponsors is not always obvious, the IETF community is
   sometimes critical or unappreciative, and the same sponsors get
   tapped again and again for many related but different
   opportunities.

   Also, and this may sound obvious, but the IETF should be open for
   getting sponsorship from the different sources. There is one area
   that we are not as open as we should be: Traditionally, meeting
   sponsorship has been sought from the location that a meeting is
   at. However, this may not be the best strategy when a significant
   fraction of these sponsorships come from global multinational
   companies.

A corollary to the desire for supporting multiple different
sponsorship models is that the IETF is clear on what the options
give, clear how they benefit the IETF. As the number of options
have grown, we have not always been clear enough, or provided
answers that were aligned with the desires of the sponsors. For
instance, the IETF Endowment was re-specified in 2015-2016 to make
it about support of the IETF rather than general-purpose support
for Internet openness and technology development. But work
remains in ensuring that all sponsorship options are crystal
clear.

Finally, the basis for any financial involvement of the sponsors
needs to be viewed in terms of the value that the IETF provides
for the participants and the supporters. Articulating that is
important, and this needs work from the IETF. Although again, the
value is probably slightly different for different sponsors.
Ultimately, value is the one that ensures we continue to draw the
participants, and attracts sponsors in a thoughtful and long-term
fashion, and helps tune IETF activities to meet the needs of the
community.

Expectations on the IETF

Some factors in our environment are changing, and the role of the
IETF is also evoling in some ways. For instance, the IETF Trust
took a role in managing IANA-related IPR in 2016.

3. Acknowledgements

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