

Secret Handshakes: How to get RFCs published in the IETF

[<draft-bradner-handshake-03.txt>](#)

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This document will expire before June, 1999. Distribution of this draft is unlimited.

2. Abstract

There is confusion over how to get an RFC published in the IETF.

Recently a long time IETF participant asked me what "secret handshake" was need to get documents published as RFCs since he had been trying unsuccessfully to get that done. This memo is the result of that query and describes the procedures required, gives the proper references and the required email addresses.

3. Copyright Notice

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4. RFCs

RFC once meant "Request for Comment" but "RFC" is no longer viewed as an acronym but as a stand-alone term. RFCs make up the publication series of the IETF. All major IETF documents are published as RFCs. The series started in April, 1969 as a way to communicate between a few people who were working on the early ARPANET. Early RFCs were

designed to convey specific information such as the minutes of meetings or to solicit comments on ideas or proposals. In the years since 1969 RFCs mutated into being more of a way to publish specific information than a way to propose new ideas. A separate, temporary series for publications called "Internet-Drafts" was established to take over the original requesting comments function.

5. Types of RFCs

RFCs can be the product from an IETF working group or of an individual or group of individuals. RFCs can also be targeted for the IETF standards track or not. Each case is handled differently but there are four basic categories: RFC Editor and IANA documents, IETF working group documents, standards track documents not from IETF working groups, and non-standards track documents not from IETF working groups. ([BCP 09, section 2.1](#))

6. RFC Editor and IANA documents

From time to time the RFC Editor publishes an RFC which describes how RFCs should be formatted [[RFC 2223](#)] and every April Fools Day one or more RFCs are published that are meant as parody or attempts at humor. The RFC Editor also periodically publishes a new version of the Internet Official Protocol Standards RFC (also known as STD 1) that describes the state of standardization of protocols. In addition every 100 RFCs the RFC Editor publishes a summary document of the 99 preceding RFCs. These RFCs are published at the discretion of the RFC Editor.

Also from time to time the IANA publishes a new version of the Assigned Numbers RFC to provide a record of protocol number and parameter assignments. These RFCs are published by the RFC Editor at the request of the IANA.

7. Common process features for other RFCs

All documents proposed as RFCs other than those mentioned in section 6 must first exist as Internet-Drafts. IETF working group documents are reviewed by the IESG as part of the normal IETF process prior to publication. (See [BCP 11](#) for a list of organizations involved in the IETF standards process) In addition the RFC Editor asks the IESG to review all other documents proposed to be published as RFCs (other than those mentioned in [section 6](#).) The IESG has the responsibility to review each of these documents and make a recommendation to the RFC Editor about publication. The IESG can recommend a document for publication as-is or it can recommend publication only if an "IESG note" is added to the beginning of the document describing any particular IESG concern with the document. The IESG can also recommend referring a non-working group document to a working group for consideration or refer, with comments, a working group document back to the working group for additional work. Finally the IESG can

decide that the document does not meet the quality or other standards for publication which the IESG is charged with maintaining, or that deployment of the technology described in the document could harm the Internet. In these cases the IESG can recommend that the RFC Editor not publish the document.

8. Internet Drafts

Documents to be published as Internet-Drafts should be emailed to internet-drafts@ietf.org. The documents must be formatted according to the instructions in "The Guidelines to Authors of Internet-Drafts" (<ftp://ftp.ietf.org/ietf/1id-guidelines.txt>) and should be sent as plain text, not as a word processor enclosure. ([BCP 09] [section 2.2](#)) In addition all documents submitted as Internet-Drafts must include the header in the latest version of "The Guidelines to Authors of Internet-Drafts." Authors should always retrieve the current version of the guidelines document since it changes from time to time.

9. IETF working group documents

An IETF working group requests publication of a working group document by sending email to the Area Directory responsible for the working group, with a copy of the email to iesg-secretary@ietf.org. As detailed in [BCP 25] [section 3.3](#), such a request should only be made after ascertaining that there is working group consensus on the document. This may involve a working group Last-Call. The document(s) to be published must already be published as Internet-Drafts or, in the case of changing the status of an existing RFC without changing the contents, as an RFC. The letter should list the file names of the Internet-Drafts or the numbers of the RFC and what type of RFC each document is being offered for. The current standards track RFC types are: Proposed Standard, Draft Standard, Standard and Best Current Practice (BCP). The current non-standards track RFC types are: Informational, Experimental, and Historic. ([BCP 09], sections [4](#) and [5](#)) The copy of the email to iesg-secretary@ietf.org is to ensure that a record of the request is entered in a tracking database. The request is then reviewed by the Area Director and processed as described in [BCP 09] [section 6.1.2](#) including, for standards track documents, an IETF-wide Last-Call.

10. Non-working group, non standards track documents

An individual requests the publication of a document as a non-standards track RFC by sending an email request to the RFC Editor (rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org). The document(s) to be published must already be published as Internet-Drafts and the email request must include the filename of the Internet-Draft. The RFC Editor will inform the IESG of the publication request and ask that the IESG review the document within a reasonable time. ([BCP 09], [section 4.2.3](#))

11. Non-working group standards track documents

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12. The Importance of Proper Formatting and References

Improperly formatted Internet-Drafts create additional work for the RFC Editor which can delay RFC publication. All authors must read, understand and follow [[RFC 2223](#)] "Instructions to RFC Authors." Particularly note that RFCs should not right-justified or hyphenated.

The RFC Editor will verify the references in any document that will be published as an RFC and will communicate with the authors or the IESG in the case of confusion. Since this can also delay RFC publication it is in the best interest of the author to be sure that all references are correct. Authors should note that standards track RFCs may not make normative references to Internet-Drafts or documents at a lower status in the standards track. ([BCP 09] [section 4.2.4](#)) This can be a source of delay in publishing a document even after IESG review since the RFC Editor must wait until all documents referenced in a normative way have been published at the appropriate standards level.

13. Additional notes

Documents are often reviewed by readers who are not as familiar with the subject matter as the authors. Consequently, it helps to clearly define all subject-specific terms, and can also help a great deal to begin the document with an overview that discusses how the different pieces fit together both internally and with respect to other Internet elements. This will also benefit future readers of the document, who may well approach it from a different context than did the authors or as was originally envisioned.

There are two main sources of delay in the process: Area Director and IESG review of documents and their revisions, and document authors addressing review comments. As a document author, you control the latter; you can endeavor to influence the former by judicious but persistent use of polite email to the AD asking where the Area

Director or IESG review currently stands. It's part of the AD's job to listen to such email, so feel free to send it.

In some cases there can also be delay in the RFC Editor's office. This can happen when a document requires complex formatting, has many references, or if the RFC Editor's queue is full.

If you are making minor revisions to a document in response to comments from an AD or the IESG, you can expedite review of the changes by sending a list of the specific differences between a new and an earlier version of the document. This can be done with the UNIX "diff" program. The use of change bars can also be helpful.

The RFC Editor will only publish the specific version of an Internet Draft that the IESG has reviewed. Specifically authors can not make changes, editing or otherwise, after the IESG review without the document being returned to the IESG to ensure that no substantive changes were introduced. Authors who have a few typos that need to be fixed can send a request to the RFC Editor to make specific editorial corrections.

14. Intellectual property rights

It is important for every one who is publishing any IETF document to read and understand the intellectual property rights section of [BCP 09] ([section 10](#)). The act of submitting a document for publication by the IETF implies the acceptance of the intellectual property rights terms and conditions in [BCP 09]. Authors should particularly note the copyright provisions.

15. Acknowledgements

Thanks to Vern Paxson for contributing to [section 13](#).

16. Security Considerations

This type of non-protocol document does not directly affect the security of the Internet.

17. References

- [[RFC 2223](#)]: J. Postel, J. Reynolds - "Instructions to RFC Authors", October 1997
- [BCP 09]: S. Bradner (Ed) - "The Internet Standards Process -- Revision 3", October 1996
- [BCP 11]: R. Hovey, S. Bradner - "The Organizations Involved in the IETF Standards Process", October 1996
- [BCP 25]: S. Bradner (Ed) - "IETF Working Group Guidelines and Procedures:", September 1998

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