

**Tasks of the IETF Chair, IESG Chair, and General Area Director**  
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Abstract

This document describes tasks performed by the IETF Chair, the IESG Chair, and the Area Director of the General Area of the IETF. Its purpose is to inform the community of what these tasks are, and to allow the community to consider whether combining all these roles in one person is optimal.

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## 1. Introduction

By tradition, the same person occupies the jobs of general Chair of the IETF and of IESG Chair, i.e., chair of its steering group. In addition, the IESG has chosen to define a General Area to house IETF activities and Working Groups that do not fit into one of the specific technical Areas. By tradition the same person that acts as IETF Chair and IESG Chair also acts as Area Director of this Area.

Specific descriptions of these roles are sparse in IETF process documents. [BCP 9](#) [[RFC2026](#)] states:

"The Area Directors along with the IETF Chair comprise the Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG)."

[BCP 10](#) [[RFC3777](#)] states:

"2. No person should serve both on the IAB and as an Area Director, except the IETF Chair whose roles as an IAB member and Area Director of the General Area are set out elsewhere."

but makes no other reference to the phrases "IETF Chair" and "General Area" and gives no reference for "elsewhere." [BCP 9](#) makes one passing reference to the "IESG Chair" in its description of the appeals process, and [BCP 10](#) does not use the phrase. Finally, [BCP 11](#) [[RFC2028](#)] states that

"The IESG is composed of the IETF Area Directors and the chair of the IETF, who also serves as the chair of the IESG."

The IAB Charter, [BCP 39](#) [[RFC2850](#)], identifies the IETF Chair as a voting IAB member.

The IESG Charter [[RFC3710](#)], which is non-normative, documents that the IETF Chair is a member of the IESG and acts as the General Area Director. It does not explicitly state that the IETF Chair is the IESG Chair, but it does list some duties for the Chair.

[BCP 45](#) [[RFC3005](#)] gives the IETF Chair a role in managing the main IETF discussion list.

[BCP 102](#) [[RFC4052](#)] and [BCP 103](#) [[RFC4053](#)] assign specific roles to the IETF Chair in special cases of external liaison handling.

Finally, [BCP 101](#) states [[RFC4071](#)] that the IETF Chair is an ex officio voting member of the IETF Administrative Oversight Committee (IAOC), and therefore implies [[RFC4371](#)] that he or she is also a Trustee of the IETF Trust.



One motivation for the current document is simply to describe the various tasks which fall to the person fulfilling the three roles of IETF Chair, IESG Chair, and General Area Director. This description may be of value in the identification of candidates for these roles, and to future occupants of these roles. Another motivation is to allow the community to consider whether combining all these roles in one person is optimal.

In what follows, tasks have been classified as best as possible among the three roles.

## **2. Tasks of the IETF Chair**

### **1. Establish IETF consensus.**

The Chair initiates and moderates IETF discussions, ascertains IETF opinions, and assesses IETF consensus, on matters that do not fit into any specific Area (including the General Area!). The principal medium for this is the main IETF discussion list [[RFC3005](#)], and on occasion an IETF plenary meeting. Incidental to this, the IETF Chair, the IETF Executive Director, or a sergeant-at-arms appointed by the Chair are responsible for dealing with inappropriate postings on the list.

### **2. Act as IAB Member.**

The IETF Chair is a full member of the IAB [[RFC2850](#)] except for matters in conflict with also being a member of the IESG. However, the IETF Chair is not present in the IAB as a representative of the IESG, which has its own liaison. The IETF Chair is expected to play a full technical role in the IAB and does not normally speak there in the IETF Chair role.

### **3. Participate in IAOC.**

The IETF Chair is an ex officio voting member of the IETF Administrative Oversight Committee (IAOC) [[RFC4071](#)] and a Trustee of the IETF Trust [[RFC4371](#)]. These are active roles including constant interaction with the IAOC itself and the IETF Administrative Director (IAD), and frequent interaction with the IETF's service providers (IANA, RFC Editor, and Secretariat). Note that the role of supervising the Secretariat described in the the IESG Charter [[RFC3710](#)] no longer applies, now being filled by the IAD.

Note that currently, the IETF Chair is the only IESG member in the IAOC. In the event of a separation of the IETF and IESG Chair roles, this would need to be reviewed.

### **4. Act as Visible Head of the IETF.**

Although the IETF has traditionally been a low profile organisation, and explicitly (by T-shirt motto) "rejects Kings and Presidents," the reality is that when dealing with other organisations of all kinds, and when dealing with journalistic



media in particular, the role of IETF Chair is automatically and immediately perceived as that of a figurehead. The IETF Chair must be able to deal diplomatically and effectively with this, even if the message will often be that the Chair cannot speak for the IETF on a given matter, because no IETF consensus has yet been reached.

1. [BCP 102](#) [[RFC4052](#)] defines a specific role for the IETF Chair in the case of technical liaison statements concerning the IETF as a whole. [BCP 103](#) [[RFC4053](#)] defines a minor role for the IETF Chair in handling incoming liaison statements.
  2. The IETF Chair will sometimes need to interact directly with the heads of other Standards Development Organisations. This should be done in close concertation with the IAB Chair, due to the IAB's general responsibility for liaisons [[RFC2850](#)].
  3. The IETF Chair will be contacted by journalists for general and specific comments, often on controversial issues. On occasion it may be desirable for the Chair to take the initiative (e.g. arrange for a press release), although this is unusual.
  4. The IETF Chair is expected to contribute to the IETF Journal published by ISOC.
  5. The IETF Chair is called upon several times a year to make a progress report to the ISOC Board in its role as the IETF's "funding agency." Note that this is completely distinct from the IAB's role as "a source of advice and guidance" [[RFC2850](#)] to ISOC. The IAB and the IASA also make reports to ISOC about their areas of competence; the IETF Chair reports on the IETF's progress as a standards body.
5. Lightning Rod.
- The IETF Chair has to act as the lightning rod, hot potato catcher, and help desk of last resort, for members of the IETF community. Often this is simply a matter of dispatching a query to the right person (for example, technical issues to the appropriate Area Director, legal issues to the IETF Counsel and administrative issues to the IAD). Sometimes there is no right person.

This role has a positive, pro-active aspect. The IETF Chair should try to have an overall picture of the IETF organization and community, and to "see what's missing" and get someone to do something about it.

### **3. Tasks of the IESG Chair**

The IESG Chair is responsible for smooth operation of the IESG as a whole and on issues that transcend an individual area in particular. Specific aspects of this role are listed below.



1. Moderate IESG discussions.

The IESG Chair, like the person chairing any committee, has to moderate and guide its discussions and mediate its decision-taking. In the IESG, decisions to approve documents are normally taken by a highly structured ballot process supported by software tools. However, the Chair has to seek consensus in contentious discussions, and to operate a decision process for cases not handled by the regular ballots.

2. First responder.

The IESG Chair has to act as "first responder" for incoming items not directed at a specific Area Director (e.g. publication requests, complaints or appeals, or general technical queries and suggestions). In most cases, the item should be assigned to a willing AD; anything else is the Chair's responsibility.

3. Progress chaser for daily operations.

The IESG Chair at the time of writing has delegated this task to two IESG "whips", but the function is properly that of the Chair. It is to ensure that the day-to-day work of the IESG goes smoothly.

1. Tools and metrics are used to identify stalled documents and projects. Then the progress chaser will contact the responsible AD, and determine what action, if any, is needed. If necessary, he or she will bring problem cases to the attention of the whole IESG.

With literally hundreds of documents under IESG consideration at any one time, the amount of such progress-chasing work should not be underestimated.

2. Additionally, the progress chaser will attempt to gather loose ends for whole IESG, identify chronic problems and gaps in the tools and project list, and identify needs for new procedures and clarifications in existing procedures.

4. Represent IESG needs to IASA.

When the IESG has established a clear need for improvements in tools or administration, the IESG Chair will convey this need to the IAD or IAOC. On a day to day or weekly basis, the IESG Chair will communicate directly with the Secretariat about short term issues and needs, with the full awareness of the IAD. (Currently, the IAD, the IESG Chair and the Head of Secretariat have a weekly one hour conference call.)

5. Represent IESG views to the IETF.

When the IESG has established a view on some matter that needs review or consensus of the IETF, the IESG Chair will convey this view to the community. (This is distinct from publishing an IESG decision or statement, which is a Secretariat job.)



#### **4. Tasks of the General Area Director**

1. **The General AD has the tasks of any AD for his or her own area** - remain attentive to emerging ideas, foster BOFs and WGs as appropriate, manage those WGs, shepherd their drafts and any relevant independent submissions. Although the General Area is in theory for any work not covered elsewhere, it is in practice limited to non-technical topics, i.e. IETF process topics. This does create a curious meta-problem, which is the constant concern about conflict of interest for an Area Director shepherding and advocating work that affects (positively or negatively) his or her own job.
2. By convention, the General AD oversees several ad hoc teams (EDU, TOOLS, PROTO) chartered by the IESG.
3. The General AD also has the tasks of any AD - reviewing all drafts, WG charters, and any other matters under consideration by the IESG. In a busy fortnight, this can represent 20 or 30 documents to review. Recent General ADs have successfully delegated much of the review load to a General Area Review Team, without which most drafts would remain unread in the General Area.

Note that if the General AD role was separated from the IESG Chair role, it would have to be decided whether the IESG Chair retained a vote in IESG decisions. If so, the Chair would necessarily also have the task of reviewing all drafts, charters and other matters under consideration.

#### **5. Time allocation**

A detailed analysis of how much time is taken by each of the three roles would require considerable effort. What is clear from recent experience is that the diversity of tasks makes it only too easy to lose any clear sense of relative priorities, and the quantity of small work items means that even important and urgent "big picture" items can readily be overlooked.

At a rough estimate, the tasks classified above as "IETF Chair" take 50% of the time, the tasks classified as "IESG Chair" take 25%, and those classified as "General AD" take 25%.

This is without including the workloads delegated to the IESG Whips and the General Area Review Team respectively. With those workloads, the three tasks would be of roughly equal size, and quite impossible for one person.



## **6. Security Considerations**

This document has no security implications for the Internet.

## **7. IANA Considerations**

This document requires no action by the IANA.

## **8. Acknowledgements**

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## **9. Change log [RFC Editor: please remove this section]**

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