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**Creating an IETF Working Group Draft  
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**Abstract**

The productive output of IETF working groups is documents, as mandated by the working group's charter. Working groups develop these documents based on initial input of varying levels of maturity. An initial working group draft might be a document already in wide use, or it might be a blank sheet, wholly created by the working group, or it might represent any level of maturity in between. This document discusses the process of creating formal working group drafts that are targeted for publication.

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## **1. Introduction**

The productive output of IETF working groups is documents, as mandated by the working group's charter. Working groups develop these documents based on initial input of varying levels of maturity. An initial working group draft might be a document already in wide use, or it might be a blank sheet, wholly created by the working group, or it might represent any level of maturity in between. This document discusses the criteria and process for adopting and developing formal working group drafts that are targeted for publication.

Within the general constraints of formal IETF process and the specific constraints of a working group's charter, there is considerable freedom in the adoption and development of drafts. As with most IETF processes, the ultimate arbiter of such choices is working group agreement. As with most working group management, this agreement might be explicit or implicit, depending upon the process efficiencies that are deemed appropriate.

This draft is intentionally non-normative. It is meant as a guide to common practice, rather than as a formal definition of what is permissible.

[[editor note: Working Group Guidelines and Procedures is a BCP. The current document /could/ serve to amend that document; or it could be left as merely non-normative commentary. /d ]]

### **1.1. What is a Working Group Draft?**

Documents under development in the IETF community are distributed as Internet Drafts (I-D). Working groups use this mechanism for producing their official output, per [Section 7.2 of \[RFC2418\]](#) and [Section 8.3 of \[RFC4677\]](#) and [\[ID-Info\]](#). The convention for identifying an I-D formally under the ownership of a working group is by the working group name in the third field of the I-D filename, per Section 7 of [\[ID-Guidelines\]](#). That is:

[draft-ietf](#)-<wgname>-...

Responsibility for direct revision of a working group I-D is assigned to its authors, often called editors, as described in [Section 6.3 of \[RFC2418\]](#).

NOTE: The distinction between an 'author' and an 'editor' is, at best, subjective. Whatever the label, in all cases, formal authority for content in a working group draft remains with the entire working group. Choices are ultimately controlled by the



usual working group rough consensus process. At times a document author can appear to have considerable authority over content, but this is (merely) for efficiency.

## **1.2. Questions**

[[editor's note: These are from Stephen's presentation. It's not clear how to incorporate these, or whether. /d ]]

How do I decide?

Polling the WG.

Making the decision.

What are the process steps to become a WG I-D?

Special cases.

Creating a document as a WG I-D.

Competing drafts.

Can an Individual I-D be under the care of a WG?

## **2. Adoption Process**

### **2.1. Criteria for Adoption**

Working group charters often specify documents that are used as 'input' or as 'a basis' to the working group's efforts, with the milestones typically detailing an exact set of documents to be produced. In some cases, a charter essentially declares an existing document to be the formal start of a working group document. The details can vary quite a bit over the life of a working group, concerning adoption of drafts. No formal specification for working group 'adoption' of a draft exists; the current document is meant to provide a description of common activities for this, but again note that it is not normative.

The first concern when considering adoption of a draft, should be basic criteria for the decisions, such as:



- \* Is there a milestone that explicitly calls for such a document?
- \* Is the topic of the I-D within scope for the working group?
- \* Is the purpose of the draft sufficiently clear?
- \* What are the process or technical objections to pursuing the draft?
- \* If not already in scope, is a simple modification to the charter feasible and warranted?
- \* Does the draft carry known intellectual property rights issues?
- \* Is there strong working group support for the draft?
- \* What is the position of the working group chairs, concerning the draft?

Some specifically-inappropriate criteria should be noted:

- \* Working group support is not required to be unanimous.
- \* The writing quality is not required to be ready-for-publication, although writing quality can be a problem and does need explicit attention; certainly it is helpful for a new working group draft to already be able to pass [[IDNITS](#)].
- \* The document is not required to already contain a complete and/or sufficient solution, although of course this can be helpful.

REMINDER: Once a working group adopts a draft, the document is owned by the working group and can be changed however the working group decides, within the bounds of IETF process and the working group charter. It is a responsibility of the working group chairs to ensure that document authors make modifications in accord with working group rough consensus.

#### **2.1.1. Going Straight to WG I-D**

Absent charter restrictions, a working group is free to create new documents. It is not required that all drafts start outside the working group. Of course, the criteria for brand new documents needs to be the same as for those imported into the working group.





## **2.2.    Polling the Working Group**

Other than for selection of document authors, working group decision-making about document management is subject to normal IETF process rules. Useful descriptions of this process for a working group are in [Section 3.3 of \[RFC2418\]](#) and [Section 5.2 of \[RFC4677\]](#).

As with any other consensus question, the form in which it is asked can make a difference. In particular, a general 'yes/no' question often is not as helpful as asking supporters and detractors of a draft to provide their reasons, not merely their preferences. In effect, this treats the consensus process as an on-going discussion. Ideally, that can produce changes in the document or in participant views. Or both.

## **2.3.    Choosing Editors**

For existing documents that are being adopted by a working group, there is a special challenge in the selection of document editors: The document has already had editors. So the question is whether the same people should continue the task? Often the answer is yes, but it should not be automatic. The process within an IETF working group can be quite different from the process that created previous versions. This well might make it appropriate to select one or more new editors.

If the original editors will continue, the chairs need to ensure that the editors understand IETF working group process; it is likely to be quite different from the process that developed earlier versions of the document. If additional or new editors are assigned, the transition needs to be discussed, including its reasons; this should be done as quickly as possible.

## **2.4.    Formal Steps**

To adopt a new working group document, the chairs need to:

1. Inform the working group of the intent.
2. Obtain working group rough consensus.
3. Choose document editors.
4. Pre-approve the document as an Internet Draft, using [\[Approval\]](#).



5. Tell the editors to submit the -00 version of the document.
6. Enjoy the ensuing working group discussion...

### 3. Competing Drafts

Engineering for interesting topics often produces competing, interesting proposals. The reasons can be technical aesthetics, engineering tradeoffs, architectural differences, company economics and the like. Although it is far more comfortable to entertain only one proposal, a working group is free to pursue more than one. Often this is necessary until a clear preference develops. Sometimes, multiple versions are formally published, absent consensus among the alternatives.

It is appealing to ask authors of competing proposals to find a way to merge their work. Where it makes sense to do this, it can produce a single, strong specification. On the other hand, some differences cannot be resolved and attempting a merge can produce a weaker result.[\[Heli-Sub\]](#) Some would argue that this is the more common outcome. At the least, detailed discussions to merge are better held in private than amidst the dynamics of an open working group mailing list. The working group must approve any decisions, but it is not required that it be present for all discussions.

Various management efforts can facilitate the handling of competing proposals. Some examples include:

- \* Develop a requirements document that is independent of specific proposals; this can highlight features that are deemed essential, from those that are of secondary importance, and facilitate a discussion about features without reference to specific proposals.
- \* Develop a comparison table of the proposals; this can aid understanding of their differences.
- \* Discuss the relative importance and effects of having one proposal, versus multiple; this can focus people's efforts at compromise and encourage a willingness to choose a single proposal.



#### **4. Individual I-Ds Under WG Care**

[[Editor's note: I can't find an explicit description of Individual vs. Working group draft. Some pages/docs imply the distinction, but not define it. /d]]

Sometimes, a working group facilitates a draft, but does not own it. These are "individual" drafts, with a common filename convention of the working group name following the personal name:  
draft-<lastname>-<wgname>...

Typically such documents are subject to normal working group process. However ownership stays with the original author and the document is not formally working group output.

#### **5. Security Considerations**

Beyond the credibility of the IETF, this document raises no security concerns.

#### **6. References - Informative**

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## **[Appendix A](#). Acknowledgements**

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Group Chairs lunch. [[Farrel-Chairs](#)])

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