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IRTF Research Group Guidelines and Procedures
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Abstract

The Internet Research Task Force (IRTF) has responsibility for organizing groups to investigate research topics related to the Internet protocols, applications, and technology. IRTF activities are organized into Research Groups. This document describes the guidelines and procedures for formation and operation of IRTF Research Groups. It describes the relationship between IRTF participants, Research Groups, the Internet Research Steering Group (IRSG) and the Internet Architecture Board (IAB). The basic duties of IRTF participants, including the IRTF Chair, Research Group Chairs and IRSG members are defined.

This document obsoletes [RFC2014](#).

Status of This Memo

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1. Introduction

This document defines guidelines and procedures for Internet Research Task Force (IRTF) Research Groups. It obsoletes [[RFC2014](#)], which originally documented them. The IRTF focuses on longer term research issues related to the Internet, while its parallel organization, the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), focuses on shorter term issues of engineering and standards making.

The IRTF is composed of a number of focused, long-term, small Research Groups. These groups work on topics related to Internet protocols, applications, architecture and technology. Research Groups are expected to have the stable, long-term membership needed to promote the development of research collaboration and teamwork in exploring research issues. Participation is by individual contributors, rather than by representatives of organizations.

The IRTF is managed by the IRTF Chair in consultation with the Internet Research Steering Group (IRSG). The IRSG membership includes the IRTF Chair, the chairs of the various Research Groups and possibly other individuals ("members-at-large") from the research community.

The IRTF Chair is appointed by the Internet Architecture Board (IAB) [[RFC2850](#)][IAB], the Research Group chairs are appointed as part of the formation of Research Groups (as detailed below) and the IRSG members-at-large are chosen by the IRTF Chair in consultation with the rest of the IRSG and on approval by the IAB.

In addition to managing the Research Groups, the IRSG MAY from time to time hold topical workshops focusing on research areas of importance to the evolution of the Internet, or more general workshops to, for example, discuss research priorities from an Internet perspective.

This document defines procedures and guidelines for the formation and operation of Research Groups in the IRTF. The duties of the IRTF Chair, the Research Group Chairs and IRSG members are also described; the first is also described in more detail in [[RFC7827](#)]. Except for members-at-large of the IRSG, there is no general participation in the IRTF, only participation in a specific Research Group. However, since around 2010, the IRTF has begun to hold "open meetings" during IETF meetings [[IRTFOPEN](#)], and a mailing list was created for discussion of IRTF-wide topics [[IRTF-DISCUSS](#)], both allowing the community to engage with the IRTF.

[[RFC4440](#)] provides additional important background information that the readers of this document should familiarize themselves with. [[RFC7418](#)] provides an introduction to the IRTF for IETF participants, focusing on the differences between the two organizations.

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in [[RFC2119](#)].

1.1. IRTF Approach

The reader is encouraged to study The Internet Standards Process [[RFC2026](#)] to gain a complete understanding of the philosophy, procedures and guidelines of the IETF and its approach to standards making.

The IRTF does not set standards, and thus has somewhat different and complementary philosophy and procedures. In particular, an IRTF Research Group is expected to be long-lived, producing a sequence of "products" over time. The products of a Research Group (often abbreviated as "RG") are research results that may be disseminated by publication in scholarly journals and conferences, as white papers for the community, as Informational RFCs, and so on. In addition, it is expected that any concrete technologies developed in a Research Group will be brought to the IETF as input to IETF Working Group(s) or in the form of birds-of-a-feather (BoF) sessions for possible standardization. However, Research Group input carries no more weight than other community input, and goes through the same standards setting process as any other proposal.

IRTF Research Groups are formed to encourage research in areas of importance to the evolution of the Internet. Clearly, anyone may conduct such research, whether or not they are members of a Research Group. The expectation is that by sponsoring Research Groups, the IRTF can foster cross-organizational collaboration, help to create "critical mass" in important research areas, and add to the visibility and impact of the work.

IRTF Research Groups may have open or closed memberships. Limited membership may be advantageous to the formation of the long term working relationships that are critical to successful collaborative research. However, limited membership MUST be used with care and sensitivity to avoid unnecessary fragmentation of the work of the research community. Allowing limited membership is in stark contrast to IETF Working Groups, which are always open; this contrast reflects the different goals and environments of the two organizations - research vs. standards setting.

To ameliorate the effects of closed membership, all Research Groups are REQUIRED to regularly report progress to the community, and are encouraged to hold occasional open meetings (most likely co-located with IETF meetings). In addition, the IRTF may host open plenaries at regular IETF meetings during which research results of interest to the community are presented. Finally, multiple Research Groups working in the same general area may be formed, if appropriate.

Even more than the IETF, the work of the IRSG is expected to be marked by informality. The goal is to encourage and foster valuable research, not to add burdensome bureaucracy to the endeavor.

1.2. IRTF and Intellectual Property Rights

The IRTF follows the IETF Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) disclosure rules, as described in [Section 3.2 of \[RFC5743\]](#). This is a summary of these rules as they relate to IRTF research group discussions, mailing lists and Internet Drafts:

- o If a participant includes their own or their employer's IPR in a contribution to an IRTF research group, then they must file an IPR disclosure with the IETF.
- o If a participant recognizes their own or their employer's IPR in someone else's contribution and they are participating in the discussions in the research group relating to that contribution, then they must file an IPR disclosure with the IETF. Even if they are not participating in the discussion, the IRTF still requests that they file an IPR disclosure with the IETF.
- o Finally, the IRTF requests that a participant file an IPR disclosure with the IETF if they recognize IPR owned by others in any IRTF contribution.

Participants may file an IPR disclosure here:

<http://www.ietf.org/ipr/file-disclosure>

See [\[RFC8179\]](#) for definitions of "IPR" and "contribution" and for the detailed rules (substituting "IRTF" for "IETF").

2. Research Group Formation

Research Groups are the activity centers in the IRTF. A Research Group is typically created to address a research area related to Internet protocols, applications, architecture or technology area. Research Groups have the stable, long-term membership needed to promote the development of research collaboration and teamwork in exploring research issues. Participation is by individual contributors, rather than by representatives of organizations.

A Research Group may be established at the initiative of an individual or group of individuals. Anyone interested in creating an IRTF Research Group MUST submit a charter for the proposed group to the IRTF Chair along with a list of proposed founding members. The charter SHALL be reviewed by the IRSG and then forwarded to the IAB

for approval. If approved, the charter is placed on the IRTF Web site.

This process allows the IRTF Chair considerable freedom in how to decide to charter new work, and different approaches have been tried. One approach seems to have worked well recently, and is therefore briefly described here as an example: Under this approach, the IRTF Chair permits the proponents of new Research Groups to start a mailing list under the irtf.org domain, schedule meetings during IETF weeks and elsewhere for their new group, and otherwise act as if they were already formally chartered. These RGs are referred to as "Proposed RGs" in the IETF Datatracker, on the meeting agenda, etc. and while they often create a wiki page for themselves, their charter is not posted on the IRTF web site, in order to distinguish them from officially chartered RGs. After roughly a year, the IRTF Chair reviews the progress, activity levels and general operation of the Proposed RG, and decides to formally charter or abandon the effort.

2.1. Criteria for Formation

In determining whether it is appropriate to create a Research Group, the IRTF Chair, the IRSG and the IAB SHALL consider several issues:

- o Is the research area that the Research Group plans to address clear and relevant for the Internet community?
- o Will the formation of the Research Group foster work that would not be done otherwise? For instance, membership drawn from more than a single institution, more than a single country, and so on, is to be encouraged.
- o Do the Research Group's activities overlap with those of another Research Group? If so, it may still be appropriate to create the Research Group, but this question must be considered carefully since subdividing efforts often dilutes the available technical expertise.
- o Is there sufficient interest and expertise in the Research Group's topic with at least several people willing to expend the effort that is likely to produce significant results over time? Research Groups require considerable effort, including management of the Research Group process, editing of Research Group documents, and contribution to the document text.

The Internet Architecture Board (IAB) SHALL also review the charter of the proposed Research Group to determine the relationship of the proposed work to the overall architecture of the Internet Protocol Suite.

2.2. Charter

A charter is a contract between a Research Group and the IRTF to conduct research in the designated area. Charters MAY be renegotiated periodically to reflect changes to the current status, organization or goals of the Research Group.

The formation of a Research Group requires a charter, which is initially negotiated between a prospective Research Group Chair and the IRTF Chair. When the prospective Chair and the IRTF Chair are satisfied with the charter form and content, it becomes the basis for forming a Research Group.

A IRTF Research Group charter consists of five sections:

1. Research Group Name

A Research Group name SHOULD be reasonably descriptive or identifiable. Additionally, the group SHALL define a short acronym (consisting of printable US-ASCII characters) to reference the group in the IRTF directories, mailing lists, and general documents. The name and acronym MUST NOT conflict with any past or existing IETF or IRTF names and acronyms. It is helpful if the acronym ends with "RG", to help distinguish Research Groups from IETF Working Groups.

2. Chair(s)

The Research Group may have a small number of Chair(s) to perform the administrative functions of the group. The email address(es) of the Chair(s) SHALL be included.

3. Mailing list(s)

Each Research Group SHALL have an address (possibly a Chair's) for members of the Internet community to send queries regarding the Research Group. For instance, for requests to join the group.

A Research Group, whether limited-membership or open, SHALL have an Internet mailing list open to all interested parties. This list is used for an open discussion of the issues and announcements of results as they become available. Included SHOULD be the address to which an interested party sends a subscription request for the interest list and the procedures to follow when subscribing, and the location of the interest mailing list archive. It is RECOMMENDED that this mailing list be hosted

under the irtf.org domain, so its archive will remain available in the future.

It is expected that a limited-membership Research Group MAY also have a mailing list limited to the regular meeting participants on which substantial part of the work of a Research Group is likely to be conducted via e-mail.

4. Membership Policy

The Charter MUST define the membership policy (whether open or limited), and the procedure to apply for membership in the group. While limited membership is permitted, it is in no way encouraged or required.

5. Description of Research Group

The focus and intent of the group SHALL be set forth briefly. By reading this section alone, an individual should be able to decide whether this group is relevant to their own work. The first paragraph SHOULD give a brief summary of the research area, basis, goal(s) and approach(es) planned for the Research Group. This paragraph will frequently be used as an overview of the Research Group's effort.

To facilitate evaluation of the intended work and to provide on-going guidance to the Research Group, the charter SHALL describe the proposed research and SHALL discuss objectives and expected impact with respect to the Internet Architecture.

3. Research Group Operation

Research Groups are autonomous and each determines most of the details of its own operation with respect to session participation, reaching closure, norms of behavior, etc. Since the products are research results, not Internet standards, consensus of the group is not required. Rather, the measure of success is the quality and impact of the research results.

A number of procedural questions and issues will arise over time, and it is the function of the Research Group Chairs to manage the group process, keeping in mind that the overall purpose of the group is to make progress towards realizing the Research Group's goals and objectives.

There are few hard and fast rules on organizing or conducting Research Group activities, but a set of guidelines and practices have evolved over time that have proven successful. These are listed

here, with actual choices typically determined by the Research Group members and a Chair.

3.1. Meeting Planning

For coordinated, structured Research Group interactions, a Chair **MUST** publish to the group mailing list a draft agenda well in advance of the actual meeting. The agenda needs to contain at least:

- o The items for discussion;
- o The estimated time necessary per item; and
- o A clear indication of what documents the participants will need to read before the meeting in order to be well prepared.

A Research Group will conduct much of its business via its electronic mail distribution list(s). It is also likely to meet periodically to accomplish those things that are better achieved in more interactive meetings, such as brainstorming, heated altercations, etc. Meetings **MAY** be scheduled as telephone conference, video teleconference, or face-to-face (physical) meetings.

It is **REQUIRED** that all Research Group meetings be recorded in written minutes, to keep informed members who were not present and the community at large and to document the proceedings for present and future members. These minutes **SHOULD** include the agenda for the meeting, an account of the high points of the discussion, and a list of attendees. Unless the Research Group chair decides otherwise, the minutes **SHOULD** be sent to the interest list and made available through other channels, e.g., the IETF proceedings web pages.

3.2. Meeting Venue

Each Research Group **SHALL** determine the balance of email and face-to-face meetings that is appropriate for making progress on its goals.

Electronic mail permits the easiest and most affordable participation; face-to-face meetings often permit better focus, more productive debate and enhanced working relationships.

Face-to-face meetings are encouraged to be held co-located with the regular IETF meetings to minimize travel, since IRTF members are often also active in the IETF, and to encourage the cross-fertilization that occurs during hallway and after-hours interactions. Furthermore, as described above, even limited-membership Research Groups are encouraged to hold occasional open

meetings; an IETF meeting would serve as an ideal venue for such an event.

Face-to-face meetings that are collocated with academic conferences or workshops have also worked well for some Research Groups, particularly those with substantial academic participation. Such groups are still encouraged to occasionally collocate a meeting with an IETF meeting, in order to facilitate the cross-fertilization between research and engineering that the IRTF is chartered to stimulate.

3.3. Meeting Management

The challenge of managing Research Group meetings is to balance the need for consideration of the various issues, opinions and approaches against the need to allow forward progress. The Research Group, as a whole, has the final responsibility for striking this balance.

4. Research Group Termination

If, at some point, it becomes evident that a Research Group is not making progress in the research areas defined in its charter, or fails to regularly report the results of its research to the community, the IRTF Chair can either:

1. Require that the group recharter to refocus on a different set of problems,
2. Request that the group choose new Chair(s), or
3. Disband the group.

The IRTF Chair is encouraged to make this decision after consulting with the RG. However, if the RG disagrees with the chair's decision, it MAY appeal to the IAB.

5. Staff Roles

Research Groups require considerable care and feeding. In addition to general participation, successful Research Groups benefit from the efforts of participants filling specific functional roles.

5.1. IRTF Chair

The IRTF Chair is responsible for ensuring that Research Groups produce coherent, coordinated, architecturally consistent and timely output as a contribution to the overall evolution of the Internet architecture. In addition to the detailed tasks related to Research

Groups outlined below, the IRTF Chair MAY also from time to time arrange for topical workshops attended by the IRSG and perhaps other experts in the field.

Planning

The IRTF Chair monitors the range of activities. This may include encouraging the formation of Research Groups directly, rather than waiting for proposals from IRTF participants.

Coordination of Research Groups

The IRTF Chair coordinates the work done by the various Research Groups.

Reporting

The IRTF Chair reports on IRTF progress to the to the IAB and the wider Internet community.

Progress tracking

The IRTF Chair tracks and manages the progress of the various Research Groups with the aid of a regular status report on documents and accomplishments from the Research Group Chairs. The resulting reports are made available to the community at large at regular intervals. The IRTF Chair MAY use the IETF Datatracker to manage the status of Internet Drafts authored by the various Research Groups [[RFC6322](#)].

[5.2.](#) IRSG Member

Members of the IRSG are responsible for advising the IRTF Chair on the chartering of new Research Groups and other matters relating to the smooth operation of the IRTF. They are also responsible for helping review documents that are being published on the IRTF Stream [[RFC5743](#)]. In addition, most IRSG members are also Research Group chairs.

[5.3.](#) Research Group Chair

A Research Group Chair is concerned with making forward progress in the areas under investigation, and has wide discretion in the conduct of Research Group business. A Chair MUST ensure that a number of tasks are performed, either directly or by others assigned to the tasks. This encompasses at the very least the following:

Ensuring the Research Group process and content management

A Chair has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that a Research Group achieves forward progress. For some Research Groups, this can be accomplished by having a Chair perform all management-related activities. In other Research Groups - particularly those with large or divisive participation - it is helpful to allocate process and/or secretarial functions to other participants, after approval from the IRTF Chair. Process management pertains strictly to the style of Research Group interaction and not to its content. Research Group Chairs remain responsible for all actions a Secretary performs on their behalf.

Moderate the Research Group email list

A Chair SHOULD attempt to ensure that the discussions on a list are relevant and do not devolve to "flame" attacks or rat-hole into technical trivia. A Chair SHOULD make sure that discussions on the list are summarized and that the outcome is well documented (to avoid repetition).

Organize, prepare and chair face-to-face and on-line formal meetings

A Chair SHOULD plan and announce meetings well in advance. (See [Section 3.1](#) for procedures.)

Communicate results of meetings

A Chair and/or Secretary MUST ensure that minutes of a meeting are taken and published to the participants.

Distribute the work

It is expected that all Research Group participants will actively contribute to the work of the group. Research Group membership is expected to be a long-term commitment by a set of motivated members of the research community. Of course, at any given time, more of the work is likely to be done by a few participants with particular interests, set of skills and ideas. It is the task of the Chair to motivate enough experts to allow for a fair distribution of the workload.

Document development

Research Groups produce documents and documents need authors. However, authorship of papers related to the work of a Research Group is one of the primary reasons that researchers become members, so finding motivated authors should not be a problem. It is up to the Research Group to decide the authorship of papers

resulting from Research Group activities. In particular, authorship by the entire group is not required. The Research Group Chair MAY use the IETF Datatracker to manage the status of Internet Drafts authored by the group [[RFC6322](#)].

Document publication

The IRTF Chair, RG Chair and/or Secretary SHALL work with the IESG, IANA and the RFC Editor to ensure documents to be published as RFCs conform with RFC publication requirements, such as the conflict review defined in [[RFC5742](#)] and to coordinate any editorial changes suggested by the RFC Editor.

The publication process has been changing over the years and is expected to continue to change on occasion. In addition, the IRTF Chair has freedom to decide how IRTF documents are reviewed and approved before being sent onward for publication. For at least the last ten years, the detailed publication process has been documented on a wiki page [[IRTF-RFCs](#)].

[5.4.](#) Research Group Editor/Secretary

Taking minutes and editing jointly-authored Research Group documents often is performed by a specifically-designated participant or set of participants appointed by an RG Chair and approval from the IRTF Chair.

[6.](#) Research Group Documents

[6.1.](#) Meeting Documents

All relevant documents for a meeting (including the final agenda) SHOULD be published and be made available as Internet Drafts at least two weeks before a meeting starts. If a meeting is collocated with an IETF meeting, the agenda and document submission deadlines communicated for that IETF meeting take precedence.

It is strongly RECOMMENDED that a Research Group Chair make sure that all meeting materials are made available via the IETF Datatracker's proceedings system, which also handles "interim" meetings not collocated with IETF meetings. All relevant documents (including the final agenda and the minutes of the meeting) SHOULD be placed there. This has the advantage that all participants can retrieve all files and thus make sure they have all relevant documents.

6.2. Request For Comments (RFC)

The work of an IRTF Research Group usually results in publication of research papers and other documents, as well as Informational or Experimental Request For Comments (RFCs). The RFC series is the archival publication record for the Internet community. Since 2009, IRTF RFCs have been published on a separate IRTF Document Stream [[RFC5743](#)]. A document can be written by individuals in a Research Group, by the group as a whole with a designated Editor, or by others not involved with the IRTF. The designated author(s) need not include the group Chair(s). Initial publication as an Internet Draft is preferred, if only to facilitate review, before asking for RFC publication.

NOTE: The RFC series is a publication mechanism only and publication does not determine the status of a document. Status is determined through separate, explicit status labels. In other words, the reader is reminded that all Internet Standards are published as RFCs, but NOT all RFCs specify standards.

The RFC's authors are expected to work with the RFC Editor to meet all formatting, review and other requirements that the RFC Editor, IAB or IESG may impose. [[RFC5743](#)] describes the approach that Research Groups follow when they want to publish RFCs on the IRTF Stream. In summary, after the group has decided that a given document is ready, a Chair initiates an IRSG Review. After approval by the IRSG, the IESG reviews the document for conflicts with the Internet Standards Process as described in [[RFC5742](#)]. After the IESG review concludes, the document undergoes final publication preparation at the RFC Editor.

7. IANA Considerations

This document has no IANA considerations.

8. Security Considerations

Security issues are not discussed in this memo.

9. Acknowledgments

This document is based on the October 1996 RFC "IRTF Research Group Guidelines and Procedures" by A. Weinrib [[RFC2014](#)], which in turn was based on the March 1994 RFC "IETF Working Group Guidelines and Procedures" by E. Huizer and D. Crocker [[RFC1603](#)].

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[Appendix A](#). Changes from [RFC2014](#)

Rev	Changes
-05	More feedback from Niels ten Oever. Fixed typos. RFC5793 -> RFC8179 . Converted to kramdown-rfc2629.
-04	Addressed feedback from Mat Ford, Niels ten Oever and Martin Thomson.
-03	Changed the stream to IRTF and status to Informational, per discussion with the IAB at the Cambridge, MA retreat. Added funding acknowledgment.
-02	Added text about and reference to [RFC7418] . Add pointer to IRTF RFC process wiki. More wordsmithing.
-01	Use [RFC2119] terms instead of local definitions. Fix idnits (missing IANA section, say that we obsolete [RFC2014] , etc.) Update obsoleted references. Update acknowledgments. Remove text about the Internet Monthly Report (IMR). Remove text that says that a RG should have 4-5 members, and that proposed charters should include the names of such "charter members". Add suggestion that RG acronyms end in "RG". Change recommendation that RGs have 1-2 chairs to instead say "a small number", to allow cases where more than two chairs are useful. Update text on IRTF RFC Stream publication [RFC5742] [RFC5743] . Add text on IRTF IPR policies. Add pointers and text to [RFC4440] and [RFC6322] .
-00	Document contains the entire, unmodified contents of [RFC2014] , except for (1) boilerplate and layout changes that are due to the conversion to xml2rfc and (2) changed author information. It is being submitted so that it will be easier to view diffs of the content changes that will be introduced in subsequent versions.

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