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Authors: A. Farrel R. Salz
 Old Dog Consulting Akamai Technologies
 How is the Area Director Workload Made Up?

Abstract

Anecdotally, every IESG complains about the Area Director (AD) workload, and says that it takes the first full term to understand the job. Empirically, the AD workload is high sometimes causing backlogs in processing of Internet-Drafts and stressing the ADs.

After some discussions in the GENDISPATCH working group and arising from an Internet-Draft postulating changes that might reduce the AD workload, several ADs reported some data on how they spent their time in a few weeks chosen at random. This document collates that data and presents it for information.

This document does not attempt to draw any conclusions from the limited data currently available, and there is no intention to publish this document as an RFC.

About This Document

This note is to be removed before publishing as an RFC.

Status information for this document may be found at <https://datatracker.ietf.org/doc/draft-farrel-how-much-AD-work/>.

Discussion of this document takes place on the GENDISPATCH Working Group mailing list (<mailto:gendispatch@ietf.org>), which is archived at <https://mailarchive.ietf.org/arch/browse/gendispatch/>. Subscribe at <https://www.ietf.org/mailman/listinfo/gendispatch/>.

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1. Introduction

Anecdotally, every IESG complains about the Area Director (AD) workload, and says that it takes the first full term to understand

the job. Empirically, the AD workload is high sometimes causing backlogs in processing of Internet-Drafts and stressing the ADs.

After some discussions in the GENDISPATCH working group and arising from [[I-D.rsalz-less-ad-work](#)] which postulated ways to reduce the AD workload, several ADs reported some data on how they spent their time in a few weeks chosen at random. That data cannot be taken as representative, and it would be wrong to draw firm conclusions from it, but this document collates the data and presents it for information.

This document does not attempt to draw any conclusions from the limited data currently available, but by collecting and presenting it we may trigger more focused discussion and additional reports of time usage from which it might be possible to make assertions.

There is no intention to publish this document as an RFC.

2. Background to Description of AD Workload

[[I-D.rsalz-less-ad-work](#)] presented the evolution of the job description for ADs as provided by the IESG to the IETF Nominations Committee (NomCom) and used by the NomCom to advise applicants for AD positions. That document noted that as far back as 2013 (the first year for which the job description is preserved in the datatracker) the description said:

The basic IESG activities can consume between 15-40 hours a week.

In 2017, this description changed to:

The ability to contribute more time is useful, but if the NomCom should pick a few ADs who can only do 15 hrs/week on a routine basis, the IESG can cope with that.

In 2018, this changed to the following more general statement:

Many ADs allocate 15 hours or more per week...

But a more descriptive message was also added to the 2018 job description:

Enough time must be allocated to manage approximately 10 to 15 working groups, [and] to read on the order of 500 pages of internet-drafts every two weeks

The 2023 NomCom used the following information in the job description:

Basic IESG activities can consume significant time during a typical non-meeting week. Enough time must be allocated to manage approximately 10 to 15 working groups, review up to 400 pages of Internet Drafts every two weeks, and follow up on document processing tasks. Many ADs allocate a minimum of 15 hours per week to such tasks. Some ADs have been able to combine significant other responsibilities with an AD role and/or delegate work to area directorates, while others put a larger proportion of their hours into AD responsibilities. A personal commitment is critical.

The time commitment varies by Area and by month, with the most intense periods immediately before and during IETF meetings. ADs during their first year tend to spend more time per week on AD work. Practices vary widely between IESG members, however. Most IESG members also participate in additional IETF leadership activities, further increasing the time commitment for those individuals.

2.1. NEWTON BoF Proposal

In 2023, leading up to IETF-118, and considering three Internet-Drafts ([\[I-D.rsalz-less-ad-work\]](#), [\[I-D.nottingham-iesg-review-workload\]](#), and [\[I-D.eggert-ietf-chair-may-delegate\]](#)) a proposal was submitted for a Birds of a Feather (BoF) meeting named "Now Exactly What are they spending Time ON" (NEWTON).

The NEWTON BoF proposal observed some of the concerns about IESG workload and said:

In order to better understand the scope of this problem, we need to determine what the time commitment is for ADs. And, if this is a significant amount of time that affects delivery in the role or constrains nominations, then it will be desirable to further understand how the total time breaks down into component tasks so that it is possible to consider how to rebalance, mitigate, or reduce the workload if the time spent is not matching the community's priorities.

The first step in this process is to spend one IETF cycle (i.e., roughly four months) collecting data from the IESG. Although a single cycle will not cover a full year's events and therefore be skewed, this period should give reasonable insight into the annual working practices without delaying for a full year. If the IESG prefers, the data collected can be anonymized as much as reasonably possible so that no AD need feel embarrassed about how

hard they work or how much of their spare time they dedicate to the role.

Although the IESG chose not to pursue this approach, several of the ADs did record and report how they spent their time for a few weeks. This information is presented in the sections that follow. If more information is gathered in the future, this document may be updated.

3. Reports from Current ADs

3.1. Martin Duke

Martin Duke (in the fourth year of his term as Transport AD) reported to the GENDISPATCH mailing list on 19th September 2023 as follows:

I am not including the time I spend as a normal IETF participant: writing drafts, participating in WGs I would attend anyway, and attending IETF plenary meetings.

These percentages are a rough fraction of a 40-hour work-week, averaged over the year. I did a time card for my own information three years ago, long since lost, but this is an estimate based on a little reflection on the tasks I perform.

-8% - Meetings: Telechats, a weekly sync with my co-AD, occasional one-offs for IEEE syncs, BOF reviews, etc.

-2% - WG management - finding chairs, occasional 1-on-1s, chartering, errata, BoFs, monitoring mailing lists, etc. Personally, I tend not to wade into WG document threads very much, to keep my perspective clear for the AD review. Others may differ. There was a period I spent about 5% of my time clearing the errata backlog, but that is long past.

-In transport, we do not get many BoFs. I have also been fortunate in having great WG chairs that can handle most problems, so thank you to them.

-3% - AD [document] Evaluation -- With only 5 WGs, I do not have many of these. I take these really seriously and a review usually takes the better part of a day, sometimes more. Other ADs almost certainly spend more time because they have many more documents.

-3% - Standards process management: actively participating in policy work -- IESG statements and such -- is essentially optional. I have gotten interested in certain initiatives. It is certainly possible to spend more or less time on this.

-2% - Retreats. These meetings essentially take a full week, but are happening only once per year. You could put this in the "standards process management" bin if you like.

-10% - IESG review - Until about a year ago, this consumed substantially more time for me, as much as 40-50%. For multiple reasons, I've trimmed this down to focus on documents with transport implications (which is not many of them). In the context of any particular review, I've reduced my focus to major problems and any transport issues. For what it's worth, I don't think this scaling back has meaningfully reduced my impact on the IETF.

For most ADs, a much larger percentage of ballots have issues pertaining to their area of expertise. If I applied the same criteria to being SEC AD, I would probably be spending *at least* 40% of my time on balloting.

Martin summarised this as follows:

In summary, I'm spending about 25%-30% of my work-week [10 to 12 hours] on AD-specific stuff. When I started, it was over 50% [20+ hours], mostly because I was much more thorough on IESG ballots. An additional chunk of time is spent on being an IETF participant. Although I participate in more policy work than the bare minimum, I would say that this level of commitment is pretty close to a lower bound for *competent* execution of the duties because:

-Transport is small: few WGs, not that many documents, largely irrelevant to most IESG ballots.

-I am experienced: I've formed an opinion about what matters and have stopped doing stuff that I don't think matters.

Martin added some closing thoughts.

No one asked me, but I don't think eliminating AD tasks that take <5% of the week is going to make a difference in recruiting: it's still a matter of asking your manager to be removed from some dayjob tasks. The real money is in:

1. eliminating lots of working groups;
2. having way more ADs; and/or
3. fundamentally changing the nature of IESG balloting.

All of these have significant drawbacks.

I will also note that we historically have plenty of AD candidates for some areas (SEC and RTG) and almost none in others (TSV). It is apparent to me that this is not just about workload and there are other factors at play, and the community would benefit from exploring these before taking a sledgehammer to the generic AD job description.

WG management and AD Evaluation are the most important things I do and should not be abridged.

If there's one place I regret not spending more time, it's adoption calls in my WGs. There are several instances where I have AD-evaluated a document that isn't highly objectionable, but that I don't think is a particularly useful addition to the RFC series.

3.2. Warren Kumari

Warren Kumari (in the seventh year of his term as Operations and Management AD) made several distinct reports.

3.2.1. 1st and 2nd August, 2023

On 21st September 2023, Warren reported to the GENDISPATCH mailing list how he had spent his time over two days. He said:

Note: I only did this for 2 days, shortly after a meeting - this means that it isn't hugely representative of an "average" week, but it hopefully at least give a flavor. One thing that I discovered while collecting this data is just how much overhead it involved. The context switching of "Do something, record something, do something, record something" was crushing. It was also very unclear how I would count almost all of the items.

Over these two days, Warren reported two principal categories of IETF time:

IETF email and slack conversations. Total time spent: 8 hours 23 minutes.

Assorted minor IETF tasks. Total time spent: 27 minutes.

The time Warren spent during the two days can be summed up as:

Total work time : 20 hours 49 minutes

IETF work time : 8 hours 50 minutes

Percentage IETF time : 42.5%

Making a lot of assumptions from these figures we might determine that Warren has a working week of roughly 52 hours, and that he might spend 22 hours a week on IETF work.

3.2.2. 24th to 30th September, 2023

On October 3rd, Warren reported to the GENDISPATCH list giving figures for a whole calendar week generated using a new tracking tool.

IETF Email and Misc : 20 hours 31 minutes

IETF Document Progression : 2 hours 5 minutes

IETF Meetings : 3 hours 21 minutes

IETF Misc : 33 minutes

IETF NOC : 2 hours 46 minutes

The time Warren spent during the week can be summed up as:

Total work time : 50 hours

IETF work time : 29 hours 16 minutes

Percentage IETF time : 76%

3.2.3. 1st to 7th October, 2023

On October 8th, Warren reported a further week of work in an email to the GENDISPATCH list.

IETF Email and Misc : 19 hours 53 minutes

IETF Document Progression : 25 minutes

IETF Document Review : 3 hours 50 minutes

IESG Discussions : 2 hours 30 minutes

IETF Misc : 10 minutes

IETF NOC : 1 hour 42 minutes

The time Warren spent during the week can be summed up as:

Total work time : 48 hours 41 minutes

IETF work time : 28 hours 30 minutes

Percentage IETF time : 58.5%

3.2.4. 8th to 14th October, 2023

On October 17th, Warren again reported a week of work in an email to the GENDISPATCH list.

IETF Email and Misc : 20 hours 6 minutes

IETF Document Progression : 3 hours 59 minutes

IETF Meetings : 3 hours 13 minutes

IETF NoC : 2 hours 57 minutes

IETF Technology Deep Dives : 0 hours 59 minutes

IETF Misc Tasks : 4 hours 8 minutes

The time Warren spent during the week can be summed up as:

Total work time : 67 hours 20 minutes

IETF work time : 35 hours 22 minutes

Percentage IETF time : 52.5%

3.2.5. 22nd to 28th October, 2023

On October 30th, Warren made a final report of a week of work in an email to the GENDISPATCH list.

IETF Email and Misc : 23 hours 5 minutes

IETF Document Progression : 3 hours 12 minutes

IETF Document Review : 2 hours 0 minutes

IETF WG Management : 3 hours 23 minutes

The time Warren spent during the week can be summed up as:

Total work time : 72 hours 59 minutes

IETF work time : 25 hours 5 minutes

Percentage IETF time : 34%

3.3. Roman Danyliw

Roman Danyliw (in the fifth year of his term as Security AD) reported on how he works as an AD in emails sent to the SAAG and GENDISPATCH mailing lists at the start of October 2023. The emails point to a github page that provides a detailed description of Roman's working practices as Security AD, and explains how the workload varies and can be balanced with other tasks.

While this document will be very valuable to people trying to better understand what it takes to be an AD in general and a Security AD in particular, it doesn't give a clear breakdown of the amount of work time that he spends on the tasks, with only a few specific tasks having timings associated with them.

However, he usefully says:

Starting with a 50 - 60% IETF effort budget is not an unrealistic baseline commitment for the SEC area realizing that the load surges and ebb some.

4. Summary

Martin Duke, as an experienced AD in a small area (TSV) found that he could do the AD job, including contributing to some of the background IESG tasks, on 10 to 12 hours a week. But he noted that as an inexperienced AD (still in the small area), he would expect the job to take more than 20 hours a week. We should note, however, that his figures are based on an educated estimate and the memory of a timecard he no longer has.

Warren's initial report of two days is notable in that they come in the period after an IETF meeting when ADs are often catching up with email and half-finished conversations. It is also remarkable that those days contain no document reviews.

Warren's second report may give a more complete picture showing almost 30 hours of his 50 hour working week devoted to IETF tasks, including some time progressing documents.

Warren's third report also gives a better picture showing 28.5 hours of his 49 hour week spent on IETF tasks, including document reviews and IESG discussions.

Warren's fourth report shows him spending 52.5% of his working week on IETF tasks, but this is not a good indication because most would consider a 67 hour working week to be excessive. Thus, the total of 35.3 hours spent on IETF work is far more indicative.

At 72 hours worked in the week in Warren's final report, we must consider Warren to be working exceptionally long hours. That he only spent 34% of his working week on IETF activity is almost meaningless! The valuable figure is that he used 25 hours on IETF tasks.

While Roman Danyliw did not give any estimates of work hours, if we assume a "normal" working week of 45 hours, he is suggesting that a Security AD could expect to spend around 22.5 to 27 hours a week on IETF tasks, with some variations as work-load varies.

4.1. Aggregation

It is not easy to make an aggregated view of how AD time is spent from the results reported so far, but it is possible to aggregate the 30 days reported by Warren Kumari. This is possible because of the consistent categories that he used in his reports, and could be valuable because of the number of days recorded.

It is, however, worth noting that, as observed by Warren, the definitions of the work categories are not precise and some activities do not sit clearly in one pot or another. Nevertheless, this gives a first level understanding.

IETF email and slack conversations : 91 hours 58 minutes

IETF Document Progression : 9 hours 41 minutes

IETF Document Review : 5 hours 50 minutes

IETF WG Management : 3 hours 23 minutes

IETF Meetings : 6 hours 34 minutes

IESG Discussions : 2 hours 30 minutes

IETF Misc Tasks : 5 hours 18 minutes

IETF NOC : 7 hours 25 minutes

IETF Technology Deep Dives : 0 hours 59 minutes

The time Warren spent during the 30 days he reported can be summed up as:

Total work time : 259 hours 49 minutes

IETF work time : 127 hours 3 minutes

Percentage IETF time : 49%

Average working day (7 day week) : 8 hours 39 minutes

Average IETF work per day (7 day week) : 4 hours 14 minutes

Average working day (5 day week) : 11 hours 48 minutes

Average IETF work per day (5 day week) : 5 hours 46 minutes

5. Security Considerations

This document is a collation of material previously posted to IETF mailing lists. It makes no security or privacy changes.

6. IANA Considerations

This document has no IANA actions.

7. Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge the useful discussion in GENDISPATCH meetings and on the GENDISPATCH mailing list.

Special thanks to Martin Duke, Warren Kumari, and Roman Danyliw for recording and reporting how they spent their time.

8. References

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Authors' Addresses

Adrian Farrel
Old Dog Consulting

Email: adrian@olddog.co.uk

Rich Salz
Akamai Technologies

Email: rsalz@akamai.com