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**The IETF-ISOC Relationship**  
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Abstract

This document summarises the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) - Internet Society (ISOC) relationship, following a major revision to the structure of the IETF Administrative Support Activity (IASA) in 2018. The IASA was revised under a new "IASA 2.0" structure by the IASA2 Working Group, which changed the IETF's administrative, legal, and financial structure. As a result, it also changed the relationship between the IETF and ISOC, which made it necessary to revise [RFC 2031](#).

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## [1.](#) Introduction and History

The Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) is the body that is responsible for the development and maintenance of the Internet Standards. The IETF is primarily a volunteer organization. Its driving force is a group of dedicated high-quality engineers from all over the world. In a structure of working groups, these engineers exchange ideas and experience, and through discussion and collaboration (both electronically and face-to-face) they strive to achieve rough consensus and implement the standards through running code.

The growth of the Internet over several decades also led to the growth of the IETF. More and more people, organizations, and companies rely on Internet Standards. Non-technical issues, such as legal, administrative, and financial issues had long been an undesirable but unavoidable part of the IETF. To address these issues in 1995 the IETF established the Poised95 Working Group. Its goal was to structure and document the IETF processes in order to maximize the flexibility and freedom of IETF engineers so that they could work in the way the IETF had always been most successful and to honour the IETF credo: "Rough consensus and running code".

The Poised95 Working Group concluded that the Internet Society (ISOC), which was formed in 1992, was the best organization to handle all of these legal, administrative, and financial tasks on behalf of



and in close cooperation with the IETF. This led to documenting things such as the IETF standards process [[RFC2026](#)], the IETF organizational structure [[RFC2028](#)], the IETF Nominating Committee (NomCom) procedures [[RFC2282](#)], and the IETF-ISOC relationship [[RFC2031](#)].

As time passed and operational experience accumulated, additional structure was necessary. As a result, the Internet Administrative Support Activity (IASA) was defined in 2005 and documented in [[RFC4071](#)] and [[RFC4371](#)].

In 2018, the IASA was revised under a new "IASA 2.0" structure by the IASA2 Working Group, which made significant revisions to the IETF's administrative, legal, and financial structure. One critical outcome was the formation, in close cooperation between the IETF and ISOC, of the IETF Administration Limited Liability Company (IETF LLC) as a subsidiary of ISOC.

As a result of the the IASA 2.0 structure [[I-D.ietf-iasa2-rfc4071bis](#)] and formation of the IETF LLC, the relationship between the IETF and ISOC has changed. This document summarises the current state of the IETF - ISOC relationship at a high level and replaces [[RFC2031](#)].

## **[2. Philosophical Relationship with ISOC](#)**

ISOC and the IETF have historically been philosophically aligned. ISOC's connection with the IETF community has always played an important role in its policy work. ISOC has always been an advocate for multistakeholder processes, which include the technical community. Open standards are an explicit part of one of the focus areas in ISOC's mission: Advancing the development and application of Internet infrastructure, technologies, and open standards.

## **[3. Main Division of Responsibilities between IETF and ISOC](#)**

The IETF remains responsible for the development and quality of the Internet Standards. The Internet Society will aid the IETF by facilitating legal and organizational issues as described below. Apart from the roles described below, the IETF and ISOC acknowledge that ISOC has no influence whatsoever on the technical content of Internet Standards.

## **[4. ISOC's Role in the IETF Standards Process](#)**

ISOC plays a small role in the IETF standards process. In particular, ISOC assists the standards process by appointing the IETF NomCom chair and by confirming IAB candidates who are put forward by



the IETF NomCom, as described in [[RFC7437](#)], and by acting as the last resort in the appeals process, as described in [[RFC2026](#)].

ISOC maintains liaison relationships and memberships in other Standards Development Organizations (SDOs) and related organizations, which directly benefits the IETF. For example, ISOC is a Sector Member of the ITU-T. As a result, ISOC delegates are afforded the same rights as other ITU-T Sector Members [[RFC6756](#)].

ISOC also supports the IETF standards process more indirectly (e.g., by promoting it in relevant communities) through several programmes. For example, ISOC's Policymakers Programme to the IETF (usually referred to simply as ISOC's policy fellows programme) gives policy experts an opportunity to interact directly with the IETF technical community. ISOC also performs technical work using the standards developed in the IETF as its basis. An example of that is ISOC's Deploy360 program, which helps encourage and support the deployment of critical new IETF standards like DNSSEC [[RFC4033](#)] and IPv6 [[RFC8200](#)].

Otherwise, the involvement of ISOC's employees in the IETF standards process (e.g., as document editors or in leadership positions) is as individual contributors rather than on institutional grounds.

## **5. The IETF's Role in ISOC**

The IETF plays a role in the governance of ISOC. Per ISOC's by-laws, the IETF appoints a set of trustees to the ISOC Board. The process by which the IETF makes those appointments is defined in [[RFC3677](#)].

The charter of the IAB (Internet Architecture Board) [[RFC2850](#)] states that "the IAB acts as a source of advice and guidance to the Board of Trustees and Officers of the Internet Society concerning technical, architectural, procedural, and (where appropriate) policy matters pertaining to the Internet and its enabling technologies". This connection between the IAB and ISOC ensures that ISOC's proposals in the policy area are based on a sound understanding of the relevant technologies and architectures. ISOC's strong connection to the Internet technical community has always been one of its main strengths.

## **6. Legal Relationship with ISOC**

The IETF LLC was created as a subsidiary of ISOC. Specifically, the IETF LLC is a single-member Limited Liability Company created in Delaware (USA) in August 2018. The member (i.e., its legal owner) is ISOC. The IETF LLC is managed separately, makes a budget, can sign contracts, can pay and receive money, can sue and be sued, and has a



board. ISOC operates as a U.S. 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization, and was founded to support and promote the development of the Internet as a global technical infrastructure, a resource to enrich people's lives, and a force for good in society. The Limited Liability Company Agreement of IETF Administration LLC, dated August 27 2018, is the Operating Agreement [[OpAgreement](#)] that governs the relationship between the IETF LLC and ISOC (while this document is intended as a summary of the agreement, please note that only the agreement is authoritative).

The IETF LLC provides the IETF with a separate legal existence. The IETF LLC structure now covers the IETF standards and IETF standards process, all IETF officers (IAB, IESG, Nomcom, and WG chairs), IETF employees and contractors, the RFC series and RFC editor, and all of the IETF's other business operations.

For tax purposes, the IETF LLC is considered a part of ISOC, known as a "disregarded entity". This means that the IETF LLC shares ISOC's tax exempt status as a not-for-profit charity, and contributions to the LLC are tax deductible under U.S. law as they would be if they were made to ISOC.

The IETF Trust, documented in [[RFC5378](#)], and updated in [[I-D.ietf-iasa2-trust-rationale](#)] and [[I-D.ietf-iasa2-trust-update](#)], provides legal protection for the RFC series of documents and other aspects of the IETF. This includes things such as protection for trademarks, copyrights, and intellectual property rights. As part of the IETF Trust arrangement, IETF standards documents can be freely downloaded, copied, and distributed without financial or other distribution restrictions, though all rights to change these documents lie with the IETF. The IETF Trust also provides legal protection in case of disputes over intellectual property rights and other rights. The creation of the IETF LLC has changed the way that the IETF Trust's trustees are selected but did not change the purpose or operation of the Trust. One of the IETF Trust's trustees is appointed by the ISOC's board of trustees.

## **7. Financial and Administrative Relationship with ISOC**

Under the terms of the Operating Agreement [[OpAgreement](#)] between ISOC and the IETF, ISOC has agreed to provide some funding support for the IETF (ISOC has historically provided the IETF with significant financial support). In particular, among other things, the IETF LLC will be responsible for creating and managing an annual operating budget for the IETF; for negotiating, signing, and overseeing contracts; for fund raising; for maintaining a bank account; and for liability insurance. The IETF LLC is managed by a board of





directors, one of whom is appointed by the ISOC's board of trustees. The intention is that ISOC and the IETF LLC operate at arms length.

The IETF LCC establishes contracts with third parties to provide different types of services to the IETF. Note that it is possible that some of those services are provided by ISOC or involve ISOC staff.

Under the new IASA 2.0 structure, the IETF is solely responsible for its administration via the IETF LLC, IETF Trust, IAB, IESG, IETF working groups, and other IETF processes. A further exploration of this can be found in Section 4 of [[I-D.ietf-iasa2-rfc4071bis](#)].

## **8. IANA Considerations**

This document introduces no new IANA considerations.

## **9. Security Considerations**

This document introduces no new security considerations.

## **10. Privacy Considerations**

This document introduces no new privacy considerations.

## **11. Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to thank Erik Huizer for his contribution as the author of [[RFC2031](#)], which this document replaces.

## **12. Changes from Previous Versions**

RFC Editor: Please remove this section upon publication.

-00: Initial version published

-01: Several key updates to prepare WGLC based on WG feedback

-02: Fixed nits identified by Brian Carpenter on 12-21-2018, and text on the tax status from John Levine.

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