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Considerations for Cancellation of IETF Meetings

Abstract

The IETF holds three in-person meetings per year to discuss and understand issues. However, various emergencies can make a planned in-person meeting infeasible. This document provides criteria for making this judgment.

Discussion Venues

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

Discussion of this document takes place on the mailing list (shmoo@ietf.org), which is archived at <https://mailarchive.ietf.org/arch/browse/shmoo/>.

Source for this draft and an issue tracker can be found at <https://github.com/martinduke/draft-ietf-shmoo-cancel-meeting>.

Status of This Memo

This Internet-Draft is submitted in full conformance with the provisions of BCP 78 and BCP 79.

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1. Introduction

Among the highlights of the IETF calendar are in-person general meetings, which happen three times a year at various locations around the world.

Various major events may affect the suitability of a scheduled in-person IETF meeting, though for some this may not be immediately obvious. For example:

- *A meeting venue itself may unexpectedly close or otherwise be unable to meet IETF meeting requirements due to a health issue, legal violation, or other localized problem.

- *A natural disaster could degrade the travel and meeting infrastructure in a planned location and make it unethical to further burden that infrastructure with a meeting.

- *War, civil unrest, or public health crisis could make a meeting unsafe and/or result in widespread national or corporate travel bans.

- *An economic crisis could sharply reduce resources available for travel.

- *Changes in visa policy or other unexpected governmental restrictions might make the venue inaccessible to numerous attendees.

This document provides criteria to aid the IETF Administration LLC (LLC) in deciding to postpone, move, or cancel an in-person IETF meeting.

2. Conventions

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "NOT RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in BCP 14 [[RFC2119](#)] [[RFC8174](#)] when, and only when, they appear in all capitals, as shown here.

In this document, the term "venue" refers to both the facility that houses the sessions and the official meeting hotel(s).

3. Decision Criteria and Roles

The LLC assesses whether an in-person meeting is logistically and financially viable in light of events, and assembles information about various travel restrictions that might impact attendance. The Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG) and Internet Research Task Force (IRTF) Chair assess if the projected attendance is sufficient for a viable in-person meeting.

3.1. IETF LLC

The LLC is responsible for assessing the suitability of a venue for an IETF meeting and is responsible for any reassessment in response to a major event that leaves the prior conclusion in doubt. If such an event occurs more than twelve weeks before the start of the scheduled meeting, it is deemed a non-emergency situation. Later events, up to and including the week of a meeting itself, are deemed an emergency situation.

In non-emergency situations, if the LLC determines the scheduled meeting clearly cannot proceed (e.g., the venue has permanently closed), then it **MUST** consult with the community on the reason(s) and its proposed remedy. In less clear cases, the LLC **SHOULD** conduct a formal reassessment process that includes:

- *Consulting with the community on the process timetable.
- *Consulting with the community on criteria to assess the impact of new developments.
- *Consulting with the community on the form of the assessment report.
- *Publishing an assessment report and recommended remedy.
- *Seeking approval of the IESG for the recommendation.

In emergency situations, which lack the time for a consultation process, this document provides criteria that have IETF consensus and which the LLC **MUST** apply in its assessment.

The LLC will collect information about the likely impact to in-person attendance of national travel advisories, national and corporate travel bans, quarantine requirements, etc. and report the results to the IESG.

These criteria, some of which are derived from Section 3 of [\[RFC8718\]](#), apply to venues that are re-evaluated due to an emergency:

- *Local safety guidelines allow the venue and hotels to host a meeting with the expected number of participants and staff.
- *It **MUST** be possible to provision Internet Access to the Facility and IETF Hotels that allows those attending in person to utilize the Internet for all their IETF, business, and day-to-day needs; in addition, there must be sufficient bandwidth and access for remote attendees. Provisions include, but are not limited to, native and unmodified IPv4 and IPv6 connectivity, and global

reachability; there may be no additional limitation that would materially impact their Internet use. To ensure availability, it MUST be possible to provision redundant paths to the Internet.

*A reasonable number of food and drink establishments are open and available within walking distance to provide for the expected number of participants and staff.

*Local health and public safety infrastructure should expect to have adequate capacity to support an influx of visitors during the meeting week.

Finally, the LLC MUST assess the impact on its own operations, including:

*The number of critical support staff and contractors who can be at the venue.

*The financial impact of continuing a meeting, or implementing any of the possible remedies.

The LLC SHOULD cancel a meeting if it judges a meeting to be logistically impossible or inconsistent with its fiduciary responsibilities.

In the event of considerations this document does not foresee, the LLC should protect the health and safety of attendees and staff, as well as the fiscal health of the organization, with approval from the IESG and a plan to seek a later update of this document.

3.2. IESG and IRTF Chair

If the LLC assesses there are no fundamental logistical or financial obstacles to holding a meeting in an emergency situation, the IESG and IRTF Chair assess if projected attendance is high enough to achieve the benefit of an in-person meeting.

The IESG is discouraged from relying on a simple head count of expected meeting attendance. Even dramatically smaller meetings with large remote participation may be successful. In addition to the LLC's estimate, the IESG might consider:

*Are many working groups and research groups largely unaffected by the restrictions, so that they can operate effectively?

*Is there a critical mass of key personnel at most working group meetings to leverage the advantages of in-person meetings, even if many participants are remote?

4. Remedies

If a meeting cannot be held at the scheduled time and place, the LLC and IESG have several options. The remedies in this section should be considered in light of four principles, presented in no particular order:

- *Hold the scheduled sessions of a meeting in some format.
- *Provide benefits of in-person interactions when possible.
- *Avoid exorbitant additional travel expenses due to last minute flight changes, etc.
- *Ensure the available time and resources allow the alternative to be adequately prepared.

4.1. Relocation

For attendees, the least disruptive response is to retain the meeting week but move it to a more accessible venue. To the maximum extent possible, this will be geographically close to the original venue. In particular, the LLC SHOULD strive to meet the criteria in [[RFC8718](#)] and [[RFC8719](#)].

Relocation that requires new air travel arrangements for attendees SHOULD NOT occur less than one month prior to the start of the meeting.

4.2. Virtualization

The second option, and one that has fewer issues with venue availability, is to make a meeting fully remote. This requires different IETF processes and logistical operations that are outside the scope of this document.

4.3. Postponement

Although it is more disruptive to the schedules of participants, the next best option is to delay a meeting until a specific date, at the same venue, at which conditions are expected to improve. The new end date of a meeting must be at least 30 days before the beginning of the following IETF meeting, and a meeting must begin no earlier than 1 month after the postponement announcement.

Due to scheduling constraints at the venue, this will usually not be feasible. However, it is more likely to allow attendees to recover at least some of their travel expenses than other options.

Note that it is possible to both postpone and relocate a meeting, though this has the disadvantages of both.

4.4. Cancellation

As a last resort, the LLC and IESG may cancel a meeting entirely. This is a last resort in the event that worldwide conditions make it difficult for attendees to even attend remotely. Not holding a meeting at all can have wide implications, such as the nomination process and seating of new officers.

Cancellation is likely the only practical alternative when emergencies occur immediately before or during a meeting, so that there is no opportunity to make other arrangements.

5. Refunds

The IETF SHOULD NOT reimburse registered attendees for unrecoverable travel expenses (airfare, hotel deposits, etc).

However, there are several cases where full or partial refund of registration fees is appropriate:

- *Cancellation SHOULD result in a full refund to all participants. It MAY be prorated if some portion of the sessions completed without incident.

- *Upon postponement, the LLC SHOULD offer refunds to registered attendees who claim they cannot attend at the newly scheduled time.

- *When a meeting becomes remote, the LLC SHOULD attempt to recover whatever venue-related payments, past or future, it can and rebate this to registered attendees, up to a maximum of their total cost of registration.

- *The LLC SHOULD offer refunds to attendees whose nation of residence forbids, or has issued a safety advisory against, visits to the host venue, even if the in-person meeting will continue. It SHOULD NOT refund cancellations due to employer policy or personal risk assessments.

These provisions intend to maintain trust between the IETF and its participants. However, under extraordinary threats to the solvency of the organization, the LLC may suspend them.

6. Security Considerations

This document introduces no new concerns for the security of internet protocols.

7. IANA Considerations

There are no IANA requirements.

8. Normative References

- [RFC2119] Bradner, S., "Key words for use in RFCs to Indicate Requirement Levels", BCP 14, RFC 2119, DOI 10.17487/RFC2119, March 1997, <<https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc2119>>.
- [RFC8174] Leiba, B., "Ambiguity of Uppercase vs Lowercase in RFC 2119 Key Words", BCP 14, RFC 8174, DOI 10.17487/RFC8174, May 2017, <<https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc8174>>.
- [RFC8718] Lear, E., Ed., "IETF Plenary Meeting Venue Selection Process", BCP 226, RFC 8718, DOI 10.17487/RFC8718, February 2020, <<https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc8718>>.
- [RFC8719] Krishnan, S., "High-Level Guidance for the Meeting Policy of the IETF", BCP 226, RFC 8719, DOI 10.17487/RFC8719, February 2020, <<https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc8719>>.

Appendix A. Acknowledgments

Appendix B. Change Log

B.1. Since draft-ietf-shmoo-cancel-meetings-03

*Clarifications from AD review

B.2. Since draft-ietf-shmoo-cancel-meetings-02

*Added IRTF to IESG responsibilities

*WGLC Nits

B.3. Since draft-ietf-shmoo-cancel-meetings-01

*Added refund principles for hybrid meetings

B.4. Since draft-ietf-shmoo-cancel-meetings-00

*Jay Daley's nits

*Distinguish the emergency and non-emergency process

*Eliminated USSTATE/UKFO references

*Clarified roles of LLC and IESG

B.5. Since draft-duke-shmoo-cancel-meetings-01

*Change to WG draft

B.6. Since draft-duke-shmoo-cancel-meetings-00

*Added mention of IRTF

*Discussed consensus on cancellation

B.7. Since draft-duke-remote-meetings-00

*Defined "venue"

*Added principles for selecting remedies and rewrote alternatives.

*Added local authority travel advisories

*Added some criteria from IETF 109

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