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J. Klensin, Ed.  
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Abstract

There is a long-term tradition in the Internet community, predating the IETF by many years, of use of the RFC series to publish materials that are not rooted in the IETF standards process and its review and approval mechanisms. These documents, known as "independent submissions", serve a number of important functions for the Internet community, both inside and outside of the community of active IETF participants. This document discusses the independent submission model and some reasons why it is important. It then describes

editorial and processing norms that can be used for independent submissions as the community goes forward into new relationships between the IETF community and its primary technical publisher.

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## **1. Introduction**

There is a long-term tradition in the Internet community, predating the IETF by many years, of use of the RFC series to publish materials that are not rooted in the IETF standards process and its review and approval mechanisms. These documents, known as "independent submissions", serve a number of important functions for the Internet community, both inside and outside of the community of active IETF participants. This document discusses the independent submission model and some reasons why it is important. It then describes editorial and processing norms that can be used for independent submissions as the community goes forward into new relationships between the IETF community and its primary technical publisher.

To understand the perspective of this document, it is important to remember that the RFC-Editor function predates the creation of the IETF. As of the time of this writing, the RFC series goes back 36 years while the IETF is celebrating its 20th anniversary. All of the documents that were published before the IETF was created, and for some years thereafter, would be considered independent submissions today. As the IETF evolved, the IAB and then the IETF itself chose to publish IETF documents as RFCs while fully understanding that the RFC-Editor function was an independent publication mechanism. Other decisions were possible: e.g., the IETF could have decided to create its own publication series. It was felt that there was considerable value in continuing to publish the IETF work in the same series as the one used to publish the basic protocols for the Internet.

### **1.1. Terminology Note**

This document describes what have historically been referred to as "independent submissions". That term is distinguished from those IETF and IAB community documents that originate from formal groups -- IAB, IRTF, IETF WGs -- and from submissions submitted to the IESG for standards-track, informational, or experimental processing. Documents produced by individuals, rather than IETF WGs or other IETF-affiliated groups, but submitted for publication under Area Director sponsorship, have been known historically as "individual submissions".

For convenience and obvious historical reasons, the editor and publisher of documents that are not processed through the IETF is known below as the "RFC Editor". The RFC Editor will typically be an organization or one or more senior people and associated staff, and the term is used collectively below. That term is not intended to predict the future, either in terms of who does the job or what they, or the document series, are called.

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## **1.2. Context and Philosophical Assumptions**

This document contains text that, if agreed to by the community, may suggest a reexamination of and a corresponding update to [RFC 3932](#) [[RFC3932](#)]. Those issues, and proposals for changes, are discussed in a different document [[RFC3932upd](#)], but they are semi-independent of the content of this document, which focuses on the review and approval process for independent submissions.

This document complements the discussion and guidelines in [[RFC4714](#)], which focuses on standards track documents. It takes a somewhat stronger view than the discussions that lead up to that document, starting from the belief that independent submissions are most valuable if they are, in fact, independent of the IETF process. From the perspective of the IETF, independent submissions are especially important as checks on the IETF processes even though such checks are not the only, or even a common, reason for them. That role is compromised if IETF-related entities are able to block or deprecate such documents to a degree beyond that needed to avoid difficulties with the standards process.

## **2. The Role of Independent Submissions**

When the RFC series was fairly new, RFCs could be used to publish general papers on networking as well as the types of documents we would describe as standards today. Those roles also developed as part of the early design and development of the ARPANET, long before anyone dreamt of the IETF and when the distinction between, e.g., standards and informational documents was less precisely drawn. In more recent years, independent submissions have become important for multiple reasons, some of them relatively new. They include:

- o Discussion of Internet-related technologies that are not part of the IETF agenda.
- o Introduction of important new ideas as a bridge publication venue between academia and IETF engineering.
- o Informational discussions of technologies, options, or experience with protocols.
- o Informational publication of vendor-specific protocols.
- o Critiques and discussions of alternatives to IETF standards-track protocols. The potential for such critiques provides an important check on the IETF's standards processes and should be seen in that light.
- o Documents considered by IETF Working Groups but not standardized. While many documents of this type are published via the IESG approval path (see [RFC 3932, Section 1](#) [[RFC3932](#)]), the independent submission path has traditionally been open to them. Because of

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- their intimate connection to the IETF Standards Process and WG activities and the consequent sensitivity to exact statements of relationships and to timing, there is reason to believe that all such documents should be published only at IESG request. In any event, these documents are published for the historical record.
- o Satirical materials.
  - o Meeting notes and reports ([RFC 164](#) [[RFC0164](#)] is the earliest, [1109](#) [[RFC1109](#)] probably the most important).
  - o Editorials (the best example is IEN-137, not an RFC).
  - o Eulogies ([RFC 2441](#) [[RFC2441](#)])
  - o Technical contributions (e.g., [RFC 1810](#) [[RFC1810](#)]) and, historically,
  - o RFC Editor and, at least prior to the handoff between ISI and ICANN and the June 2000 MOU [[RFC2860](#)], IANA Policy Statements (e.g., [[RFC2223](#)] and [RFC 1591](#) [[RFC1591](#)]).

It should be clear from the list above that, to be effective, the review and approval process for independent submissions should be largely independent of the IETF. As a important principle that has been applied historically, the RFC Editor should seek advice from the IESG about possible relationships and conflicts with IETF work. The IESG may ask that, as a courtesy, publication of particular documents be deferred because their untimely publication could cause confusion or other harm with proposals under consideration for standardization. Absent compelling arguments to the contrary, the RFC Editor will honor such requests. Similarly, any submission that constitutes an alternative to, or is in conflict with, an IETF Standard or proposal for standards-track adoption must clearly indicate that relationship. The IESG may identify such conflicts as part of its review. If the IESG identifies issues, it may recommend explanatory or qualifying text for the RFC Editor to include in the document if it is published.

The specific procedures to be followed in review are described in [Section 4](#).

### **3. Document Submission**

Independent submissions are submitted directly to the RFC Editor. They must first be posted as Internet Drafts, so the submission is typically simply a note requesting that the RFC Editor consider a particular Internet Draft for publication. The process is described in more detail in [[RFC2223](#)] and a working draft of an update to it [[RFC2223bis](#)].

Any document that meets the requirements of this specification, of [[RFC2223](#)] and its successors, and of any intellectual property or



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other conditions that may be established from time to time, may be submitted to the RFC Editor for consideration as an Independent Submission. However, the RFC Editor prefers that documents created through IETF processes (e.g., working group output) be considered by the IESG and submitted using this path only if a working group, or the IESG, decline to publish it. In the latter cases, the review process is likely to be more efficient if the authors provide a history of consideration and reviews of the document at the time of submission.

#### **4. The Review Process**

While this document is consistent with the broad outline of independent submission and review as practiced over the years, it specifies some new arrangements in RFC Editor processing that will improve the balance between openness and independent decisions.

In general, the steps in the review process are identified in the subsections below. Any of them may be iterated and, at the discretion of the RFC Editor, steps after the first may be taken out of order.

##### **4.1. Posting of Draft**

The author(s) or editor(s) of a document post it as an Internet Draft.

##### **4.2. Request for Publication**

After the normal opportunity for community review and feedback provided by the submission of the I-D and the I-D repository announcement thereof, the author or editor sends a request for consideration for publication to the RFC Editor at [rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org](mailto:rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org). That request should note any community discussion or reviews of the document that have occurred before submission.

##### **4.3. Initial RFC Editor Review**

RFC Editor Staff perform an initial check on the document. If they believe there is a high likelihood of conflicts or other interactions with IETF efforts (including believing that the document is one that the IESG should probably process), they may forward it to the IESG, or relevant ADs, for preliminary evaluation and comment.



#### **[4.4.](#) Document Rejection**

If the document does not appear publishable, the RFC Editor may reject a submitted document at any point in the process specified here. Such rejection would normally be based on the conclusion that the submission does not meet the technical or editorial standards of the RFC Series or is not relevant to the areas that the series covers. Alternatively, the RFC Editor Staff may, at their discretion, iterate with the author on the document to improve its quality. If a document is rejected by the RFC Editor, the author may request an additional review from the IAB, as described below, but the IAB is not obligated to do that review, nor is the RFC Editor obligated to publish even with a favorable IAB review.

#### **[4.5.](#) Review and Evaluation**

The RFC Editor arranges for one or more reviews of the document. This may include Editorial Board (see [Section 5](#)) reviews or evaluation of reviews by others.

#### **[4.6.](#) Unsolicited Reviews**

Unsolicited reviews from parties independent of the author are welcome at any time and will be handled as above. Unsolicited reviews will be shared with the author including the identity of the reviewer.

#### **[4.7.](#) Additional Reviews**

If the author is unsatisfied with the review(s), the author may request that the RFC Editor solicit additional reviews. In exceptional circumstances, the author may request that the IAB review the documents. Such requests to the IAB, and any reviews the IAB chooses to perform, will occur according to procedures of the IAB's choosing. However, the IAB is not required to initiate a review or comply with a request for one: a request to the IAB for a review is not an appeal process. The RFC Editor is expected to consider all competent reviews carefully, and in the absence of some unusual circumstance, a preponderance of favorable reviews should lead to publication.

#### **[4.8.](#) Final IESG Review**

Once the RFC Editor has made a tentative decision to publish, the document is forwarded to the IESG for evaluation with a relatively short timeout.

The IESG evaluation is not a technical one. Instead, it covers the

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issues listed in [RFC 3932](#) or its successors, presumably from the perspective outlined above in [Section 1.2](#). That is, the evaluation should focus exclusively on conflicts or confusion with IETF process and attempts to subvert ("end run") working group activities.

At the time the document is forwarded to the IESG, the RFC Editor will post an indication on its web pages that the document is under IESG review and that comments on conflicts can be sent to the IESG with copies to the RFC Editor. Additional mechanisms may be developed from time to time to inform a community that a document is entering formal prepublication review. Comments not directly related to IETF procedures or conflicts may be sent directly to the author(s) and RFC Editor.

In addition to the IESG review for conflict with IETF work, individuals in the IESG, or in the broader IETF community, are free to review a draft and, if they have comments of any kind --including the extreme case of believing that the proposal is damaging to the Internet as a whole-- these comments should be directed to the authors and the RFC Editor.

If the IESG, after completing its review, concludes that publication of the document should be delayed for a reasonable period of time, the RFC Editor will grant that request. The current agreement between the RFC Editor and the IESG on requested delays is expected to continue. That agreement permits the IESG to ask for a delay of up to six months and, if necessary, to renew that request twice, for a total possible delay of 18 months.

If the IESG concludes that the document should not be published as an RFC, it will request that the RFC Editor not publish and provide appropriate justification for that request. The RFC Editor will consider the request to not publish the document.

The RFC Editor or the author may request that the IAB review the IESG's request to delay or not publish the document and request that the IAB provide an additional opinion. Such a request will be made public via the RFC Editor web site. As with the IESG review itself, the IAB's opinion, if any, will be advisory. And, as with author requests for an IAB technical review (see [Section 4.7](#)), the IAB is not obligated to perform this type of review and may decline the request.

#### **[4.9](#). Final Decision and Notification**

In all cases, the ultimate decision to publish or not publish, and with what language, rests with the RFC Editor.



Information about the IESG requested publication delay or request to not publish a document will be posted to the RFC Editor web site to supplement document status information.

#### **4.10. Final Editing and Publication**

Once a document is approved for publication, it is handled in a fashion similar to other RFCs, with principles about priorities worked out with the IAB as appropriate.

### **5. The Editorial Review Board**

The RFC Editor appoints and maintains an Editorial Review Board which, much like the Editorial Boards of professional journals and publishers, provides the RFC Editor with both advice and reviews of particular proposed publications and general and strategic policy advice. The membership list of the Editorial Review Board is public and can be found at <http://www.rfc-editor.org/edboard.html>.

Editorial Board members serve at the pleasure of the RFC Editor. From time to time, the RFC Editor will solicit suggestions for new appointees from the IAB and other sources and will seek IAB comments on those to be appointed and on the effectiveness of the review process and the quality of documents being published and criteria applied. However, to ensure the independence of the independent submission process, the final decision to appoint (or not appoint) Editorial Board members rests with the RFC Editor.

### **6. Status and Availability of Reviews**

The RFC Editor will conduct the reviews discussed above with the intent of balancing fairness to authors, transparency of the review process to the general community, protection of reviewers from possible retaliation or undue pressure, and the interest of the community in having any significant dissents from published documents available to the community with the same degree of scrutiny that the original documents received. To this end, reviews and information about reviewers will be made public under the following circumstances. In special cases in which other considerations apply, the RFC Editor may adopt special provisions after reviewing the circumstances and proposed action with the IAB.

Any reviewer participating in the process outlined in this document does so on condition of giving consent to handling of the reviews as outlined in this section. In special cases, individual arrangements may be worked out in advance with the RFC Editor.





### **6.1. Documents in process or rejected**

For documents in process, reviews may be made public and posted on the RFC Editor web site at the request of the author. The names of reviewers associated with each review will normally accompany their reviews, but may be withheld at the request of the reviewer.

If the RFC Editor declines to publish a document, the document author may request that reviews be made public, as above. However, that request must be timely, generally within thirty days of the author's notification that the document would not be published.

With or without a document author request, the RFC Editor may post the full set of reviews associated with a document in process or rejected for publication if they conclude that doing so would be in the best interest of the community. The author will be notified that this action is about to be taken and may optionally request that the request to publish the document be withdrawn and the reviews kept private. Under normal circumstances, the RFC Editor will honor that request.

### **6.2. Published Documents and Documents Approved for Publication**

For documents that are published, either the author or any reviewer may request that reviews be made public. The RFC Editor may, but is not required to, do so. In considering whether to make review materials public, the RFC Editor is expected to note, first, that the best way to comment on, or dissent from, an RFC is generally another RFC; that reviews critical of a document are not themselves reviewed and that the author generally does not have the right to publish a refutation to an unfavorable review; and that a reviewer who feels strongly about a subject about which a review has already been written often would not need to do significant additional work to produce an RFC-format document from that review.

Nothing in this section or the subsections above precludes private communications between reviewers, the Editorial Board, and the RFC Editor; such communications will remain confidential. At minimum, the author of either an accepted or rejected document shall receive a written summary of the review(s).

## **7. Intellectual Property Rights**

The following material was extracted from the relevant sections of [BCP 78](#) [[RFC3978](#)] [[RFC4748](#)] in order to get all independent submission information for technical publications produced under the auspices of the IETF, IASA or the IETF Trust, or ISOC into a single place and to



initialize the process of separating discussions of independent submissions from those about standards-track or other IETF documents. Note that the text that follows uses the term "RFC Editor Contribution" to describe the same type of document referred to as an "independent submission" elsewhere in this document. The RFC Editor may change these provisions from time to time after obtaining the advice and consent of the IETF Trust in its capacity as the formal publisher of RFCs.

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## **8. Security Considerations**

This document specifies an RFC Editor (and, indirectly, IETF) administrative and publication procedure. It has no specific security implications.

## **9. IANA Considerations**

This document requires no actions by the IANA.

## **10. Acknowledgments**

Special thanks are due to Bob Hinden and Craig Partridge, who made several suggestions for improved text in earlier versions of this document and to Stewart Bryant, Scott Bradner, Brian Carpenter, Vint Cerf, Leslie Daigle, and Olaf Kolkman who made a number of useful suggestions about the organization and content of subsequent versions. We also express our appreciation to the IETF and Scott Bradner, Editor, for the material extracted from [BCP 78](#) [[RFC3978](#)] and used in [Section 7](#).

## **11. Change log**

[[anchor18: RFC Editor: please remove this section before publication]]

### **11.1. Changes between version -02 and version -03**

This section summarizes changes between version -02 and version -03.



- o Removed material suggesting specific revisions to [RFC 3932](#). There is still a forward pointer to a proposal for those revisions, but it is not normative.
- o Added new text questioning whether documents considered by, but rejected in, WGs should be processed as independent submissions or via the IESG (and, implicitly, subject to normal appeal procedures if rejected there).
- o Clarified that the order of actions in [Section 4](#) is not a binding requirement.
- o Indicated that authors should submit notes on existing discussion and reviews along with the request for publication itself.
- o Brian Carpenter's suggested text about technical reviews was incorporated (approximately) into [Section 4.8](#).
- o Clarified the status of review privacy on documents accepted for publication.
- o Added text to [Section 5](#) to indicate that the RFC Editor will solicit inputs about effectiveness and quality in addition to names of individuals.
- o Several small editorial and textual changes for clarity and correctness.

#### **[11.2](#). Changes for -04**

This section summarizes changes between version -03 and version -04.

- o Removed the material on public reviews and public authors to a separate section and revised the rules somewhat. The reader may wish to note that, in addition to the often-repeated arguments about standard practices in professional journals, no IETF-related management body makes transcripts of its internal discussions public. In particular, the IESG has repeatedly declined (for good reason as far as this editor is concerned) to make its mailing list contents public and has also declined to permit general access to its conference calls. There appear to be strong analogies between those precedents and reasonable confidentiality of reviews. In particular, an author should always have the option of withdrawing a document rather than having reviews made public.
- o The relationship between WG-produced documents, and documents considered as part of WG processes, has been further clarified.
- o At IETF 67, the IPR WG decided that IPR rules for independent submissions were not the responsibility of that WG and would not be covered in future versions of [BCP 78 \[RFC3978\]](#). To facilitate that transition, the material on that subject from [RFC 3978](#) has been incorporated directly into this document.
- o Several small editorial changes



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### **11.3. Changes for -05**

This section summarizes changes between version -04 and version -05.

- o Updated the IPR text to reflect [RFC 4748](#)
- o Removed a spurious empty subsection from that section.

## **12. References**

### **12.1. Normative References**

- [RFC2026] Bradner, S., "The Internet Standards Process -- Revision 3", [BCP 9](#), [RFC 2026](#), October 1996.
- [RFC2223] Postel, J. and J. Reynolds, "Instructions to RFC Authors", [RFC 2223](#), October 1997.
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- [RFC3932] Alvestrand, H., "The IESG and RFC Editor Documents: Procedures", [BCP 92](#), [RFC 3932](#), October 2004.
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- [RFC4748] Bradner, S., "[RFC 3978](#) Update to Recognize the IETF Trust", [BCP 78](#), [RFC 4748](#), October 2006.

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- [RFC0164] Heafner, J., "Minutes of Network Working Group meeting, 5/16 through 5/19/71", [RFC 164](#), May 1971.
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- [RFC2441] Cohen, D., "Working with Jon Tribute delivered at UCLA, October 30, 1998", [RFC 2441](#), November 1998.
  
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- [RFC4714] Mankin, A. and S. Hayes, "Requirements for IETF Technical Publication Service", [RFC 4714](#), October 2006.

#### Author's Address

John C Klensin (editor)  
1770 Massachusetts Ave, #322  
Cambridge, MA 02140  
USA

Phone: +1 617 491 5735  
Email: john-ietf@jck.com



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