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Meeting Modalities for the Future
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Abstract

The IETF currently meets three times per year in various parts of the world. Somewhere around 1,000 people all get into planes, consume carbon, and then attend various meetings in what often is a jetlagged stupor. We gotta stop meeting like this. This draft calls on the LLC to research on the community's behalf new modalities for IETF face-to-face meetings.

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1. Introduction

For the last few decades, the Internet Engineering Task Force has brought together between 900 and 2,000 engineers and support staff from various points around the globe to various points around the globe, three times per year. This, despite the fact that we're supposed to be the people who design, maintain, and showcase the latest Internet technologies.

There are both positive and negative impacts on in-person meetings.

1.1. Why We Meet

[I-D.ietf-mtgvenue-iaoc-venue-selection-process] explains in great detail why we as an organization meet in person. The largest positive impact is that we are able to work together in a collegial way to accomplish tasks in person that for whatever reason could not be accomplished via other means.

Also, as perhaps is demonstrated by societies more broadly, there is a need for people to establish relationships so that people can more recognize each other as people, rather than just as bits on the wire.

We also meet to cross-fertilize between efforts, so that transport people can provide application discussions, and security people can help the rest of us to develop secure protocols.

Finally, we meet to test interopability and capabilities in "Hackathons", where the focus is on coding in a social context. If code is law, this is law being made.

1.2. The Negatives

Due to the number of working groups meeting, each working group often gets between one and three hours to meet, and no more. Unless the value to a person is the hallway conversations, if someone's primary task is to advance work in one or two working groups, that person has travelled a long way for a very limited amount of face time.

- The cost of bringing us together on individuals and sponsors can range from US $2,000 to $5,000 per person, when considering registration, food, travel, and hotel costs. The costs are even greater for those who live in remote locations.

- People who cannot travel, either because they cannot afford the costs or the time away, are put at a disadvantage to those who can.

- The environment takes a pretty big hit. While we all have to eat, wherever we are, and we all have to sleep, we don't all have to travel to get to where we eat and sleep. For most of us who will have traveled to Montreal will have generated between sixty and 120 kilograms of CO2, and that's before we generate hot air in our meetings. And when we do get to these meetings, hotels themselves are generally not as good at managing their environmental impact as individuals are. Specifically, it is often difficult to separate trash, lots of plastic is used for drinks, and we generally use more energy.

We gotta stop meeting like this.

2. Finding alternatives

As I just mentioned, it is not possible to eliminate in-person meetings. However, it may well be possible to reduce our plenary face to face meetings from three times per year to two times per year, and at the same time improve productivity.

And so, a number of alternatives should be considered, with an eye toward eliminating one of our three in-person meetings per year:

- Simply eliminate one meeting. We try to do our work with two meetings per year.

- Replace one meeting with several different smaller meetings in which working groups are grouped together based on likely common interest and attendance.

- Replace one meeting with one or more optional F2F meetings for individual working groups.

- Replace one meeting with a virtual plenary meeting.

- A combination of some of these or others.

To determine what is best, the LLC is requested, in consultation with the IESG to develop and present to the community an analysis of available options to change our meeting structure, with an eye toward improving productivity at meetings, reducing our impact on the planet, and maintaining financial health of the organization.

This is not intended to be a short affair, but one where the LLC is encouraged to bring in appropriate expertise, consider what information they have, what information they need, collect it, analyze it, and bring it back to the community for our consideration. This memo does not propose particular solutions quite simply because it is already recognized that substantial legwork needs to be performed before any particular experiment can be proposed. It is hoped that the positives mentioned will be preserved and improved through this exercise.

As part of this effort, the LLC should ask venues what their environmental footprint is and how they calculate it. It should be a requirement for selection that venues answer these questions, as a desirable feature under [I-D.ietf-mtgvenue-iaoc-venue-selection-process].

Once the LLC has presented the analysis, the community is called upon to consider and discuss the options. The IESG and LLC are called upon to facilitate those discussions, to bring them to a productive outcome, from which next steps can be take. Those next steps could include one or more experiments, or nothing at all if the community cannot then come to a consensus.

3. Security Considerations

None.

4. IANA Considerations

None.

5. Changes from Earlier Versions

Draft -00:

- Initial revision

6. Normative References

[I-D.ietf-mtgvenue-iaoc-venue-selection-process]
Lear, E., "IETF Plenary Meeting Venue Selection Process", draft-ietf-mtgvenue-iaoc-venue-selection-process-16 (work in progress), June 2018.

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