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P. Saint-Andre
&yet
D. York
Internet Society
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The Chatroom Relay Role at IETF Meetings
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Abstract

During IETF meetings, individual volunteers often help sessions run more smoothly by relaying information back and forth between the physical meeting room and an associated textual chatroom (where remote participants can send questions or feedback to the physical room).

This document provides suggestions for fulfilling the role of a chatroom relay.

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[1.](#) Introduction

During IETF meetings, individual volunteers often help sessions run more smoothly by relaying information back and forth between the physical meeting room and an associated textual chatroom. This role is critical as it is currently the only "real-time" way for a remote attendee to provide feedback or comments back into most IETF meeting sessions (whether for an IETF working group, IRTF research group, or IETF "birds of a feather" or "BoF" session). Although there are multiple ways that a remote attendee can listen and follow along, the chatroom provides a method of returning feedback to the physical meeting.

This document provides suggestions for fulfilling the role of a chatroom relay.

[2.](#) Terminology

A chatroom relay is often referred to as a "Jabber scribe". This term is misleading because nothing prevents the IETF from using a technology other than Jabber/XMPP [[RFC6120](#)] [[XEP-0045](#)] for chatrooms (say, IRC or an integrated collaboration environment), and more importantly because volunteers are not expected to scribe the complete contents of the meeting into the chatroom (which would be a much more onerous task than relaying selected information back and forth between the physical room and the chatroom). Use of the term "scribe" might discourage people from volunteering to serve in the role.

3. Know Your Users

The participants in a chatroom typically fall into three categories:

- o Remote attendees who are listening to the audio stream or in some cases following the proceedings using a real-collaboration system (currently exemplified by the MeetEcho service). These participants might wish to send questions or feedback to the physical room.
- o IETF meeting attendees who are in another simultaneous session in a different physical room. These participants are often monitoring the chatroom session to find out when a particular topic is being discussed or to observe what is being discussed in the chatroom. Typically they are not able to listen to the audio stream and sometimes they ask for a higher level of commentary so that they can know when they might need to change locations to participate in the session's physical room.
- o IETF meeting attendees who are in the same session. These participants like to follow the discussions in the physical room and the chatroom at the same time. They can also provide some assistance to chatroom relays.

Because all chatroom sessions are logged during IETF meetings and the logs are publicly available, the logs can be a very useful history of what occurs during a meeting. For that reason any additional information that can be supplied to remote participants can be very helpful.

4. Primary Tasks

Individuals who volunteer for the role of chatroom relay usually complete the following tasks:

- o Relay questions and comments from the chatroom to the physical room. This typically involves going to the microphone to relay the comment from the remote participant.
- o Count the number of chatroom participants who virtually "hum", raise their hands, volunteer to provide feedback on documents, etc., and feed that information back to the physical room.
- o Relay information about hums and similar interactions from the physical room to the chatroom (preferably after receiving a "reading" from the session chairs).

It is the convention in most sessions that the chatroom relay has the privilege to go to the front of the microphone line to relay the question(s) from remote participants. Some chatroom relays choose to exercise that privilege while others choose to wait in line along with the participants in the physical meeting room.

5. Additional Tasks

Additionally some chatroom relays often complete the following tasks:

- o Relay the names of people speaking in the physical room to the chatroom.
- o Relay the slide numbers or slide names to help chatroom participants follow along.
- o Query remote participants about audio streaming quality, and relay such information to the session chairs.
- o Relay to the chatroom participants any logistical or procedural issues related to the meeting (for instance, known technical glitches at the physical meeting or delays in starting the session).
- o Provide links to the current set of slides and the document being discussed so that chatroom participants can easily follow along.

Although chatroom relays are not generally expected to scribe the complete contents of conversations that happen in the physical room to the chatroom, they sometimes relay the gist of such conversations, especially during ad-hoc discussions for which slides are not available. (By prior arrangement between the session chairs and the chatroom relay, more detailed scribing might be expected for particular sessions.)

6. Suggestions

Experience has shown that the following behaviors make it easier to act as a chatroom relay.

If you have volunteered before the session:

- o Coordinate with the chairs to ensure that remote participants have received information about where to find the meeting materials, agenda, audio stream, etc. (e.g., this information can be sent to a working group discussion list so that remote participants do not need to ask about it on entering the chatroom).

- o Coordinate with the chairs to see if they have any special expectations for the chatroom relay (e.g., some chairs might want you to actually "scribe" more detailed information about the session proceedings into the chatroom).
- o Ask the session chairs whether it is acceptable for you to advance to the front of the mic line with time-sensitive comments from remote participants.

As you are getting settled and ready for the meeting to start:

- o Seat yourself near the microphone most likely to be used for discussions in the physical room, so that you can more easily capture the names of people who come to the mic. Typically this will be a seat near the end of a row or in some location where you can easily get up out of your seat to go to the microphone.
- o It can be helpful to open several browser windows or tabs for:
 - * the agenda page for the session
 - * the materials page so that you can relay links to slides if necessary
 - * the documents page for the working group or research group (or BoF wiki page) in case you want easy access to documents mentioned but not in the agenda page
 - * the meeting registration system page (see below)
- o Determine if the session will be streamed via a real-collaboration system such as MeetEcho. If so, that system might automatically post the slide names into the chatroom and this is one less task you need to be concerned about.
- o If the session is large or is expected to be especially active (e.g., a controversial BoF), find an assistant who can help you by sitting at another mic, taking turns relaying information, etc.

Identifying one or more assistants is very useful particularly if you want to go up to the microphone to speak as an individual or if you need to take a break or step out of the physical room at some point.

During the session:

- o Identify yourself in both the physical room and the chatroom so that participants in both venues know that you are a relay.

- o Ask chatroom participants what level of information they need relayed into the chatroom. For example if all chatroom participants are listening via audio or a system like MeetEcho they might need very little information relayed from the room.
- o Ask chatroom participants to prepend statements they would like you to relay with "RELAY" or "MIC" (the former term is less ambiguous).
- o When relaying a question or comment from the chatroom to the physical room, say "this is X relaying for Y from the chatroom" so that people know you are not speaking for yourself.
- o It's not expected that you will know the names of everyone who comes to the mic. If you don't know the name of a person at the microphone, you have several options:
 - * look at their name badge if you are seated nearby
 - * query them directly (calling out "state your name, please" is acceptable)
 - * ask in the chatroom or type something like "?? at the mic", since it is likely that someone who is present in both the physical room and the chatroom will be able to identify the person for you
 - * look up the name of the attendee in the meeting registration system (this is typically found at a URL of the form "https://www.ietf.org/registration/<meeting>/attendance.py", such as "https://www.ietf.org/registration/ietf90/attendance.py"); you can quickly look up a name using this system if you are in doubt.
- o Be aware that lag happens between the time when something is said in the physical room and the time when someone provides a response in the chatroom, and take this into account when the interaction is time-sensitive (e.g., during a hum or a show of hands).

7. IANA Considerations

This document requests no actions from the IANA.

8. Security Considerations

Although XMPP multi-user chat rooms [[XEP-0045](#)] can be configured to lock down nicknames and require registration with the chatroom in order to join, at the time of this writing IETF chatrooms are not so

configured. This introduces the possibility of social engineering attacks on discussions held in IETF chatrooms. It can be helpful for chatroom relays to be aware of this possibility.

Denial of service (DoS) attacks of various kinds are possible, e.g., flooding a chatroom with unwanted or automated traffic.

9. References

[RFC6120] Saint-Andre, P., "Extensible Messaging and Presence Protocol (XMPP): Core", [RFC 6120](#), March 2011.

[XEP-0045] Saint-Andre, P., "Multi-User Chat", XSF XEP 0045, February 2012.

Appendix A. Acknowledgements

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Authors' Addresses

Peter Saint-Andre
&yet

Email: peter@andyet.com
URI: <https://andyet.com/>

Dan York
Internet Society

Email: york@isoc.org
URI: <https://www.internetsociety.org/>

