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Guidance to the IETF Nominating Committee About Term Limits
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Abstract

In order to encourage more turnover in the IETF management bodies, this document provides strong guidance to the IETF Nominating Committee with regard to limiting the number of consecutive terms a given participant should be selected to serve in NomCom-appointed positions.

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1. Introduction

In order to encourage more turnover in the IETF management bodies, this document provides strong guidance to the IETF Nominating Committee (NomCom) [RFC8713] with regard to limiting the number of consecutive terms a given participant should be selected to serve in NomCom-appointed positions.

// The following paragraph is for draft discussion only and will be
// changed or removed before publication.

For convenience, this document will refer to NomCom-appointed positions on the Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG), the Internet Architecture Board (IAB), and the IETF Administration LLC Board of Directors (LLC) collectively as "leadership positions", or just "leadership". We can decide on final nomenclature for that after we've hashed out the other details in this proposal.

2. Background

The IETF community is best served when leadership changes at regular intervals, leading to greater diversity of thought, vision, and perspective, and avoiding "burnout" that can result from someone serving in time-consuming and stressful positions for an extended time. There have been occasional proposals for hard term limits, and many in the community support that approach, but there is concern about the effect of limiting NomComs too strictly. This document takes an alternative approach of using clear and strong guidance to NomComs, which they are expected to follow, while still giving them the flexibility to evaluate specific situations and to "do the right thing" when strict rules would be problematic.

This section lays out some principles that inform the guidance given here.

The IESG comprises the Area Directors (ADs) from each of the IETF technical areas, the IETF Chair (AD of the General Area), and the IAB Chair (ex-officio). It is widely considered that much of an AD's first year is spent learning the role and finding one's way. Because of that, ADs who are doing well in the second year of their first terms are generally re-appointed for a second term, taking advantage of their experience and allowing them to use what they have learned. Third terms are less common, and four terms or more are unusual, as the role of an Area Director is a busy and stressful one. Burnout is a danger, but even without that consideration the community thinks it important to bring new vision and perspective into the AD position regularly.

A complication often arises with respect to finding ADs: There are frequently few -- sometimes only one or two -- volunteers to stand for a particular AD position. Sometimes a NomCom has only an incumbent candidate, and no other volunteers to choose from. While some participants can serve -- and have served -- as ADs in more than one area, AD positions are not readily interchangeable, making the NomCom's work more difficult when these situations arise.

The IAB comprises members across the IETF technical areas. Because its members are appointed "at large", rather than from specific areas, there tends to be a broader pool of IAB candidates, giving NomComs a greater abundance of choices than they have when selecting Area Directors.

A challenge in selecting the IAB is that ADs who step down often immediately vie for positions as IAB members. While the IAB is a different body, with different roles and needs, this situation nevertheless does not contribute to diversity in leadership, revitalization of a stressed AD, or fresh perspectives on the IAB. The community is particularly concerned with a pattern of ADs making immediate transitions to the IAB.

The IETF Chair role is the busiest and most stressful, and benefits strongly from recent experience on the IESG. "Recent", here, requires judgment, of course, and a good candidate for IETF Chair might be just finishing a term as a technical AD or might have held such a role within the last few years. It is not desirable for term limits to rule out IETF Chair candidates because they have been on the IESG "too recently".

(This document is not covering the LLC just yet...)

The community considers it important that participants who take on leadership positions return to the community (outside of leadership) periodically, to serve as working group participants, document

editors, working group chairs, and directorate members. This allows the community to benefit from what those in leadership have learned and the experience they have developed. It also provides opportunities for others in the community to step into leadership, and benefits the individuals involved by allowing them to revitalize and regenerate, developing a new set of perspectives, before they consider additional terms in other leadership positions.

3. Specific Guidance to the NomCom

In general, an individual should be expected to serve no more than two terms in *any* collective NomCom-appointed positions before returning to the community for at least one year. As an example, if a participant is selected for the IAB in 2020 and becomes an AD in 2022, that participant would be expected to take a "gap year" in 2024. NomComs should consider a third consecutive term with no gap to be unusual, and should consider a fourth term to be exceptional, only to be used in exceptional circumstances. The IESG and IAB should consider such exceptional situations as needing analysis and possible action to see that they do not persist.

An exception to the general guidance above is for appointment to IETF Chair: It is expected that the individual selected as IETF Chair might be a sitting AD or IAB member, or one who is just stepping down from one of those roles, and that there might not be a gap year in this case.

NomComs are, given this guidance, tasked with doing the right thing and making the best choices for the IETF, with the understanding that situations arise where firm rules do not work well and judgment is critical. If a NomCom makes an appointment that this guidance considers unusual or exceptional, it is important that the situation be explained in the NomCom Chair's report to the confirming body, as the confirmation process needs to consider the NomCom's choice to deviate from this guidance, and needs to understand the situation that has arisen. The NomCom Chair should also include an explanation in the report to the community, to the extent possible within NomCom confidentiality rules.

4. IANA Considerations

This document makes no request of IANA.

5. Security Considerations

This document is purely procedural, and there are no related security considerations.

6. Acknowledgments

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7. Informative References

[RFC8713] Kucherawy, M., Ed., Hinden, R., Ed., and J. Livingood, Ed., "IAB, IESG, IETF Trust, and IETF LLC Selection, Confirmation, and Recall Process: Operation of the IETF Nominating and Recall Committees", BCP 10, RFC 8713, DOI 10.17487/RFC8713, February 2020, <<https://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc8713>>.

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