Nomcom Eligibility
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Abstract

The IETF Nominating Committee (NomCom) appoints candidates to most IETF leadership committee. RFC8713 provides criteria for membership on Nomcom that attempts to ensure that NomCom volunteers are members of the loosely defined IETF community, by requiring in-person attendance in three of the past five in-person meetings. In 2020 and 2021, the IETF had six consecutive fully online plenary meetings that drove rapid advancement in remote meeting technologies and procedures, including an experiment that included remote attendance for NomCom eligibility. This document updates RFC8713 by building a new set of eligibility criteria from first principles, with consideration for the increased salience of remote attendance.

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1. Introduction

[RFC8713] defines the process for selection of the Internet Architecture Board (IAB), Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG), IETF Trust, and the IETF LLC Director. These four committees form the senior leadership of the IETF. A key actor in the process is the Nominating Committee (NomCom), which nominates a single candidate for each open position from the pool of volunteers, subject to confirmation by other bodies.

Nomcom voting members are themselves volunteers that have met certain eligibility requirements. The actual NomCom is selected at random from the pool of eligible volunteers, with restrictions to ensure that no more than two volunteers with the same primary affiliation are chosen.

Section 4.14 of [RFC8713] requires that volunteers must have attended three of the previous five in-person meetings. In practice, this has meant that the volunteer picked up their registration badge. Current members of the Internet Society Board of Trustees, IETF Trust, LLC Board, IAB, and IESG are ineligible.
[RFC8989] specified an experiment in the wake of six consecutive fully online meetings from 2020 to 2021, where the traditional interpretation of the requirement would have resulted in no eligible volunteers. It extended the attendance requirement to define meeting attendance as including logging in to at least one session of a fully-online IETF meeting.

RFC8989 also created two other tracks to obtain eligibility: (1) serving as a working group chair or secretary in the past 3 years, and (2) author or editor of an IETF Stream RFC in the past five years, including internet-drafts in the RFC Editor queue.

This document discusses some of the first principles that inform the design of NomCom eligibility. It makes recommendations on how the future process should work. Its objective is to eventually replace Section 4.14 of RFC8713 with criteria loosely based on those in RFC8989.

2. Conventions and Definitions

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.

3. NomCom Principles

The NomCom is intended to be composed of randomly selected members of "the community." For many years, in-person attendance was a reasonable proxy for the commitment associated with being a member. Two days of travel and an attendance fee is a relatively large expenditure of time and money. Additionally, in-person attendance is thought to increase personal familiarity with candidates for leadership positions, although there is no mechanism to ensure any interactions. Finally, the NomCom interview process was largely conducted in-person at IETF meetings, so the ability to attend was a prerequisite to participate.

Beyond the principle that the community should govern itself, selecting volunteers with a demonstrated commitment to the organization, while limiting the number from any organization avoids the potential for mischief via nominations that disrupt IETF operations or attempt to "take over" the IETF on behalf of that organization.

However, there are numerous problems and vulnerabilities with the criteria:
* Attitudes to business travel evolve, and remote meeting technology continues to improve, to the extent that many longstanding community members choose to participate remotely.

* The NomCom process is now fully remote.

* In-person attendance involves roughly two days of travel and the registration fee. Some organizations may find this to be a small price to pay to shape the IETF, compared to the cost of sustained involvement in IETF activities.

* Affiliations are difficult to verify; understanding alliances and other relationships between organizations is nearly impossible.

Among the RFC8989 criteria, counting remote attendance lowers the barriers to entry. As IETF is committed to having a no-fee remote option, ([I-D.draft-kuehlewind-shmoo-remote-fee]), the only required investment is to log on once per meeting at a specific time (sometimes a locally inconvenient hour).

Further, practices for authors and editors of RFCs vary widely. Some listed authors expend very little time on publishing drafts, having contributed an idea or lending their name to bestow prestige on a document.

Conversely, it is historically difficult recruit volunteers for NomCom, so overly restrictive criteria work against getting a deep talent pool.

3.1. Some Opinionated Assertions

Time commitment is more meaningful than money expended. For many organizations, the fiscal costs are negligible. For other committed participants, they are insurmountable. But everyone has the same amount of time.

We can’t measure the passive time spent on IETF (e.g. spent reading mailing lists), but there are outcomes from active time spent (emails sent, drafts written) that we can measure.

There are numerous appointed positions (Working Group Chair, Directorate Review, Designated Expert) where leadership will generally police members that are not meeting minimum contribution levels.
4. Criteria

The following paths to qualification replace Section 4.14 of [RFC8713]. Any one of the paths is sufficient, unless the person is otherwise disqualified under Section 4.15 of [RFC8713].

Path 1: For 3 out of the past 5 IETF meetings, the person has either (a) attended in person, or (b) been listed as a presenter on the agenda for any working group or research group at that meeting.

Path 2: The person has served as a Working Group Chair, Secretary, Directorate or Review Team reviewer, or IANA Designated Expert for at least six months over the past three years prior to the day the call for NomCom volunteers is sent to the community.

Path 3: The person has personally uploaded an internet-draft to datatracker for two IETF Stream RFCs within the last 5 years prior to the day the call for NomCom volunteers is sent to the community. An Internet-Draft that has been approved by the IESG and is in the RFC Editor queue counts the same as a published RFC, with the relevant date being the date the draft was added to the RFC Editor queue. For avoidance of doubt, the 5-year timer extends back to the date 5 years before the date when the call for NomCom volunteers is sent to the community.

4.1. Rationale

Path 1: Obtaining working group agenda time is a demonstration of a valuable contribution to IETF work, and is resistant to trivial contributions (blank email, silly comments from the queue) that could artificially inflate stats. Volunteering to take minutes, if the tooling was feasible, would be a valuable addition to this path. This narrows the [RFC8989] criteria by excluding mere remote attendance, while continuing to accept the investment of time and money to travel to the venue as a demonstration of commitment.

Path 2: Community members in these postions are vetted by leadership and (presumably) removed for failure to do the work, so this path is difficult to manipulate. This expands the [RFC8989] criteria considerably.

Path 3: Physically uploading the draft is a good proxy for actually doing the active editorial work, rather than merely lending one’s name to a document, or authoring an obsoleted document many years ago.
5. Available Data

TODO: This document should contain data about how the proposed criteria would have affected eligibility for NomComs in the recent past.

6. Security Considerations

As this document specifies IETF governance processes, it has no direct impact on security of the internet.

7. IANA Considerations

This document has no IANA actions.

8. References

8.1. Normative References


8.2. Informative References

Acknowledgments

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