Balloting and DISCUSS Criteria

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"The IESG shall determine whether or not a specification submitted to it according to section 6.1.1 satisfies the applicable criteria for the recommended action (see sections 4.1 and 4.2), and shall in addition determine whether or not the technical quality and clarity of the specification is consistent with that expected for the maturity level to which the specification is recommended."

— RFC 2026 Section 6.1.2

"A Proposed Standard specification is generally stable, has resolved known design choices, is believed to be well-understood, has received significant community review, and appears to enjoy enough community interest to be considered valuable."

"A Proposed Standard should have no known technical omissions with respect to the requirements placed upon it."

— **RFC 2026 Section 4.1.1**

RFC 2026 IESG Approval Criteria

In Summary

- Stability

- Resolved Design Choices

- Well-Understood

- Significant Community Review

- Community Interest

- Lack of Technical Omissions

- Technical Quality

- Clarity

🏠 > Internet standards > Standards process

IESG Ballot Procedures

This document describes the IESG ballot procedures. Three cases are described. For the vast majority of documents, the Normal IESG Ballot Procedure is used, and neither of the other procedures comes into play.

https://www.ietf.org/standards/process/iesg-ballots/

- **"Discuss"** may mean "I cannot in good conscience send this document forward, but if it were fixed in these ways, I would change my ballot position to either Yes or No Objection", or it may literally mean "I think we need to talk about this."

  Text explaining the "discuss" must be posted in the Data Tracker at the time that the "discuss" ballot position is posted, and the discuss text should be sent by email to all affected parties (at least the IESG, the document shepherd, and the document authors, and in many cases to the working group (WG) as well).

  Valid criteria for a "discuss" ballot position are documented separately.

  A "discuss" is not intended to be a blocking tactic; rather it is a way to cause significant improvement in a draft prior to approval. If there is a legitimate issue with a draft, the document should be returned to the WG (or author) for resolution of the problem as quickly as possible. If an AD cannot get cooperation from the WG and cannot enter a ballot position that supports sending the document forward, then the AD should switch to "abstain."

DISCUSS Criteria in IESG Review

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This document describes the role of the 'DISCUSS' position in the IESG review process. It gives some guidance on when a DISCUSS should and should not be issued. It also discusses procedures for DISCUSS resolution.

NOTE:: The original statement was made 2007-07-05. This has updated text added by the IESG.

https://www.ietf.org/about/groups/iesg/statements/iesg-discuss-criteria/

DISCUSS Criteria

- The specification is impossible to implement due to technical or clarity issues.

- The protocol has technical flaws that will prevent it from working properly, or the description is unclear in such a way that the reader cannot understand it without ambiguity.

- It is unlikely that multiple implementations of the specification would interoperate, usually due to vagueness or incomplete specification.

- Widespread deployment would be damaging to the Internet or an enterprise network for reasons of congestion control, scalability, or the like.

- The specification would create serious security holes, or the described protocol has self-defeating security vulnerabilities (e.g. a protocol that cannot fulfill its purpose without security properties it does not provide).

- It would present serious operational issues in widespread deployment, by for example neglecting network management or configuration entirely.

- Failure to conform with IAB architecture (e.g., RFC1958 (Carpenter, B., "Architectural Principles of the Internet," June 1996.) [2], or UNSAF (Daigle, L., "IAB Considerations for UNilateral Self-Address Fixing (UNSAF) Across Network Address Translation," November 2002.) [3]) in the absence of any satisfactory text explaining this architectural decision.

- The specification was not properly vetted against the I-D Checklist. Symptoms include broken ABNF or XML, missing Security Considerations, and so on.

- The draft omits a normative reference necessary for its implementation, or cites such a reference merely informatively rather than normatively.

- The document does not meet criteria for advancement in its designated standards track, for example because it is a document going to Full Standard that contains 'down references' to RFCs at a lower position in the standards track, or a Standards Track document that contains only informational guidance.

- IETF process related to document advancement was not carried out; e.g., there are unresolved and substantive Last Call comments which the document does not address, the document is outside the scope of the charter of the WG which requested its publication, and so on.

- The IETF as a whole does not have consensus on the technical approach or document. There are cases where individual working groups or areas have forged rough consensus around a technical approach which does not garner IETF consensus. An AD may DISCUSS a document where she or he believes this to be the case. While the Area Director should describe the technical area where consensus is flawed, the focus of the DISCUSS and its resolution should be on how to forge a cross-IETF consensus.

DISCUSS Non-Criteria

- Disagreement with informed WG decisions that do not exhibit problems outlined in Section 3.1 (DISCUSS Criteria). In other words, disagreement in preferences among technically sound approaches.

- Reiteration of the issues that have been raised and discussed as part of WG or IETF Last Call, unless the AD believes they have not been properly addressed.

- Pedantic corrections to non-normative text. Oftentimes, poor phrasing or misunderstandings in descriptive text are corrected during IESG review. However, if these corrections are not essential to the implementation of the specification, these should not be blocking comments.

- Stylistic issues of any kind. The IESG are welcome to copy-edit as a non-blocking comment, but this should not obstruct document processing.

- The motivation for a particular feature of a protocol is not clear enough. At the IESG review stage, protocols should not be blocked because they provide capabilities beyond what seems necessary to acquit their responsibilities.

- There are additional, purely informational references that might be added to the document, such as pointers to academic papers or new work. Although the cross-area perspective of the IESG invites connections and comparison between disparate work in the IETF, IESG review is not the appropriate time to append external sources to the document.

- The document fails to cite a particular non-normative reference. This is an appropriate non-blocking comment, but not a blocking comment.

- Unfiltered external party reviews. While an AD is welcome to consult with external parties, the AD is expected to evaluate, to understand and to concur with issues raised by external parties. Blindly cut-and-pasting an external party review into a DISCUSS is inappropriate if the AD is unable to defend or substantiate the issues raised in the review.

- New issues with unchanged text in documents previously reviewed by the AD in question. Review is potentially an endless process; the same eyes looking at the same document several times over the course of years might uncover completely different issues every time.

- "IOU" DISCUSS. Stating "I think there's something wrong here, and I'll tell you what it is later" is not appropriate for a DISCUSS; in that case, the AD should state the position DEFER (or, if the document has already been DEFERed once, "No Objection").

- When an extension or minor update is made to an existing protocol that has unaddressed issues, it would not be appropriate to hold a DISCUSS on that document demanding that the problem in the base protocol specification be addressed; rather, the way to address problems of this sort is to update the base protocol specification. For example, a lack of consideration for pervasive monitoring in an existing specification would not justify holding a DISCUSS on the extension or minor update.

- **"Abstain"** means "I cannot support sending this document forward." There are two obvious reasons an AD might post this ballot position:
    - I am so strongly opposed to the document that I am unwilling to "discuss". (Note that this should be very unusual.)
    - I oppose this document but understand that others differ and am not going to stand in the way of the others.

Saying No to a Document

In some cases an AD may believe that a document has fundamental flaws that cannot be fixed. Normally in such cases the AD will write up a description of these flaws and enter an "Abstain" position on the ballot. Such a position does not support publication of the document but also does not block the rest of the IESG from approving the document. Normally, entering an Abstain position is a sufficient mechanism for an AD to voice his or her objections.

However, there may be cases where an AD believes that the mechanisms described in a document may cause significant damage to the Internet and/or that the mechanisms described in a document are sufficiently incompatible with the Internet architecture that a document must not be published, despite the fact that the document is within scope for the WG and represents WG consensus. This situation should be extremely rare, and an AD should not take this position lightly, but this does represent an important cross-area "back-stop" function of the IESG.

In this situation, the AD will enter a "DISCUSS" position on the ballot and explain his or her position as clearly as possible in the tracker. The AD should also be willing to explain his or her position to the other ADs and to the WG.

RFC 2026 v Balloting Criteria

Objective and Subjective

- "Technical quality"

- "Clarity"

- "Lack of technical omissions"

- "Significant community review"

- "Good conscience"

- "AD believes… may cause significant damage"

- "I am […] strongly opposed"

- "Despite the fact that the document […] represents WG consensus"

Problem Statement

The DISCUSS Criteria are treated as authoritative, but can be interpreted to be broader and more subjective than what's enabled by RFC 2026.

As a result, work is potentially subject to criteria that are outside the community's direct control. This has impacts on legitimacy and due process.

Option I
Status Quo

- Rely on appeals + recall + NOMCOM to address any excesses

- **Benefits**:

  - IESG remains in control of its internal processes

- **Potential Downsides**:

  - Conflict between 2026 and DISCUSS criteria remains

  - Appeals and recall are seldom exercised

  - NOMCOM selects on technical judgement

  - Legitimacy and due process deficits

Option II
Community Consultation

- Require the IESG to consult with the community on its internal processes

- Assure that consultation is transparent and accountable

- **Benefits**:

  - Internal processes stay internal

- **Potential Downsides**:

  - Who instigates?

  - May not provide sufficient legitimacy / due process

Option III
Bring Balloting into the Process

- Create a WG with Balloting + DISCUSS Criteria as input documents

- Publish as process RFCs

- Output might be a copy of input

- **Benefits**:

  - Balloting is owned by the community

  - Enhanced legitimacy and accountability of our process

  - Clearer guidance (and therefore protection) for ADs

- **Potential Downsides**:

  - Lack of flexibility

  - More process RFCs

DISCUSS