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Terms of Appointments for Nomcom-selected IETF Leadership Positions
draft-klensin-nomcom-term-02

Abstract

A consensus is emerging in the IETF that very long tenure in leadership roles is not in the best interests of the community. While, in theory, that advice could simply be given to the Nomcom, there is reason to believe that a different model for consideration of renewal or replacement for members of the leadership would be more efficient for the Nomcom and would impose less hardship on incumbents and the community. This document outlines that alternate method.

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	2
1.1. Mailing List	3
2. The Review and Clean Nomination Model	3
2.1. Phase 1: Review of Incumbents	4
2.2. Phase 2: Nomination and Selection of New Candidates . . .	5
2.3. Revised schedule	5
3. Previous Discussion Points	5
3.1. IESG-only, or all Nomcom appointments?	6
3.2. Justification for third terms?	6
3.3. Guidance, or hard limit on service length?	6
4. Internationalization Considerations	7
5. IANA Considerations	7
6. Security considerations	7
7. Contributor	7
8. Acknowledgements	7
9. Normative References	7
Appendix A. Change Log	8
A.1. Changes from draft-klensin-Nomcom-term-01 (2006-06-24) to -03	8
Author's Address	8

1. Introduction

Context and Note in Draft: This Internet-Draft is a small update of a version with the same name that was last posted and discussed in 2006. The problems it identified still exist in 2021 and the proposed solution still seems relevant. However, the original was written more as a discussion piece than as a formal proposal and this revision continues in that form. Should the idea get traction, much of the style will need to be modified and it will need to be adapted to formally update RFC 8713.

A consensus is emerging in the IETF that very long tenure in leadership roles is not in the best interests of the community. While, in theory, that advice could simply be given to the Nomcom, there is reason to believe that a different model for consideration of renewal or replacement for members of the leadership would be more efficient for the Nomcom and would impose less hardship on incumbents and the community. This document outlines that alternate method.

1.1. Mailing List

This proposal is under discussion on the gendispatch@ietf.org list.

2. The Review and Clean Nomination Model

The current nomination process pits incumbents, incumbent performance, and questions of stability in the IESG against potential other candidates. It also gives incumbents and the nomcom no explicit guidance about how many terms someone should serve. This is undesirable for a number of reasons. It creates the notion of incumbents being "fired" rather than honorably retired to the citizenry after a brief period of contributing to the community by assuming a leadership role. And, while there is significant value in treating stability as a goal, it can also create distortions about the degree of support various ideas have in the community and the impression of in-groups.

This specification changes the current model by reintroducing some principles that the authors believe are widely held in the community and optimizing the selection process to support those principles. The principles include:

- o Service in the IETF's leadership bodies is a short-term contribution to the community, not a career. Indeed, assuming those positions may be considered a responsibility to the community.
- o It takes long enough to learn the job of being an effective AD that, in general, having someone retire after a single two-year term is uneconomic for the community.
- o Just as retirement of an AD after one term should be considered a major step because of the inefficiencies of the learning period, the six-month or more period in which an incumbent is uncertain about whether work should be planned that spans the "first meeting of the next year" introduces inefficiencies that should be minimized to the degree possible.
- o A demonstrated shortage of people willing to do work in the IETF should be taken as an indication that there is insufficient real community interest in the work to reach a meaningful consensus about high-quality results. While that position appears to be reasonably well-understood with regard to the number of active IETF participants interested in putting a working group together, and in finding leadership for working groups, the same principle probably should be applied to ADs and areas: if there are only one or two people willing and qualified to do the AD job, that may be

an indication that the IETF should review the appropriateness of that area's existence or definition.

To deal effectively with these problems, the Nomcom consideration and evaluation process is divided into two phases.

2.1. Phase 1: Review of Incumbents

Incumbent performance should be evaluated, not compared to potential other candidates or replacements. The incumbent will always have more experience. An AD who has done his or her job well, will have accumulated strong proponents and probably strong detractors. Other candidates are always risks, and direct comparison is inevitably difficult.

In Phase 1, the Nomcom will evaluate the performance of incumbents, collecting information from the community as needed to do that. The Nomcom is instructed that an incumbent should be returned once (i.e., permitted/encouraged to serve two terms) unless there is strong evidence of problems (e.g., incompetence, inability to work with WGs, inability to work with other ADs, non-feasance, or malfeasance). Conversely, the Nomcom should assume that it is better to return an incumbent who has served two terms to the community and active WG work unless some special circumstances apply.

While this process allows flexibility, the Nomcom is instructed that "special circumstances" should be a rare occurrence, based on what is best for the affected area, the IESG, and the IETF as a whole. Simply doing an outstanding job as an AD should not constitute "special circumstances" that would justify a third term.

The level of special circumstances required for a fourth, or subsequent, term should be required to be much higher than that for a third: the intent is to make more than three terms a rare and nearly impossible event without formally prohibiting that through a term limit: it is important that the Nomcom retain flexibility and the opportunity to judge special circumstances.

Discussions between the Nomcom and a candidate as to whether that candidate is willing to serve again should be covered by the Nomcom's normal privacy rules except as mutually agreed. If the Nomcom chooses to not return a candidate who is willing to serve, the expectation is that this will be indistinguishable to the community from the candidate voluntarily stepping down. Under normal circumstances, the Nomcom is expected to conduct informational evaluations of even those candidates who have chosen to step down (the evaluations may inform later choices), but such candidates may negotiate with the Nomcom as appropriate, perhaps supplying in-depth

analysis of the relevant Area and its status and issues as an alternative.

At the end of this phase, the Nomcom submits the list of returning candidates to the IAB as usual. The IAB makes its decision and the choices are announced to the community. The list of (remaining) open slots is then announced to the community and nominations and recommendations sought. Any incumbent who is not returned in this phase is not eligible for the relevant position in the second phase.

2.2. Phase 2: Nomination and Selection of New Candidates

This procedure works exactly as described in [RFC8713], with the understanding that no incumbent will ever be a candidate for the same position under this process. As a side-effect, the process makes it more difficult than it has traditionally been to shift people around within the IESG: it is considered an explicit corollary to the principles above that an incumbent AD in one area should normally have working experience within one or more WGs in a new area before being considered as a candidate for AD in that area.

2.3. Revised schedule

[[to be supplied]]

The authors are aware of other proposals that would also affect the Nomcom timeline. Rather than trying to develop a revised schedule on a per-proposal basis, we suggest that one Nomcom schedule revision be considered, based on this and other proposals that would be accommodated.

3. Previous Discussion Points

In informal discussions before the initial version of this draft was completed and posted, there was considerable discussion on three points - whether this proposal should apply only to IESG appointments, or to all Nomcom appointments, whether "doing an outstanding job" is justification for third terms, and whether this proposal should contain a statement of guidance, or hard term limits.

Reasonable people disagreed on both of these points, but the proposal authors made choices.

The community will need to discuss, and decide upon, these issues.

3.1. IESG-only, or all Nomcom appointments?

This specification has been written to apply to the IESG only, since the IESG's operational role and observed rates of AD burnout make it most obviously important there.

It is possible that consideration should be given as to whether a similar or identical model should be applied to the IAB and/or other appointments made by the Nomcom.

3.2. Justification for third terms?

This specification is written to allow Nomcom to return ADs for third terms, and beyond, due to "special circumstances". One question we've been asked is whether "doing an outstanding job" should be included in "special circumstances".

While our intention is to provide guidance to Nomcom, rather than rules, this specification proposes that this guidance be "no".

- o The community is better served by having former ADs returning to technical work. A consistent criticism of the current working group process is that specifications often lack sufficient cross-area review when they are forwarded for publication. ADs provide this type of review, but currently-serving ADs don't have time to provide reviews early in the development of a draft, where it is most useful and most likely to have a positive impact.
- o Allowing "doing an outstanding job" to constitute "special circumstances" removes deterministic benefits of this model. The intention is that ADs return to the community after two terms. It is desired that all ADs "do an outstanding job" - this proposal would remove the ADs who do not, after their first term - but Only in Lake Wobegon are all the children above average, and Lake Wobegon is a fictitious place.
- o We also note that former ADs are often asked to serve as working group chairs in difficult situations, to help with BOFs and WG charter discussions, and to carry out assignments that benefit from AD experience but do not require the assignee to be a serving AD.

3.3. Guidance, or hard limit on service length?

There was considerable discussion about whether it was better to offer the Nomcom the guidance above, discouraging terms beyond the second, or whether to flatly prohibit more than two terms. One group believed that giving the Nomcom a little extra flexibility was a good

idea; the other believed that any additional flexibility would likely lead to very long terms since there would always be a reason to make an exception.

The authors of this proposal prefer to offer Nomcom guidance, rather than rules. To take one example - if the Nomcom believes that returning a third-term AD is appropriate (due, perhaps, to serving area directors stepping down before the end of second terms), we prefer to allow Nomcom this flexibility, rather than restrict them to a course of action that seems ill-advised.

4. Internationalization Considerations

This specification is about IETF Procedures. It has no impact on internationalization issues.

5. IANA Considerations

This specification is about IETF Procedures. It has no impact on IANA issues and does not contemplate any IANA actions.

6. Security considerations

This specification is about IETF Procedures for leadership selection. It has no impact on Internet security issues.

7. Contributor

Spencer Dawson was co-author of the 2005-2006 versions of this draft and contributed very significantly to the thinking that went into them. It was not possible to contact him and get his review and assent before posting this version, so his is identified him as a Contributor but may be moved back to authorship in the future.

8. Acknowledgements

[[to be supplied]]

9. Normative 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>>.

Appendix A. Change Log

[[RFC Editor: Please remove this section before publication.]]

A.1. Changes from draft-klensin-Nomcom-term-01 (2006-06-24) to -03

- o Updated contact information, a reference, and changed needed to get from xml2rfc v1 to v2.
- o Added introductory note and updated target mailing list.
- o Moved Spencer (I hope temporarily) to "Contributor".

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