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Experiment in Exploratory Group Formation within the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF)

Status of This Memo

Abstract

This document describes an RFC 3933 experiment in the Working Group formation process, known as the Exploratory Group. Exploratory Groups may be created as the first step toward Working Group formation, or as an intermediate step between a Birds of a Feather (BOF) session and Working Group creation. Exploratory Groups are focused on completion of prerequisites for Working Group formation, and as a result they have a short life-time, with limited opportunities for milestone extension.

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1. Introduction

"IETF Working Group Guidelines and Procedures" [RFC2418] describes the Working Group formation process within the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF). As noted in RFC 2418 [RFC2418] Section 2.1:

> When determining whether it is appropriate to create a working group, the Area Director(s) and the IESG will consider several issues:
>
> - Are the issues that the working group plans to address clear and relevant to the Internet community?
>
> - Are the goals specific and reasonably achievable, and achievable within a reasonable time frame?
>
> - What are the risks and urgency of the work, to determine the level of effort required?
>
> - Do the working group's activities overlap with those of another working group?
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> ...
>
> - Is there sufficient interest within the IETF in the working group's topic with enough people willing to expend the effort to produce the desired result (e.g., a protocol specification)?
>
> ...
>
> - Is there enough expertise within the IETF in the working group's topic, and are those people interested in contributing in the working group?
>
> ...
>
> - Does a base of interested consumers (end-users) appear to exist for the planned work?
>
> ...
>
> - Does the IETF have a reasonable role to play in the determination of the technology?
>
> ...
>
> - Are all known intellectual property rights relevant to the proposed working group's efforts issues understood?
>
> - Is the proposed work plan an open IETF effort or is it an attempt to "bless" non-IETF technology where the effect of input from IETF participants may be limited?

- Is there a good understanding of any existing work that is relevant to the topics that the proposed working group is to pursue? This includes work within the IETF and elsewhere.

- Do the working group's goals overlap with known work in another standards body, and if so is adequate liaison in place?

In some situations, while interest on the part of IETF participants and end-users may be evident, and the relevance to the Internet community may be demonstrated, the answer to other questions (such as an understanding of existing work, clarity or achievability of goals, or overlap with existing working groups or standards bodies) may not be as clear. In the past, the likely outcome in this circumstance has been to postpone Working Group formation or even Birds of a Feather (BOF) sessions until satisfactory answers are forthcoming. However, in practice this may leave the status of the potential Working Group officially undetermined for months or even years. While the Area Directors should provide potential Working Group participants timely updates on the status of the potential Working Group and insight into IESG or IAB concerns, currently there is no mechanism to track progress toward Working Group creation, and as a result, participants may not have a clear understanding of the status or the next steps. Also, the lack of formal recognition may negatively affect the motivation of the participants, and may leave those who have not followed the effort closely with an impression that no work is going on.

This document describes an RFC 3933 [RFC3933] experiment in the Working Group (WG) formation process, known as the Exploratory Group (EG). Exploratory Group milestones are focused on completion of prerequisites for Working Group formation, and as a result they are expected to conclude within a short time frame, with limited opportunities for milestone extension.

This Exploratory Group experiment does not alter the Working Group formation guidelines described in RFC 2418 [RFC2418] Section 2.1, or the Internet Standards Process described in RFC 2026 [RFC2026]. Rather, it builds on these existing processes, introducing an element of formality which may be useful in clarifying IESG and/or IAB concerns relating to Working Group formation criteria and motivating more rapid progress toward their resolution. Since Exploratory Group documents (including the EG Charter and potential WG Charter) are reviewed and comments are tracked using existing tools and processes, feedback is available to Exploratory Group chairs and authors, providing for transparency and accountability.

1.1. Requirements

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in [RFC2119].

2. Exploratory Group Formation

If at any point during the Working Group formation process, relevance to the Internet community and interest within the IETF and end-user community has been demonstrated, but one or more Working Group formation criteria outlined in RFC 2418 [RFC2418] Section 2.1 has not yet been met, the IESG MAY propose that an Exploratory Group be formed. Exploratory Groups MAY be created as the first step toward Working Group formation, or as an intermediate step between an initial Birds of a Feather (BOF) session and Working Group creation. The formation of an Exploratory Group after a second BOF is NOT RECOMMENDED.

Since the goal of an Exploratory Group is to put in place the prerequisites for formation of a Working Group more rapidly than might otherwise be possible, Exploratory Groups SHOULD initially be chartered for a period of six months to twelve months, with six months being the default. While the IESG MAY extend the initial Exploratory Group milestones by an additional six months, extensions beyond this are NOT RECOMMENDED. The Exploratory Group Charter SHOULD include at least the following "basic milestones":

- Development of a Working Group Charter.
- Development of a document demonstrating fulfillment of the Working Group formation criteria described in RFC 2418 [RFC2418] Section 2.1.

The IESG MAY also include additional milestones within an Exploratory Group charter (such as development of a problem statement or requirements document and/or completion of a review of the literature or current practices), as long as these additional milestones do not compromise the ability of the Exploratory Group to deliver on the basic milestones in a timely way. A Exploratory Group charter MUST NOT include milestones relating to development of standards track documents or protocol specifications.

Since the Exploratory Group experiment is not intended as a substitute for the existing Working Group formation process, Exploratory Groups SHOULD be formed only in situations where the prerequisites for formation of a WG are likely to be met if the EG successfully completes the basic milestones.

3. The Experiment

This experiment runs for a period of 18 months from IESG approval of the experiment. During the period of the experiment, the IESG MAY approve formation of as many as three Exploratory Groups. The IESG MUST inform the community in a public statement of any decisions for Exploratory Group formation approved under this experiment. Such a statement SHOULD include a description of specific Exploratory Group that was formed.

Given that this is an experiment, the intent is for Exploratory Groups to be handled identically to Working Groups in terms of IETF process, tools and infrastructure; no additional burden is to be imposed on the IETF Secretariat. Other than the abbreviated Exploratory Group charter, the process for formation of an Exploratory Group is identical to that of a Working Group, including review by the IAB and IESG, announcement of the potential Exploratory Group, and request for review by the IETF community. The operating rules of an Exploratory Group (openness, meeting requirements, etc.) are identical to Working Groups. From the point of view of IETF infrastructure (tools, membership in the WGCHAIRS mailing list, process rules, Exploratory Group Charter pages, etc.) Exploratory Groups are treated identically to Working Groups, with the exception that Exploratory Group names should include "EG" within the name (e.g. "EXAMPLEEG"), so as to clearly differentiate them from Working Groups.

Review of Exploratory Group documents will utilize the same tracking tools and processes (including PROTO shepherding) as other IETF documents; this allows feedback to be viewed by Exploratory Group Chairs and participants, as well as providing additional clarity on next steps. Formation of an Exploratory Group requires the appointment of an Exploratory Group Chair, and a well defined set of Working Group formation criteria (agreement on the Working Group Charter, review of the formation criteria, problem statement or requirements document, etc.).

3.1. Success Metrics

Since one of the goals of this experiment is to enable the more rapid formation of Working Groups, the success of an individual Exploratory Group, as well as the experiment, can be measured based on the progress made toward Working Group formation. Useful metrics include:

Progress on Basic Milestones

A Exploratory Group that does not make progress on its basic milestones cannot be judged successful, regardless of its other achievements, such as progress on a literature review or requirements document. Progress on the basic milestones is measured by whether they are completed within the time-frame specified in the initial Exploratory Group Charter, and whether feedback from the IESG, IAB and IETF community is positive, leading the IESG to vote to form a Working Group.

Mailing List Activity

Since one of the goals of the Exploratory Group experiment is to avoid a potential loss of interest among participants, evidence of continued engagement on the part of Exploratory Group participants based on mailing list activity is a potential success metric. Conversely, an Exploratory Group whose mailing list shows minimal traffic would probably not be a good candidate for milestone extension.

4. Security Considerations

This document describes an experiment in the formation of Exploratory Groups. It has no security considerations.

5. Normative References

[RFC2026] Bradner, S., "The Internet Standards Process -- Revision 3", BCP 9, RFC 2026, October 1996.

[RFC2119] Bradner, S., "Key words for use in RFCs to Indicate Requirement Levels", BCP 14, RFC 2119, March 1997.

[RFC2418] Bradner, S., "IETF Working Group Guidelines and Procedures", BCP 25, RFC 2418, September 1998.

[RFC3933] Klensin, J. and S. Dawkins, "A Model for IETF Process Experiments", BCP 93, RFC 3933, November 2004.

6. Acknowledgments

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