IETF Administrative Strategic Plan 2020

Background

As set out in RFC 8711, the IETF Administration LLC (IETF LLC) was established to provide administrative support to the IETF. It has no authority over the standards development activities of the IETF. The responsibilities of the IETF LLC are:

- **Operations**. The IETF LLC is responsible for supporting the ongoing operations of the IETF, including meetings and non-meeting activities.

- **Finances**. The IETF LLC is responsible for managing the IETF's finances and budget.

- **Fundraising**. The IETF LLC is responsible for raising money on behalf of the IETF.

- **Compliance**. The IETF LLC is responsible for establishing and enforcing policies to ensure compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and rules.

Introduction

This Strategic Plan sets out the strategy the IETF Administration LLC aims to achieve over the next 3-5 years, within the scope of its responsibilities as set out above. This strategy comprises the following components:

1. **Linkages.** The organisations and communities that the IETF LLC is linked to and how that linkage is the top-level driver of the IETF LLC strategy.

2. **Mission**. This is a literal definition of what the IETF LLC does. The mission rarely changes in the lifetime of the company.

3. **Values**. These define how the company behaves as it follows its mission. These may change over time to reflect broader social changes.

4. **Strategic Goals**. The highest priority goals of the IETF LLC. These may be short-, medium- or long-term goals or a mix. These are the big picture of

what the IETF LLC is aiming to do in the next 3-5 years and so are the key setting that the board expects the company to follow.

5. **Strategic Transformations**. These detail the changes that need to be made in order to achieve the strategic goals.   Each transformation details the current state and the desired state to transform into. These transformations should be achievable within 1-3 years.

The next level below this Strategic Plan is the various operational plans such as the IETF Comms Plan and the ED Goals, which are where specific projects and specific measures of success are defined.

Linkages

As set out in RFC 8711, the IETF LLC provides the corporate legal home for the IETF, the Internet Architecture Board (IAB), and the Internet Research Task Force (IRTF), and financial support for the operation of the RFC Editor. In addition the IETF LLC provides financial support for the operation of the IETF Trust.

Consequently, this strategic plan should ideally clearly reflect the plans and goals of the IETF/IRTF/IAB, where they exist.

Furthermore, as the IETF community is a dynamic one, with leaders and other participants changing at a higher rate than the 3-5 year horizon of this strategic plan, the IETF LLC commits that it will adjust this plan should IETF consensus shift

Mission

The best possible support corporation to the IETF/IRTF/IAB

Values

- **Trusted**. The LLC will uphold the values and policies of the IETF/IRTF/IAB as if they were its own.
- **Transparent**. The IETF community can expect the LLC to keep it informed about its work and to keep comprehensive records which are public by default and only make them confidential where there is specific justification.
- **Responsive**. The LLC will act consistently with the documented consensus of the IETF community, adapt its decisions in response to consensus-based community guidance, and engage with the community to obtain consensus-based guidance for how it operates where none exists.

- **Diligent**. The LLC will always do its job diligently by following professional best practice, acting ethically and minimising risks.
- **Evidence-led**. The IETF LLC will use evidence, both qualitative and quantitative, as the primary driver of its decision making.
- **Focused**. The LLC will focus solely on its defined role and within its defined mandate.
- **Equitable.** The LLC will deal with all members of the IETF community equitably regardless of sex, race, geography, culture, religion, age, health or other status.

Strategic Goals

As the IETF LLC is a support organisation to the IETF/IRTF/IAB, the strategic goals should ideally reflect their strategic goals. However, as those are neither well understood nor well defined, some assumptions are required.

1. To support the IETF in being the standards development organisation (SDO) of choice for those who want to develop Internet protocols that deploy at scale.

2. To support the IETF/IRTF/IAB in building a strong community of participants at all stages of the participant journey.

3. To secure long-term funding for the LLC/IETF/IRTF/IAB that is more than sufficient to meet their plans.

4. To ensure the value of the IETF is well understood by sponsors.

5. To rapidly mature the IETF LLC into an organization that fully meets its values and has strong community support and approval.

6. To deliver a toolchain that is up-to-date, efficient and well regarded by users.

7. To provide the high quality planning and support services required for the IETF to hold productive meetings both in-person and online.

The discussions on the future of the RFC Series Editor (RSE) are at too early a stage for the LLC to understand if it should have a goal relating to supporting the RSE or what that might be.

Strategic Transformations

The focus currently is very much on developing capability and capacity rather than higher level outcomes. In part this reflects the age of the IETF LLC and in part this is because we do not have the data or even measurement mechanisms in place to assess higher level outcomes.

Transformations: Strategic Planning

#	From		To
1	Varying levels of strategic planning across IESG, IRSG, IAB and LLC with only loose strategic alignment between individual strategic objectives	→	LLC strategy closely aligned with the plans and goals, where they exist, of IESG, IRSG and IAB
2	Multiple demands for spending throughout the year from individual requests and suggestions	→	Open, annual strategy process that captures community requests/suggestions in a structured process, while still allowing urgent requests at any time
3	Policy set partially complete and not yet bedded in	→	Policy set complete, fully bedded in and where required by our operating agreement, signed off by ISOC

The LLC strategy process has significant scope for improvement. Not all of the groups (IETF, IRTF, IAB and LLC) operate a formal strategy process and there is no process to align the outputs of those that do, though with the IESG making one appointment to the LLC board, reasonable alignment with the IESG is ensured.

There is also no public call for community input until near the end of the LLC strategy process and only then indirectly by soliciting feedback on the draft budget. This requires community members to time suggestions to ensure that they get onto the agenda for the strategy process. Often these suggestions come outside of the strategy planning process leading to a mid-course correction for the LLC with subsequent unplanned budgetary impact.

The LLC will need to liaise with the IESG/IRSG/IAB if they follow a strategy process, with the dual aim of offering professional support and ensuring that the LLC strategy is aligned with any outcomes.

The LLC policy set is another key area which binds multiple parts of the IETF, and significant progress has already been made. The next steps are to fill in the gaps, ensure the policies are fully bedded in with training and audit, and have ISOC sign them off as required in the LLC operating agreement.

Transformations: Engagement

#	From		To
4	No clear and supported articulation of the value proposition for the IETF/IRTF/IAB, which hampers engagement with current and potential sponsors	→	Clear, strongly supported and well articulated value proposition for the IETF/IRTF/IAB for engagement with current and potential sponsors
5	Poor understanding of the entry points , stages and transitions of the participant journey	→	Documented understanding of the entry points, stages and transitions of the participant journey
6	Patchy externally focused content making it hard to demonstrate the value of the IETF to current and potential sponsors	→	Full set of high quality content that enables us to deliver a compelling demonstration of the value of the IETF to current and potential sponsors

The IETF/IRTF/IAB is a complicated organization/cluster of organizations (even that description is a simplification) and it is difficult both for insiders to articulate the value it provides and for outsiders to understand that value. This is problematic for the LLC as we need to be able to create a pitch for any potential sponsor that clearly and quickly articulates what value their funding will generate both to them and the Internet, whatever their knowledge of the IETF.

Sponsors, in addition to supporting the IETF for the value it delivers, are also increasingly concerned about how the organisations they sponsor operate, how they treat their volunteers and staff and what opportunities they provide for a diverse range of new participants. To be able to explain this, we need to document the participant journey (more commonly called a 'User Journey' in user experience analysis terminology). This is a map of the different stages of participation (e.g. newcomer, leadership), showing at what stages people start their participation in

the IETF, why and how they choose to transition between them and at what stages they end their participation. Note, the word 'journey' does not imply any form of career- or value-based progression.

The value proposition and participant journey together bring focus to our promotional content and with those in place we can develop significantly more content to enable us to deliver a compelling demonstration of the value of the IETF to current and potential sponsors.

The development of the value proposition and participant journey must be community led through the EMO directorate, most likely with significant support from the LLC. As the form of the value proposition is unlikely to be something many participants are familiar with, achieving acceptance let alone positive agreement could be challenging and the LLC may need to use an interim value proposition for sponsor engagement if that would be significantly delayed otherwise.

Transformations: Culture

#	From		To
7	(For LLC services) A culture where people line up next to people with the same opinions and standing opposite those who disagree	→	(For LLC services) A culture where people line up together facing the data and working together to interpret it
8	(For LLC services) A set of long-standing issues left in the "too hard" basket as the culture of opinion and debate cannot resolve them	→	(For LLC services) An evidence led process in place to address all long-standing issues in the "too hard" basket.
9	Insufficient data on participants and their activities, motivations and expectations to support an evidence-led culture	→	Sufficient high-quality data on participants their activities, motivations, expectations, etc to support an evidence-led culture
10	Requirements for LLC services sometimes expressed without clearly articulated goals	→	Requirements for LLC services always expressed in terms of clearly articulated goals

With particular regard to the services that are provided to participants by the LLC, a culture has built up where decisions are taken more on the basis of opinion and debate than evidence. For example, someone has a good idea that we should provide X for participants and rather than ask participants if they want X, how they

already obtain it and if it is a priority for them, a debate takes place on the merits of us providing it or not. Sometimes this debate results in stalemate and issues get put into the "too hard" basket as a result.

We need to shift from this to a culture where data, where possible, is the starting point for identifying what needs to change and why and what the impact will be. As the transformation says, we need to shift people from lining up next to people with the same opinions and standing opposite those who disagree, to lining up together facing the data and working together to interpret it. There will be times when it is either impossible or unreasonable to collect the data and there is still significant value in expertise expressed as opinion so this shift should be seen as a rebalancing from opinion towards data, not a wholesale replacement of opinion with data.

We already have some data available, such as stats on meeting attendees and the post-meeting survey, but making this cultural change requires much more data. For example, there is a big set of questions on non-participation and barriers to participation which are crucial to providing better service to the community overall. Obtaining this data will require a wide ranging plan backed up with a major programme of surveys and technical analysis.

This collection of data needs to be mindful of the privacy of individuals and the policy set out in the IETF/IRTF/IAB Privacy Statement.

While the data is important, it is the means, not the ends. Every time someone makes a specific proposal regarding LLC services they should be able to lay out a high-level "value" proposition: If it is truly a "good idea", then it should be easy to articulate what strategic goal it achieves.

Transformations: Performance

#	From		To
10	Several key areas of our operations are unmeasured	→	All key areas of our operations are measured in a comparable way
11	Insufficient benchmarking against comparable organisations including other SDOs	→	All key areas of our operations are benchmarked against comparable organisations including other SDOs and that data is used to drive improvements.

By measuring key areas of our operations and then benchmarking those against comparable organisations we can identify if any of those areas could be improved.

While some areas are measured in some ways, this is far from comprehensive, and benchmarking has only been ad-hoc and against a small number of factors.

The desired outcome is that
- we have identified the key areas of our operations and a range of factors we want to measure for them
- these key areas are measured regularly and in a comparable way
- we regularly benchmark these measurements against comparable organisations
- the results of this measure drive a review and improvement process.

There may be an existing group of SDOs that share benchmarking data.

Transformations: Funding

#	From		To
13	ISOC funding not formally guaranteed for the long term	→	Long term funding guarantee from ISOC.
14	While the majority of our funding comes through multiple sources (ISOC and global sponsors) it relies on a small number of interconnected industries	→	Funding comes from multiples sources that are not interconnected
15	Limited number of ways in which we can receive funds and so we are leaving too much on the table.	→	Multiple "buckets" will be set up to receive funds, with multiple opportunities for contributions to be received
16	Lack of clarity on whether or not we need additional income, how much and in what form	→	Clearly understood and documented funding framework that sets out what income we seek, from where and in what form

ISOC currently contributes close to 50% of our funding and while they clearly expect to continue with this for many years, there is no formal guarantee of that. The lack of such a guarantee means there is notionally a non-zero risk of a significant drop in income, which a professional board should mitigate. This mitigation would be a major strategy for the LLC, expensive and resource intensive, all of which could be avoided if ISOC were to formalise its commitment into a long-term guarantee.

Even with the ISOC contribution secured, the risk would remain to our funding, when looked at for both donors and sponsors that it comes through the reliance primarily on a small number of industries, namely telecoms and domain names. This risk can be mitigated by new donors whose income is from different sources.

An important next step is for us to put this all down into a funding framework document that we can both use internally and share with existing and potential donors to eliminate confusion and provide assurance that all donations will be well used.

While the funding framework has been in development we have had offers of small amounts of money from a number of sources that we have not been able to take up as the appropriate "buckets" to receive the money have not been available. New options for donation need to be added, including taking small recurring donations from individuals and accepting donations at registration time.

Transformations: Meetings

#	From		To
17	No feedback loop from LLC to the community regarding the impact of meeting requirements on selecting a venue	→	Regular data-driven feedback loop from the LLC to the community regarding the impact of meeting requirements on selecting a venue and those requirements being adapted in response
18	Unknown but presumably significant, carbon footprint for individual IETF meetings and very large total carbon footprint from all historical meetings	→	Data gathered on carbon footprint of IETF meetings and potential options for carbon offset
19	Unclear what form of a fully virtual meeting we can support, if any, and how long it would take to arrange	→	Able to support a full online IETF meeting at a few months notice
20	Unclear what the impact is of increasing remote participation or what the goal for it is	→	Clear goal for remote participation, with a clear plan for managing the impact

Running a cycle of three global meetings per year is a difficult and expensive task, and one that is going to get harder because of three growing issues.

Data from the meetings team suggests that some of the meeting requirements significantly reduce the number of suitable venues and that this problem is going to get worse due to the mismatch between increasing demand and the slow rate of new urban venue developments, giving venues higher bargaining power. This issue needs to be tackled through the use of data to explain the impact of each requirement and identify and address the most problematic.

The second issue is the increasing awareness of the carbon cost of travelling and the corporate and social stigma surrounding that. Given the ongoing high value of in-person interaction, urgent attention should be given to measuring this carbon cost both for future and previous meetings and documenting options for carbon offset, to be shared with the community.

The final and urgent issue is the medium term impact of COVID-19 and the impact that has had with in-person meetings replaced with online meeting and the need for the LLC to put plans into place to support this, including fees, technology, support services and sponsorship.

Transformations: Tools

#	From		To
21	Tools development is concentrated around a few people and has poor accessibility to others	→	Tools area highly accessible with many people informed, contributing and involved in all levels of decision making
22	Tools development has had limited big picture overview at both the architectural and user experience level	→	Tools development implements the high-level requirements generated by the Tools Architecture and Strategy Team
23	Transition from volunteers to contractors for developing in-house tools has stressed existing mechanisms for solution design and work prioritisation	→	New mechanisms in place for tools solution design and prioritising tools work, with greater community support, throughput and transparency
24	Inconsistent understanding and documentation of user flows for common tasks	→	Good understanding and documentation of user flows for all common tasks

The area of IETF tools has grown organically over many years and due largely to the contribution of a small number of people. This has delivered valuable functionality and we have a well supported, productive and featured-packed toolchain.

After a number of years of organic tools development, there is now a new Tools Architecture and Strategy Team that will be producing the high-level requirements for such things as interoperability and user experience, which the LLC will need to ensure are implemented.

In recent years the bulk of the development has switched from volunteers to contractors and this requires improved mechanisms for prioritisation of work and solution design to ensure this transition meets community needs. The Tools Team has reorganised specifically to address this need and the LLC will need to support this change.

Overall, the level of work required is likely to require significant capital investment, increased community support and increased operational expenditure.

Additionally, some work is needed in analysing and documenting existing user flows to provide information for the two teams to use for decision-making.

Transformations: LLC Operations

#	From		To
23	RFP process has multiple issues, there is no contract performance framework and community engagement is limited	→	Best practice RFP management process with formal contract performance framework and good community engagement
24	Operational processes don't take advantage of the features and efficiency gains of modern apps	→	Operational processes empowered by a suite of modern, efficient and feature rich apps

Our contract management process has a number of issues, including mismatched bidder expectations, low volume of bids, complex negotiation phase, poor tracking and transparency and no formal process for performance management. All of this needs to be addressed in a new process, which follows current best practice.

In addition, we want ongoing community engagement and support for our overall approach to contracts and key contract provisions.

Many other LLC operational processes work well but as they are largely manual they can be inefficient and won't be able support new feature demands. This can be addressed quite easily by implementing a suite of modern apps.