

The Process for Organization of Internet Standards
Working Group (POISED)

Status of this Memo

This memo provides information for the Internet community. This memo does not specify an Internet standard of any kind. Distribution of this memo is unlimited.

Abstract

This report, originally prepared in January 1993 provides a summary of the POISED WG, starting from the events leading to the formation of the WG to the end of 1992. Necessarily, this synopsis represents my own perception, particularly for the "prehistory" period. Quite a few people hold strong views about both the overall sequence and specific events. My intent here is to convey as neutral a point of view as possible.

Background and Formation of POISED Working Group

The POISED WG resulted from two sequences of activity, both intimately related to the growth of the Internet. During 1991, there was great concern that the IP address space was being depleted and that the routing tables were growing too large. Some change in the IP addressing and routing mechanisms seemed inevitable, and it became urgent to explore and choose what those changes should be. The ROAD Working Group was formed to study the issues and recommend changes. The ROAD group returned with a specific recommendation for the short term, but did not reach a conclusion on a long term plan.

The IESG then formulated a plan of action for further exploration of the issues and forwarded these recommendations to the IAB. In June 1992, after the INET '92 meeting in Kobe, Japan, the IAB met and considered the IESG's recommendations. After considering the IESG's recommendations, the IAB felt that additional ideas were also important, particularly some of the addressing ideas in the CLNP protocol. The IAB communicated its concerns, and there was immediate controversy along two dimensions. One dimension was technical: What is the best course for evolving the IP protocol? How important or useful are the ideas in the OSI protocol stack? The other dimension was political: Who makes decisions within the Internet community? Who chooses who makes these decisions?

As often happens during periods of conflict, communication suffered among the several parties. The June communication from the IAB was understood by many as an IAB decision or, equivalently, a sense of the decisions the IAB would make in the future. In contrast, many if not all on the IAB felt that they were trying to open up the discussion and their memos were intended as advice and not decisions. From my perspective, this form of miscommunication was partly due to the extended size of the Internet technical community. When the community was much smaller, the IAB was in close contact with the day to day workings of the technical groups. With the creation of the IESG and area directorates, there are now two or three layers between a working group and the IAB.

These matters came to a head during the IETF meeting in July in Cambridge, MA. It was made clear that the consideration of changes to the IP protocol remained open. Work on that topic has proceeded and is reported in the appropriate forums. However, it became clear that it was necessary to examine the decision process and the procedures for populating the IESG and IAB. With respect to the procedures for selecting IAB and IESG members, the procedures that were in place derived from the creation of the Internet Society (ISOC) and the ISOC's sponsorship of the IAB. These procedures had been developed during the early part of 1992 and had been adopted by the ISOC during its meeting in Kobe in June. Hence, as fast as the ISOC was building the framework for supporting the Internet community, the community was questioning its structure and processes.

Following the IETF meeting, Vint Cerf, Internet Society president, called for the formation of working group to examine the processes and particularly the selection process (Attachment 1). During August, the working group was formed, I was asked to chair it, and a charter for the WG was formulated (Attachment 2). (The acronym is due to Erik Huizer and originally stood for The Process for Organization of Internet Standards and Development. It was shortened to fit into the space available on paper and in the IETF Secretariat's database.)

Deliberations: August through mid-November

The formation of the POISED WG provided a forum for discussion of process issues. An estimated 20 MB of messages filled up disks all over the world. Much of this discussion was fragmented or focused on narrow issues. The salient point that emerged was the need for a well defined process for selecting leaders with explicit community representation in the selection process. There was also substantial discussion of the role of the IAB -- to what extent should it make decisions and to what extent should it provide technical guidance? -- and the relationship between the IAB and IESG.

After several weeks of discussion, Carl Malamud and I attempted to capture the main elements of the discussion by presenting a specific proposal for the reorganization of the entire structure. The main elements of the proposal were:

- o Retention of the WG and area structure now in place within the IETF.
- o Replacement of the IAB and IESG by two boards, one devoted to technical management and one devoted to oversight of the process.
- o Well defined terms for members of both boards.
- o Selection by committees with input from the community.

This proposal was technically radical in the sense that it proposed new structures to replace existing structures instead of proposing changes within the existing system. The proposal focused all further discussion and set the stage for the fall IETF in mid-November in Washington D.C.

November IETF meeting

By virtue of the intensity of interest throughout the community, the POISED WG was one of the focal points of the IETF meeting. The schedule included a plenary session Tuesday morning to present the current state of the POISED WG discussions, a formal POISED WG session Tuesday afternoon and an open IESG meeting Thursday evening devoted to the POISED issues. The formal schedule was only the tip of the iceberg; numerous meetings took place over breakfast, lunch and dinner, in the halls and off in the corners. The more active participants probably had a dozen or more separate meetings on this over the three most active days, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

Amidst all this frenetic activity, remarkable progress occurred at two key points. At the Tuesday afternoon POISED WG meeting, Lyman Chapin, IAB chair, Phill Gross, IETF chair and IAB member, and other IAB members proposed changes within the existing IAB/IESG structure which converged with the process management elements of the Malamud-Crocker proposal. The key point was that all processing of standards actions, including the final decision to advance a specification along the standards track, would be made by the IESG. This change in the process shortens the decision cycle and brings it a step closer to the working group. Convergence on this key point obviated a radical proposal and signaled the building of a consensus on how the standards process should evolve. Over the next two days attention then turned to the selection process.

As indicated above, there was a strong feeling in the community that the IAB and IESG members should be selected with the consensus of the community. A natural mechanism for doing this is through formal voting. However, a formal voting process requires formal delineation of who's enfranchised. One of the strengths of the IETF is there isn't any formal membership requirement, nor is there a tradition of decision through votes. Decisions are generally reached by consensus with mediation by leaders when necessary.

Various formulas were considered, and the one that emerged was that IAB and IESG members would be selected by a nomination and recruiting committee. The committee is to consist of seven members from the community, with non-voting representatives from the IAB and IESG and a non-voting chair provided by the ISOC. The seven members are to be volunteers, with selection by lot if there are more than seven volunteers. The only requirement for volunteers is they must have attended two IETF meetings. This requirement is designed to ensure the nomination committee has some familiarity with the Internet community and the standards process.

IAB and IESG members are to serve two years. Half of each body is to have terms starting in odd years, and half is to have terms starting in even years. Selections to the IESG have to be ratified by the IAB, and selections to the IAB had to be ratified by the ISOC. In the event that the nomination committee is unable to reach a consensus on a single candidate for each position, it may forward multiple nominations to the ratifying body, and the ratifying body will select the candidate.

In addition to this selection process, a recall mechanism was outlined using a similar scheme. The ISOC is to supply an ombudsman who will field complaints after all oversight processes have been exhausted. If the ombudsman is unable to resolve a complaint after a cooling off period, a recall committee, selected at random among volunteering community members, will consider the matter. A two thirds vote by the committee is necessary to remove someone.

This proposal was formulated and circulated during Wednesday and Thursday and presented at the IESG open plenary. In contrast to the extraordinarily contentious open IESG meeting in Cambridge, this meeting was characterized by a strenuous effort by numerous people, representing diverse points of view, to reach consensus on this proposal, and the meeting ended with a distinct decision to proceed on this basis. Given the strong consensus that emerged at that meeting, the group decided to implement the selection process by the next IETF meeting, with the new IESG and IAB members to begin their terms at the termination of the IETF meeting in March.

On Friday, the IAB and IESG met jointly to determine what to do next. Both groups agreed to implement the change in processing standards actions quickly and cooperatively and to identify the positions which are open for selection. Within a couple of weeks, the IAB finished processing the standards actions in its queue, and IESG began to handle standards actions on its own.

December ISOC meeting

The Internet Society Trustees met December 10 and 11 at CNRI in Reston, VA. The process and organization of the IAB and IETF was one of their major concerns. A session of the Trustees at 3:00 p.m. EST, December 10, was broadcast via the Internet. It was not clear how many people listened, but Geoff Huston, Internet Trustee, was spliced in separately from Australia.

At this session, I presented the POISED WG results deliberations and asked on behalf of the IETF that the Trustees approve the selection process described above. For the long run, a new charter is needed. Given the very compressed schedule for these activities, there has not been time to draft and refine a new charter, so the Trustees were asked to approve the general direction of the reorganization of the IAB and IETF and give temporary approval to the selection process in order to permit the first round of selections to proceed.

The Trustees expressed strong approval for the work of the POISED WG and general approval for the direction of the effort. One area of concern for the Trustees is the legal liability of the Internet Society regarding decisions the IESG might make in the future. The Trustees made it quite clear that they are not inclined to micromanage the IETF process, but they do feel compelled to understand the legal issues and help construct a charter which is consistent with their responsibilities as Trustees.

The session adjourned with agreement to proceed on the current course and for the IETF, IAB and ISOC Trustees to work together to draft the appropriate charter.

Future activities

Both the IESG and IAB have selected the positions which must be filled through the new selection process. As I write this, Vint Cerf has been working to find a chair for the nominations committee, and the process should move forward during January and February. Communications on the details of the nomination process will be published on the IETF mailing list and possibly other forums. As described above, the selection process should be complete well before the next IETF meeting, and preferably by the end of February.

The other open agenda item is the draft of a new charter for the IAB and IETF and adoption of the charter by the ISOC. This is the next order of business for the POISED WG.

ATTACHMENT 1: Message from Vint Cerf to the IETF, et al.

To: pgross@nis.ans.net
Cc: iab@isi.edu, iesg@NRI.Reston.VA.US, ietf@isi.edu,
internet-society-trustees:@IETF.NRI.Reston.VA.US,
internet-society-members:@IETF.NRI.Reston.VA.US,
isoc-interest@relay.sgi.com
Subject: Request for Recommendations
Date: Wed, 12 Aug 92 21:46:48 -0400
From: vcerf@NRI.Reston.VA.US
Message-Id: <9208122146.aa10744@IETF.NRI.Reston.VA.US>

To: IETF Chairman
CC: IAB, IETF, IRTF, ISOC Trustees, and ISOC Members
From: President, Internet Society
Subject: Request for Recommendations on IAB/IETF/IRTF/ISOC Procedures

Introduction

In June, 1992, The Internet Society Board of Trustees received a proposed charter for an Internet Architecture Board to be created within the Internet Society. The new Internet Architecture Board was envisioned to be made up of the then current members of the Internet Activities Board. The functions of the IETF and the IRTF would be brought under the umbrella of the Internet Society as elements of the newly chartered Internet Architecture Board. The Trustees voted to accept the proposed charter, which is contained in RFC 1358.

In the period between June and July, a great deal of discussion occurred both by email and at the IETF meeting in Boston about the procedures by which the IAB, IETF, and IRTF should work together under the general umbrella of the Internet Society. Among the many points raised, three seemed particularly important to consider:

1. Procedures for making appointments to the Internet Architecture Board.
2. Procedures for resolving disagreements among the IETF, IESG, and IAB in matters pertaining to the Internet Standards.
3. Methods for ensuring that for any particular Internet Standard, procedures have been followed satisfactorily by all parties so that everyone with an interest has had a fair opportunity to be heard.

Effective discussion of these issues requires the availability of an open venue, an opportunity to comment by email, and the possibility of conducting face-to-face meetings. Recognizing this, the IAB has recommended that the most effective means available to the Internet Community for gathering recommendations for refining our existing procedures is to request that an IETF Working Group be formed.

I am pleased to make this request of the IETF to create such a WG. It would be extremely helpful to have recommendations on the three topics listed above by the first of December, 1992, in time to be presented at the Internet Society Board of Trustees meeting scheduled for December 10th.

With respect to point 1 above, the current procedures for making IAB appointments are contained in the IAB charter (RFC 1358). RFC 1310 contains a description of the current process by which Internet Standards are achieved. Points (2) and (3) could be discussed in the context of the present procedures described in RFC 1310, which recognizes a number of open issues in an appendix.

The Internet Society Trustees hope that members of the IAB, IRTF, IESG, and IETF, as well as general members of the Internet Society, will take the time to share their thoughts in the proposed working group forum. It is vital to the future of the Internet that these key groups work together well. Certainly, the Internet Society Trustees are committed to doing everything possible to facilitate effective procedures and to preserve and enhance the special spirit of the Internet Community which has created and maintains the health and growth of the global Internet.

Vint Cerf
President
Internet Society

Process for Organization of Internet Standards (poised)

Charter

Chair(s):

Steve Crocker <crocker@tis.com>

Mailing lists:

General Discussion:poised@nri.reston.va.us

To Subscribe: poised-request@nri.reston.va.us

Archive: nri.reston.va.us:~/poised/current

Description of Working Group:

The goal of this working group is to examine the Internet standards process and the responsibilities of the IAB, with attention to the relationship between the IAB and IETF/IESG.

The need for this working group was suggested during discussions at the July 1992 IETF. This led to a request from the Internet Society president to form such a working group.

The WG will consider the following matters:

1. Procedures for making appointments to the Internet Architecture Board.
2. Procedures for resolving disagreements among IETF, IESG and IAB in matters pertaining to the Internet Standards.
3. Methods for assuring that for any particular Internet Standard, procedures have been followed satisfactorily by all parties so that everyone with an interest has had a fair opportunity to be heard.

The WG will begin with a review of the procedures for making IAB appointments as documented in RFC 1358 and a review of the standards-making process documented in RFC 1310.

The WG has a goal of issuing a final report in time for IESG consideration and publication as an RFC before the ISOC Board of Trustees' meeting in December 1992. Given the compressed timescale, the WG will conduct most of its deliberations by electronic mail on the POISED WG mailing list. There will also be a preliminary report and discussions at the November 1992 IETF meeting in Washington, DC.

This will be a normal IETF WG, i.e. the mailing list and all discussions will be completely open.

Goals and Milestones:

Sep 92 Gather initial set of issues and write a preliminary report.

Oct 92 Post as an Internet Draft the initial recommendations to the ISOC Board.

Nov 92 Open discussion and presentation of the work of the POISED Working Group at Washington D.C. IETF meeting.

Dec 92 Submit the recommendations document to the IESG for posting as an Informational RFC. This document will be subsequently transmitted to the ISOC Board.

Security Considerations

Security issues are not discussed in this memo.

Author's Address

Steve Crocker
Trusted Information Systems, Inc.
3060 Washington Road
Glenwood, MD 21738

Phone: (301) 854-6889
Email: crocker@TIS.COM

