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Considerations for Cancellation of IETF Meetings

Abstract

The IETF ordinarily holds three in-person meetings per year to discuss issues and advance the Internet. However, various events can make a planned in-person meeting infeasible. This document provides criteria to aid the IETF Administration LLC (IETF LLC), the Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG), and the Chair of the Internet Research Task Force (IRTF) in deciding to relocate, virtualize, postpone, or cancel an in-person IETF meeting.

Status of This Memo

This memo documents an Internet Best Current Practice.

This document is a product of the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF). It represents the consensus of the IETF community. It has received public review and has been approved for publication by the Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG). Further information on BCPs is available in Section 2 of RFC 7841.

Information about the current status of this document, any errata, and how to provide feedback on it may be obtained at <https://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc9137>.

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1. Introduction

Among the highlights of the IETF calendar are in-person general meetings, which happen three times a year at various locations around the world.

Various major events may affect the suitability of a scheduled in-person IETF meeting, though this may not be immediately obvious for some events. Examples of such events include the following:

- A meeting venue itself may unexpectedly close or otherwise be unable to meet IETF meeting requirements due to a health issue, legal violation, or other localized problem.
- A natural disaster could degrade the travel and meeting infrastructure in a planned location and make it unethical to further burden that infrastructure with a meeting.
- War, civil unrest, or a public health crisis could make a meeting unsafe and/or result in widespread national or corporate travel bans.

- An economic crisis could sharply reduce resources available for travel, resulting in lower expected attendance.
- Changes in visa policies or other unexpected governmental restrictions might make the venue inaccessible to numerous attendees.

This document provides criteria to aid the IETF Administration LLC (IETF LLC), the Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG), and the Chair of the Internet Research Task Force (IRTF) in deciding to relocate, virtualize, postpone, or cancel an in-person IETF meeting.

2. Conventions

The key words "**MUST**", "**MUST NOT**", "**REQUIRED**", "**SHALL**", "**SHALL NOT**", "**SHOULD**", "**SHOULD NOT**", "**RECOMMENDED**", "**NOT RECOMMENDED**", "**MAY**", and "**OPTIONAL**" in this document are to be interpreted as described in BCP 14 [RFC2119] [RFC8174] when, and only when, they appear in all capitals, as shown here.

In this document, the term "venue" refers to both the facility that houses the sessions and the official meeting hotel(s), as defined in [RFC8718].

3. Decision Criteria and Roles

The IETF LLC assesses whether an in-person meeting is logistically and financially viable in light of events and assembles information about various travel restrictions that might impact attendance. The IESG and the Chair of the IRTF assess if the projected attendance is sufficient for a viable in-person meeting.

3.1. IETF LLC

The IETF LLC is responsible for assessing the suitability of a venue for an IETF meeting and is responsible for any reassessment in response to a major event that leaves the prior conclusion in doubt. If such an event occurs more than fourteen weeks before the start of the scheduled meeting, it is deemed a non-emergency situation. Later events, up to and including the week of a meeting itself, are deemed emergency situations.

In non-emergency situations, if the IETF LLC determines the scheduled meeting clearly cannot proceed (e.g., the venue has permanently closed), then it **MUST** share the reason(s) with the community and **MUST** consult on its proposed remedy. In less clear cases, the IETF LLC **SHOULD** conduct a formal reassessment process that includes:

- Consulting with the community on the timetable of the decision process.
- Consulting with the community on criteria to assess the impact of new developments.
- Publishing an assessment report and recommended remedy.
- Seeking approval of the IESG and the Chair of the IRTF for the recommendation.

In emergency situations, which lack the time for a consultation process, this document provides criteria that have IETF consensus and that the IETF LLC **MUST** apply in its assessment.

The IETF LLC will collect information about the likely impact to in-person attendance of national travel advisories, national and corporate travel bans, availability of transportation, quarantine requirements, etc., and report the results to the IESG and the Chair of the IRTF.

These criteria, some of which are derived from [Section 3](#) of [\[RFC8718\]](#), apply to venues that are re-evaluated due to an emergency:

- Local safety guidelines allow the venue and hotels to host a meeting with the expected number of participants and staff.
- It is possible to provision Internet access to the venue that allows those attending in person to utilize the Internet for all their IETF, business, and day-to-day needs; in addition, there must be sufficient bandwidth and access for remote attendees. Provisions include, but are not limited to, native and unmodified IPv4 and IPv6 connectivity and global reachability; there may be no additional limitation that would materially impact their Internet use. To ensure availability, it **MUST** be possible to provision redundant paths to the Internet.
- A reasonable number of food and drink establishments are open and available within walking distance to provide for the expected number of participants and staff.
- Local health and public safety infrastructure expects to have adequate capacity to support an influx of visitors during the meeting week.

Finally, the IETF LLC **MUST** assess the impact on its own operations, including:

- The number of critical support staff, contractors, and volunteers who can be at the venue.
- The financial impact of continuing a meeting or implementing any of the possible remedies.

The IETF LLC **SHOULD** cancel an in-person meeting and explore potential remedies if it judges a meeting to be logistically impossible or inconsistent with its fiduciary responsibilities.

In the event of considerations this document does not foresee, the IETF LLC should protect the health and safety of attendees and staff, as well as the fiscal health of the organization, with approval from the IESG and the Chair of the IRTF. The IESG should pursue a later update of this document.

3.2. The IESG and the Chair of the IRTF

If the IETF LLC assesses there are no fundamental logistical or financial obstacles to holding a meeting in an emergency situation, the IESG and the Chair of the IRTF assess if projected attendance is high enough to achieve the benefit of an in-person meeting. The IESG and the Chair of the IRTF **SHOULD** cancel the in-person meeting if that benefit is insufficient.

The IESG and the Chair of the IRTF are discouraged from relying on a simple head count of expected meeting attendance. Even dramatically smaller meetings with large remote participation may be successful. In addition to the IETF LLC's estimate, the IESG and the Chair of the IRTF might consider:

- Are many working groups and research groups largely unaffected by the restrictions, so that they can operate effectively?

- Is there a critical mass of key personnel at most working group meetings to leverage the advantages of in-person meetings, even if many participants are remote?

4. Remedies

If a meeting cannot be held at the scheduled time and place, the IETF LLC, IESG, and Chair of the IRTF have several options. The remedies in this section should be considered in light of four principles (presented in no particular order):

- Hold the scheduled sessions of a meeting in some format.
- Provide benefits of in-person interactions when possible.
- Avoid exorbitant additional travel expenses due to last-minute flight changes, etc.
- Ensure sufficient time and resources to adequately prepare an alternative.

The following remedies are listed in approximate declining order of preference.

4.1. Relocation

For attendees, the least disruptive response is to retain the meeting week but move it to a more-accessible venue. To the maximum extent possible, this will be geographically close to the original venue. In particular, the IETF LLC **SHOULD** meet the criteria in [RFC8718] and [RFC8719].

Relocation that requires new air travel arrangements for attendees **SHOULD NOT** occur less than one month prior to the start of the meeting.

4.2. Virtualization

The second option, and one that has fewer issues with venue availability, is to make a meeting fully online. This requires different IETF processes and logistical operations that are outside the scope of this document.

4.3. Postponement

Although it is more disruptive to the schedules of participants, the next best option is to delay a meeting until a specific date, at the same venue, at which conditions are expected to improve. The new end date of a meeting must be at least 30 days before the beginning of the following IETF meeting, and a meeting **MUST** begin no earlier than 30 days after the postponement announcement.

Due to scheduling constraints at the venue, this will usually not be feasible. However, it is more likely to allow attendees to recover at least some of their travel expenses than other options.

Note that it is possible to both postpone and relocate a meeting, though this has the disadvantages of both.

4.4. Cancellation

The IETF LLC, IESG, and Chair of the IRTF may cancel a meeting entirely in the event that worldwide conditions make it difficult for attendees to even attend online. Not holding a meeting at all can have wide implications, such as effects on the nomination process and seating of new officers.

Cancellation is likely the only practical alternative when emergencies occur immediately before or during a meeting, so that there is no opportunity to make other arrangements.

5. Refunds

The IETF **SHOULD NOT** reimburse registered attendees for unrecoverable travel expenses (airfare, hotel deposits, etc.).

However, there are several cases where full or partial refund of registration fees are appropriate:

- Cancellation **SHOULD** result in a full refund to all participants. It **MAY** be prorated if some portion of the sessions completed without incident.
- Upon postponement, the IETF LLC **SHOULD** offer refunds to registered attendees who claim they cannot attend at the newly scheduled time. Attendees can opt out of receiving a refund.
- When a meeting is virtualized, the IETF LLC **MUST** offer to refund registered attendees the difference between their paid registration fee and the equivalent fee for an online meeting. The IETF LLC **SHOULD** offer refunds to registered attendees who do not wish to attend an online meeting.
- The IETF LLC **SHOULD** offer refunds to attendees whose government forbids, or has issued a safety advisory against, visits to the host venue, even if the in-person meeting will continue. It **SHOULD NOT** refund cancellations due to employer policy or personal risk assessments.

These provisions intend to maintain trust between the IETF and its participants. However, under extraordinary threats to the solvency of the organization, the IETF LLC may suspend them.

6. Security Considerations

This document introduces no new concerns for the security of Internet protocols.

7. IANA Considerations

This document has no IANA actions.

8. Normative References

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