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RFC 9712
IETF Meeting Venue Requirements Review

Abstract

Following a review of the IETF meeting venue requirements, this document updates RFC 8718 ("IETF Plenary Meeting Venue Selection Process"), clarifies how the IETF Administration Support Activity (IASA) should interpret some elements of RFC 8718, and specifies a replacement exploratory meeting process, thereby updating RFC 8719 ("High-Level Guidance for the Meeting Policy of the IETF").

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/rfc9712.

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1. Introduction

IETF meeting venues are researched, negotiated, booked, and managed in accordance with "IETF Plenary Meeting Venue Selection Process" [RFC8718] and "High-Level Guidance for the Meeting Policy of the IETF" [RFC8719]. While these RFCs were published in 2020, the substantive work was completed in 2018, and since then, there have been a number of developments that have affected the efficacy of the current model for IETF meetings.

The IASA has reviewed the venue selection in light of these developments, primarily informed by the staff who work on venue selection, and has identified a number of issues to be addressed by a combination of updates to those RFCs and clarifications of interpretation.

2. Summary of Changes to RFCs 8718 and 8719

This document makes the following changes to [RFC8718] and [RFC8719]:

1. Updates the meeting (rotation) policy specified in [RFC8719] with a new process for the selection of exploratory meetings.
2. Clarifies the interpretation of "close proximity" as used in [RFC8718].
3. Updates the room block requirement specified in [RFC8718] from "one-third or more of projected meeting attendees" to a more flexible "sufficient rooms to meet the expected demand".
4. Clarifies that the IASA should interpret any reference to "Overflow Hotels" in [RFC8718] as an entirely optional feature that the IASA can choose to provide at its own discretion.
5. Updates the ad hoc space specified in various parts of [RFC8718] to better match the community requirements, as expressed in post-meeting surveys.

3. The Meeting (Rotation) Policy and Exploratory Meetings

3.1. Current Policy

The current meeting (rotation) policy is set as the "1-1-1-*" policy in [RFC8719]:

> [...] the meeting policy (let's call this the "1-1-1" policy) is that meetings should rotate between North America, Europe, and Asia.

and

> [...] the 1-1-1-* meeting policy is a slightly modified version of the aforementioned 1-1-1 meeting policy that allows for additional flexibility in the form of an exploratory meeting (denoted with an "*").

Furthermore, Section 4 of [RFC8719] describes the process for agreeing on an exploratory meeting, which includes the requirement for a participant to nominate the city, the community to discuss it, and the IETF chair to determine if there is consensus for the city to be considered suitable.

3.2. Discussion

Community consensus is a very high bar, much higher than is required for a meeting in Asia, Europe, or North America. For those ordinary meetings, the IASA considers community feedback but is ultimately the decision maker and can choose to go ahead with a meeting in a particular city even if there is no community consensus on the suitability of that city for an IETF meeting. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated by the low attendance at some exploratory meetings that community consensus is orthogonal to the viability of meeting in a particular city.

3.3. Resolution: Replacement of the Process for an Exploratory Meeting

This document replaces Section 4 of [RFC8719] and sets the new process as follows:

Exploratory meetings may be scheduled by the IASA following its normal processes, including those for assessing the suitability of a particular city, consulting with the IETF community, and deferring to the IESG if there is any concern that the core objective from [RFC8718] of 'why we meet' might not be met.

The IASA should ensure that the frequency of exploratory meetings is such that it does not redefine the concept of 'exploratory' and that the distribution of exploratory meetings does not disproportionately impact meetings in the 1-1-1 regions.

4. Hotels and the Facility

4.1. The "One-Roof" Preference

4.1.1. Current Policy

[RFC8718] defines "IETF Hotels" as:

> One or more hotels, in close proximity to the Facility, where the IETF guest room block allocations are negotiated and where network services managed by the IASA (e.g., the "IETF" SSID) are in use.

It also provides the following important criteria (only listing those directly relevant):

> • The IETF Hotels are within close proximity to each other and the Facility.

Additionally, [RFC8718] contains this preference:

> • We have something of a preference for an IETF meeting to be under "One Roof"; that is, qualified meeting space and guest rooms are available in the same facility.

4.1.2. Discussion

What happens in practice is that the IASA books a venue that conforms to one of two separate configurations:

1. A "One-Roof" venue of a hotel with the meeting space in the hotel or directly attached.

   The advantages of this configuration are:

   - With a large enough room block, the meeting space is generally free.
   - For those IETF participants (and staff) that normally stay in the IETF hotel, there is a strong sense of community.
   - It is usually easier and more flexible to work with a single point of contact instead of several (e.g., convention centers have separate contacts for Audio/Visual services, Food/Beverage services, and meeting space).
   - It can be much cheaper for the IASA than working with a separate convention center.
   - Group discussions can move more naturally from the Facility to the hotel.
   - It is easier to negotiate network changes to the hotel as part of an overall network package.
   - Someone can walk from their room to the meeting space in a few minutes, staying indoors the whole time.

   The disadvantages are:

   - There are a limited number of hotels (and therefore cities) with large enough meeting space and sufficient rooms.
   - The room rates at conference hotels are often on the high side, which can be more expensive for IETF participants.

2. A meeting space not co-located with a hotel (normally a convention center) but where there are hotels within a short walk.

The advantages of this configuration are:

- It makes many more cities available as potential venues.
- It provides more options for local hotels.
- It enables the IASA to negotiate a lower room rate than otherwise as convention centers generally have a range of hotels nearby.

The disadvantages are:

- Convention centers are much more difficult to negotiate with and are less flexible.
- The IASA has to pay for the meeting space.
- For those IETF participants (and staff) that normally stay in the IETF hotel, the sense of community is diminished.
- The choice of a main hotel and negotiation for the network at that hotel are more complicated.

To meet in cities that do not have suitable "One-Roof" venues, the IASA needs to work with convention centers. If this approach is not taken, then many cities and potentially some countries will be practically excluded as meeting venues.

It should also be noted that a "One-Roof" venue shifts the costs of the meeting onto participants whereas a convention center shifts the costs onto the IASA.

Despite "One Roof" being expressed as a preference in [RFC8718], there are some in the community who consider it as the only way to meet the requirement for "close proximity".

4.1.3. Resolution: Clarification of Interpretation

To address this concern, the IASA should interpret the "close proximity" requirement of [RFC8718] as follows:

> Where the meeting space is a convention center or another facility without a directly attached hotel, the "close proximity" requirement for the IETF Hotels should mean that the time it takes to walk from the IETF Hotels to the meeting space should be no longer than ten minutes, and it should be a safe walk including early in the morning and late at night.

It should be noted that Section 3.2.2 of [RFC8718] already uses a walkability test of 5-10 minutes for a similar purpose.

4.2. Number of Rooms Reserved

4.2.1. Current Policy

[RFC8718] includes the following requirement as an important criterion:

> - The guest rooms at the IETF Hotels are sufficient in number to house one-third or more of the projected meeting attendees.

4.2.2. Discussion

COVID-driven cancellations and lockdowns have badly affected the hospitality industry overall. Hotels and convention centers are now much more cautious about the terms of their bookings and much less willing to invest in securing a booking, as they aim to protect themselves from any similar sudden loss of income. For example, many hotels are now requiring conference organizers to provide full payment in advance for guest room blocks.

Where the IASA can get a large room block, it is finding that hotels are less willing to provide good discounts, so room pricing is not always on a par with other nearby hotels that have a smaller number of available rooms.

Then there is the impact of the now ubiquitous offering of short-term apartment rental sites. These sites are significant competitors to hotels for traveler accommodation both in price and availability.

The net result is that the IASA is reserving more hotel rooms than are being used, which exposes it to unnecessary risk as they are required to financially guarantee certain levels of occupancy, and this leads to wasted effort.

4.2.3. Resolution: Update to RFC 8718

To address this issue, this document updates Section 3.2.4 of [RFC8718] by replacing the total room block requirement for IETF Hotels from "one-third or more of projected meeting attendees" to a more flexible "sufficient rooms to meet the expected demand".

4.3. Overflow Hotels

4.3.1. Current Policy

Section 1 of [RFC8718] defines "Overflow Hotels" as follows:

> One or more hotels, usually in close proximity to the Facility, where the IETF has negotiated a group room rate for the purposes of the meeting.

The concept is further expanded in Section 3.2.4 of [RFC8718]:

> Overflow Hotels can be placed under contract, within convenient travel time to and from the Facility and at a variety of guest room rates

4.3.2. Discussion

The IASA has historically contracted with Overflow Hotels including those at other price points from the IETF Hotels. They were very underutilized by attendees, reflecting the general underutilization of IETF contracted room blocks and exposing the IASA to financial risk with

little benefit to participants. As a result, the use of Overflow Hotels has reduced, and they are rarely contracted. However, due to the way they are incorporated into [RFC8718], there are still many who believe these are, or should be, a normal feature of IETF meetings.

4.3.3. Resolution: Clarification of Interpretation

To address this issue, the IASA should interpret any reference to Overflow Hotels as an entirely optional feature that the IASA can choose to provide at its own discretion.

4.4. Ad Hoc Space including the Lounge and Terminal Room

4.4.1. Current Policy

Sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.4 of [RFC8718] include the following requirements as important criteria:

> - There are sufficient places (e.g., a mix of hallways, bars, meeting rooms, and restaurants) for people to hold ad hoc conversations and group discussions in the combination of spaces offered by the facilities, hotels, and bars/restaurants in the surrounding area, within walking distance (5-10 minutes).
> - At least one IETF Hotel or the Facility has a space for use as a lounge, conducive to planned and ad hoc meetings and chatting, as well as a space for working online. There are tables with seating, convenient for small meetings with laptops. These can be at an open bar or casual restaurant. Preferably the lounge area is centrally located, permitting easy access to participants.

While not a formal requirement, a terminal room (described as a dedicated room with extended opening hours beyond the normal hours of IETF meetings), Ethernet connectivity, a printer, and a staffed help desk have been long-standing features of IETF meetings.

4.4.2. Discussion

Both the lounge and the terminal room are used regularly but lightly, i.e., far below capacity. The reason for this is explained in the feedback to post-meeting surveys: Most participants want an immediately accessible ad hoc meeting space, which is best provided by plenty of hallway seating. The IASA has responded to this feedback by adopting a new practice of bringing in additional in-hallway seating whenever that provided by the venue is insufficient.

Dedicated rooms, such as the lounge or terminal room, or external facilities "within walking distance (5-10 minutes)" are unsuitable for the majority of participant needs, though there remains a need for quiet places to work between sessions.

4.4.3. Resolution: Update to RFC 8718

To address this issue, [RFC8718] is updated as follows:

1. Section 3.2.2 of [RFC8718] is updated so that the entry on ad hoc meeting space (first bullet) now reads:

> There are sufficient, easily accessible places within the Facility for people to hold ad hoc conversations and group discussions.

2. Section 3.2.4 of [RFC8718] is updated so that the entry on the lounge (sixth bullet) now reads:

> There are sufficient places within the Facility suitable for people to work online on their own devices.

5. IANA Considerations

This document has no IANA actions.

6. Security Considerations

This document should not affect the security of the Internet.

7. References

7.1. Normative References

[RFC8718] Lear, E., Ed., "IETF Plenary Meeting Venue Selection Process", BCP 226, RFC 8718, DOI 10.17487/RFC8718, February 2020, <https://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc8718>.

[RFC8719] Krishnan, S., "High-Level Guidance for the Meeting Policy of the IETF", BCP 226, RFC 8719, DOI 10.17487/RFC8719, February 2020, <https://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc8719>.

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