

Experiment in Long-Term Suspensions From
Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) Mailing Lists

Status of This Memo

This memo defines an Experimental Protocol for the Internet community. It does not specify an Internet standard of any kind. Discussion and suggestions for improvement are requested. Distribution of this memo is unlimited.

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Abstract

Discussion in the community has begun to question whether RFC 3683 and RFC 3934 provide the appropriate flexibility for managing Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) mailing lists. This document is an RFC 3933 experiment designed to allow the community to experiment with a broader set of tools for mailing list management while trying to determine what the long-term guidelines should be.

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1. Introduction

As discussed in RFC 3683, the IETF needs to have rules of conduct to limit disruptive or abusive behavior while permitting a fair and open forum for the discussion of Internet standardization. The IETF has a long and complicated history of rules for managing conduct on its mailing lists.

RFC 2418 [RFC2418] permitted individuals to be blocked from posting to a mailing list: "As a last resort and after explicit warnings, the Area Director, with the approval of the IESG, may request that the mailing list maintainer block the ability of the offending individual to post to the mailing list." RFC 2418 also allowed other forms of mailing list control to be applied with the approval of the area director and Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG). However, RFC 2418 applied only to working group mailing lists.

The IETF discussion list charter [RFC3005] provides guidelines for ietf@ietf.org. These guidelines provide more flexibility than RFC 2418. "The IETF Chair, the IETF Executive Director, or a sergeant-at-arms appointed by the Chair is empowered to restrict posting by a person, or of a thread, when the content is inappropriate and represents a pattern of abuse. They are encouraged to take into account the overall nature of the postings by an individual and whether particular postings are an aberration or typical. Complaints regarding their decisions should be referred to the IAB." In particular it appears that these decisions do not follow the normal appeals path outlined in RFC 2026 [RFC2026].

RFC 3683 [RFC3683] provides a procedure for banning named individuals from posting to an IETF mailing list for at least one year. However once such a ban is put in place for one mailing list, the individuals responsible for other IETF mailing lists can unilaterally remove the posting rights of that individual.

RFC 3934 [RFC3934] amends RFC 2418 and grants the working group chair the ability to suspend a member's posting rights for 30 days. However, it appears to remove the ability of the AD and IESG to approve longer suspensions or alternative procedures: "Other methods of mailing list control, including longer suspensions, must be carried out in accordance with other IETF-approved procedures." An argument could be made that the amendment was not intended to remove the already-approved procedures in RFC 2418, although a perhaps stronger argument can be made that the actual textual changes have the effect of removing these procedures.

The IESG has issued a statement on mailing list management [IESGLIST] that allows working group mailing lists to be moderated. Under this procedure, specific off-topic postings could be discarded. However, this procedure does not allow the posting rights of an individual to be suspended; it simply allows the list as a whole to be moderated.

The IESG issued a statement on disruptive postings [IESGDISRUPT] . This statement applies procedures similar to RFC 3934 and to the statement on moderated lists to non-working group lists.

The result of these guidelines is that there is a large gap between the levels of sanction that can be applied. An individual can be suspended from a working group list easily for 30 days. However, the only option available to the IESG that permits a longer suspension for any list besides `ietf@ietf.org` is the ability to suspend an individual for an indefinite time period from one list. This suspension can expand to any IETF list without community or IESG involvement. This memo is an RFC 3933 [RFC3933] experiment to provide the IESG with the ability to create additional mechanisms to manage IETF mailing lists while the community decides what mailing list guidelines are appropriate. In particular, this experiment allows the IESG to create a level of sanction between RFC 3934 and RFC 3683 for working group lists and to create sanctions other than RFC 3683 for non-working group lists. The goal of this experiment is to improve the functioning of IETF mailing lists while keeping the process open and fair. This experiment is successful if it gives the community useful input on how to design a mailing list management process. It is not expected that this experiment will be adopted in its current form as a permanent Best Current Practice (BCP).

2. Requirements notation

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].

3. Definition of IETF Mailing List

This experiment applies to all IETF mailing lists, including those not associated with a working group. The definition of a working group list is clear, but the definition of an IETF mailing list comprehensive enough to include all IETF mailing lists is not obvious. For the purpose of this experiment, an IETF mailing list is defined as follows.

An "IETF mailing list" is defined as the IETF list itself, any mailing list operated to further the work of a current IETF Working Group (WG), any mailing list created for WG use but retained for ongoing discussion after that WG was shut down, any mailing list created in support of an IETF-specified procedure (including mailing lists whose purpose is the discussion of registration actions), and any mailing list hosted on any site or system operated by the IASA or otherwise on behalf of the IETF. Mailing lists listed at https://datatracker.ietf.org/public/nwg_list.cgi are explicitly included in this definition.

4. The Experiment

This experiment runs for a period of 18 months. During the experiment period, the IESG MAY approve other methods of mailing list control besides those outlined in RFC 3683 and RFC 3934 to be used on a specified set of IETF mailing lists. Such methods include but are not limited to suspending the posting rights of an individual beyond 30 days on those lists. Under such procedures the IESG may delegate the authority to perform longer-term suspensions of specific individuals on specific mailing lists.

The procedures of this memo MUST NOT be used to suspend the posting rights of an individual beyond the period of the experiment. The procedures of this memo MUST NOT be used to limit an individual's ability to read the contents of a mailing list.

The IESG MUST inform the community in a public statement of any procedures for mailing list management approved under this experiment. Such a statement should include the description of the procedure and the description of mailing lists to which it applies or an indication that it applies to all IETF mailing lists. The IESG MUST make a public announcement of a new procedure at least 14 days prior to the procedure taking effect. Although the community is encouraged to comment on any IESG action, community consensus is not required to approve such a procedure. All currently active procedures under this experiment MUST be made public in an appropriate, easy-to-find location.

Sanctions made under this memo may be appealed using the procedures outlined in [RFC2026].

5. How the Experiment May Be Used (Informative)

The IESG could approve a procedure allowing it to suspend an individual from one or more mailing lists for a fixed period of time greater than 30 days.

Also, the IESG could delegate this power. Two types of delegation are envisioned. In the first, the IESG has a procedure that allows it to suspend a named individual from a list and to grant the managers of that list the delegated authority to continue to apply longer suspensions if disruptive behavior continues. In the second, the IESG approves a procedure that specifies a set of lists and allows managers of those lists to take action unilaterally after an initial suspension in a manner similar to RFC 3683.

6. Security Considerations

This document describes a modification to the IETF process for managing mailing list discussions. It has no security considerations.

7. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Brian Carpenter and John Klensin for valuable input in drafting this experiment.

8. References

8.1. 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.
- [RFC3933] Klensin, J. and S. Dawkins, "A Model for IETF Process Experiments", BCP 93, RFC 3933, November 2004.

8.2. Informative References

- [IESGDISRUPT] "IESG Statement on Disruptive Posting", URL <http://www.ietf.org/IESG/STATEMENTS/statement-disruptive-posting.txt>, February 2006.
- [IESGLIST] "IESG guidance on the moderation of IETF Working Group Mailing Lists", URL <http://www.ietf.org/IESG/STATEMENTS/moderated-lists.txt>, August 2000.
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- [RFC3005] Harris, S., "IETF Discussion List Charter", BCP 45, RFC 3005, November 2000.
- [RFC3683] Rose, M., "A Practice for Revoking Posting Rights to IETF Mailing Lists", BCP 83, RFC 3683, March 2004.
- [RFC3934] Wasserman, M., "Updates to RFC 2418 Regarding the Management of IETF Mailing Lists", BCP 94, RFC 3934, October 2004.

Author's Address

Sam Hartman
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

EMail: hartmans-ietf@mit.edu

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