



How to engage with internet standardisation and governance bodies?

Practical guidance to the IETF / IRTF

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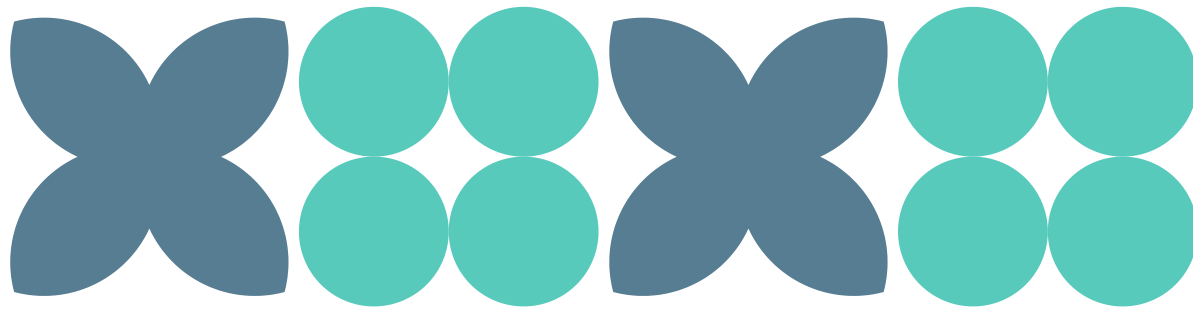
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Abbreviations

ALAC - At-Large Advisory Committee

ALS - At-large Structure

CSO - Civil Society Organisation

DESA - Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN)

GNSO - Generic Names Supporting Organisation

gTLD - Generic Top-Level Domains

IAB - Internet Architecture Board

ICANN - Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers

I-D - Internet Draft

IESG - Internet Engineering Steering Group

IETF - Internet Engineering Task Force

IGF - Internet Governance Forum

IRTF - Internet Research Task Force

ITU - International Telecommunication Union

ITU-D - Telecommunication Development

ITU-R - Radiocommunication

ITU-T - Telecommunication Standardisation

MAG - Multistakeholder Advisory Group

NCUC - Non-Commercial Users Constituency

NCSG - Non-Commercial Stakeholders Group

NPOC - Not-for-Profit Operational Concerns Constituency

RALO - Regional At-Large Organisations

RFC - Requests for Comments

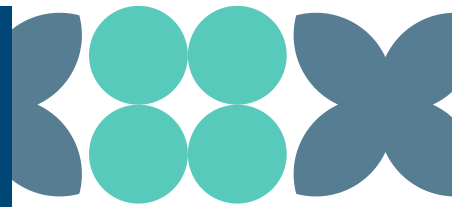
SG - Study Groups

WTDC - World Telecommunication Development Conference

WTSa - World Telecommunications Standardisation Assembly

Internet Engineering Task Force

Internet Research Task Force



What are IETF/IRTF, and how do they work?

The Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) **develops voluntary standards for the internet**, which are widely adopted by network operators and internet users. These standards, **known as Requests for Comments (RFCs)**, cover many topics, including network protocols, security, routing, and applications. **The Internet Research Task Force (IRTF)** is a parallel organisation to the IETF which researches emerging issues related to internet protocols, applications, architecture, and technology. IRTF can especially be of interest to civil society, as it focuses on long-term research, rather than shorter term standards making, and several of its working groups offer easier entry points for CSOs.

The IETF/IRTF operate through a decentralised, open, and collaborative process, where technical experts participate in working groups to propose, discuss, and refine internet standards. **There is no membership in the IETF or IRTF.** Anyone can participate by signing up to a working group mailing list or registering for an IETF/IRTF meeting, although the latter is subject to fees. All participants are considered volunteers and expected to participate as individuals.

The IETF is governed by the **Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG)** and **the Internet Architecture Board (IAB)**. The IESG is responsible for overseeing the technical management of IETF activities and ensuring that proposed standards meet the necessary criteria for approval. The IAB, on the other hand, provides strategic guidance and oversight, helping to shape the long-term direction of the IETF.

The new standards development process begins with one or more participants producing a discussion document called **an Internet-Draft (I-D)** and then working to get it adopted for further work. The IETF develops standards through working groups (WGs), that focus on particular areas, such as security, networking, or applications. Most of the work is conducted through the WG mailing list and, to some extent, during the three annual meetings. Decisions within WGs are taken by rough consensus and not by voting. The IETF holds three week-long physical meetings a year, which are also used as an occasion to hold IRTF meetings.

More Information



- [About IETF](#)
- [About IRTF](#)
- [CDT and ARTICLE 19 Guide to IETF for Public Interest Advocates](#)
- [About Internet-Drafts and how to prepare and influence them](#)

How can civil society get involved?

The nature of the discussions in the IETF/IRTF is highly technical, often requiring programming skills, specific technical expertise, and an understanding of jargon. The work in both organisations is conducted entirely in English. Many CSOs already have the skills and expertise needed to effectively participate in IETF/IRTF. Others may still face challenges, but their engagement is necessary to overcome these challenges and create a more inclusive culture. Still, several groups, especially research groups from the IRTF, can be an interesting entry point for CSOs, thanks to their explicit focus on human rights-related considerations.

Join an IETF Working Group or an IRTF Research Group

Participation in working/research groups is a key avenue for influencing standards development at IETF or research at IRTF. Anyone can participate in working groups by signing up for a working group mailing list, where most discussions and decision-making happen, or registering for an IETF meeting.

Each working group is led by one or more chairs. They are responsible for leading the discussions, managing the development of drafts, and coordinating with other working groups. Decisions on standards are made through rough consensus, which means that a large majority must agree, and minority comments need to be addressed, even if they were ultimately not implemented. Importantly, it is up to the chairs to decide when the working group has reached a consensus, which makes their position very influential.

→ ***More information on roles in IETF working groups***

There are currently 129 active working groups in IETF and 16 research groups in IRTF.

The following **IETF working groups** can be of particular interest to civil society:

- **DNSOP, The Domain Name System Operations**, develops guidance for the operation of DNS software and services. In particular, it focuses on DNS privacy and anonymity through the standardisation of DNS protocols like DNS-over-HTTPs or DNS-over-TLS.
- **MLS, The Messaging Layer Security**, is researching a standard messaging security protocol, including ways to guarantee a shared validation of a single end-to-end encrypted communications protocol.

The following **IRTF research groups** can be particularly relevant for civil society:

- **PEARG, The Privacy Enhancements and Assessments Research Group**, is a general forum for discussing and reviewing privacy-enhancing technologies for network protocols and distributed systems.
- **HRPC, The Human Rights Protocol Considerations Research Group**, spearheaded by ARTICLE 19, focuses on researching the implications of standards and internet protocols for human rights. The group's current focus is intimate partner violence.
- **GAIA, The Global Access to the Internet for All Research Group**, focuses on the issues related to internet access, the digital divide, and barriers to the implementation of internet protocols.

There are two primary ways that CSOs can contribute to the discussions to working groups:

- **Submit Internet-Drafts:** CSOs can propose new standards or modifications to existing Internet-Drafts by submitting new Internet-Drafts. Note that this requires technical knowledge and significant effort to push for the adoption of the standard, but if successful, it can lead to substantial impact.
- **Observe and comment:** Even without direct participation, CSOs can observe IETF meetings and working group discussions, submit comments on draft documents, and raise concerns.



More Information

- [Full list of IETF working groups](#)
- [Full list of IRTF research groups](#)
- [Guide to IETF Working Groups](#)

Attend an IETF/IRTF meeting

IETF holds **three annual meetings**, each of them one week long. Usually, the meetings rotate between Europe, Canada/US, and Asia. For example, in 2025, the three IETF meetings take place in Bangkok, Madrid and Montreal. Additionally, individual working or research groups organise [virtual interim meetings](#). In-person meetings are also open to remote participation. IRTF meetings usually take place during the IETF events. In addition, IRTF holds the [Applied Networking Research Workshop](#) once a year at the location of one of the IETF meetings (usually the one in July).

These meetings are designed to serve primarily as working meetings supporting the delivery of tasks by working or research groups and promoting exchanges between them. Consequently, traditional conference formats, such as panels or presentations, constitute a very small part of the agenda. However, they still constitute an important space for networking, collaboration and knowledge exchange.

Participation in IETF meetings is **subject to a fee** (in 2025 the fee varies between \$160 and \$1200, depending on how early the ticket is purchased and how many conference days the participant attends). This registration fee allows for participation in both the IETF and IRTF. However, IETF **offers fee waivers:** an unlimited number to remote participants and limited waivers for in-person participation, at the discretion of the IETF chair. The IRTF also offers [travel grants](#) to IETF events (during which IRTF meetings also take place) and fee waivers for early career academics, PhD students, and under-represented groups.

→ Tip:

- To request a fee waiver for an IETF meeting, contact support@ietf.org and include an explanation why you require an onsite fee waiver.
- You can also apply for the Travel Fund for Underrepresented Voices run by the Public Interest Technology Group (see more details below).

More Information



- [Guide to IETF Meetings](#)
- [Meeting terms and conditions](#)
- [List of upcoming in-person meetings](#)
- [Upcoming meeting tracker with interim meeting list](#)

Engage with the Public Interest Technology Group

The Public Interest Technology Group (PITG), formed in 2016, is an informal group of individuals who are involved in work at the intersection of technology, human rights, equity and advocacy. The PITG was created with the aim of promoting public interest technology work in key standards and technical internet governance bodies, while bridging the knowledge gap within these communities and CSOs. Its primary objective is to support sustained and effective CSO participation in these spaces to foster collaboration and diverse representation.

This group offers several key opportunities and resources that may be of value for CSOs working in technology governance:

- Engagement in internet infrastructure governance: The PITG has expanded its engagement beyond the IETF to include a number of standardisation organisations such as the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), offering CSOs avenues to influence standards and policies affecting internet infrastructure.
- Travel Fund for Underrepresented Voices: The PITG has established a travel fund aimed at enabling individuals from underrepresented groups to participate in internet governance and standards bodies. This initiative seeks to bring public interest perspectives into technical forums that have traditionally lacked civil society voices. The fund operates on a rolling basis and is not limited to participation in IETF events, but can also support engagement with ICANN, ITU and other standardisation bodies. Details regarding the application cycle are outlined on the official site.
- The PITG offers useful updates about developments in technical standardisation.



→How to apply?

While PITG's membership is currently by nomination only, CSOs interested in collaborating or seeking guidance can reach out directly to the group at chairs@pitg.network for more information.

Practical tips for participating in a Working or Research Group

→ Tip 1: Identify a relevant working or research group

Considering the significant commitment required to influence standardisation processes at the IETF or research at the IRTF, CSOs should carefully select the group in which they get involved to avoid spreading themselves too thin by following multiple discussions.

→ Tips for identifying relevant groups:

- See above in the section 'Join a working/research group'.
- Review the discussions in the freely available [mailing list archive](#).
- Speak with the group's chair prior to engaging to understand the group's aims, current focus, way of working, and expected milestones. This can be helpful, especially for identifying the right group to submit an Internet-Draft.

→ How to join key IRTF research groups:

- GAIA: The GAIA mailing list is gaia@irtf.org. To subscribe to or access the list archives, visit the [mailman page](#). Documents and meeting materials for the GAIA can be found on the [IETF datatracker](#).
- HRPC: The HRPC mailing list is hrpc@irtf.org. To subscribe to or access the list archives, visit the [mailman page](#). Documents and meeting materials for the HRPC can be found on the [IETF datatracker](#). Access the website <https://hrpc.io/>.
- PEARC: The PEARC mailing list is pearc@irtf.org. To subscribe or access the list archives, visit the [mailman page](#). Documents and meeting materials for the PEARC can be found on the [IETF datatracker](#). Additional PEARC information is available at <https://pearc.org/>.

→ Tip 2: Understand the community and your role

According to the Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT) and ARTICLE 19's report '[A Guide to the Internet Engineering Task Force \(IETF\) for Public Interest Advocates](#)', the IETF/IRTF community is primarily composed of technical experts, often male, white, industry-associated and representing the Global North. In this context, CSOs play a key role in bringing different, more diverse perspectives and especially translating human rights considerations into technical language and vice versa. Organisations experienced in engaging with the IETF suggest that to gain trust among the community, CSOs should avoid firmly formulated criticism and judgements and instead provide constructive questions and suggestions.

The IETF/IRTF community also values seniority and long-term engagement. While participation in in-person meetings is not necessary, it can be helpful for building relationships and using informal spaces to gather support for public interest considerations.

→ Tip 3: Prepare for long-term engagement

CSOs interested in getting involved must acknowledge that successful advocacy in the IETF/IRTF often requires long-term engagement over years and the ability to cover multiple iterations of standards development, often months apart. This means that CSOs should also carefully consider the time, resources, and knowledge needed to meaningfully engage in the process.

One-off contributions can be timely and necessary to flag human rights or other relevant issues or bring missing perspectives to the table. Still, this requires following the developments, monitoring the mailing list, analysing comments, and reviewing the implications of proposed standards for the area of work that the organisation focuses on.

Are there any materials for newcomers?

- Check the [“New Participant” website](#) of IETF which offers useful guidance on how to prepare for an IETF meeting as well as outlines opportunities for joining a physical onboarding and introduction session before the start of each IETF event.
- The IETF offers a [“Guides Program”](#) which can be a very beneficial way for newcomers to learn from more experienced peers and facilitate their integration into the IETF community. The programme matches experienced IETF participants with new participants for the purposes of IETF meetings, taking into account their language, region and areas of interest. Any person attending an IETF meeting can request a guide ahead of the event. Normally, the participant would exchange introductory emails with their guide ahead of the event, meet with them in-person at the event and have a post-event online meeting.

More Information



- [Link to requesting a guide](#)
- [FAQ for potential participants](#)
- [For questions, contact the IETF Guides Program leads at lead@guides.ietf.org.](#)
- [Other suggestions for facilitating meaningful engagement:](#)
 - [Consult IETF materials for newcomers.](#)
 - [Attend Technology Deep Dives and watch live sessions from IETF meetings.](#)
 - [Join the Systems mailing list and meetings, which are for members who identify as women and non-binary people and are aimed at improving the gender balance of participation at the IETF.](#)
- [Consult resources developed by other civil society organisations:](#)
 - [Centre for Democracy and Technology.](#)
 - [ARTICLE 19: A Guide to the IETF for Public Interest Advocates](#)



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