The Nominating Committee Process: Open Disclosure of Willing Nominees

Abstract

   This document updates RFC 3777, Section 3, Bullet 6 to allow a
   Nominating and Recall Committee to disclose the list of nominees who
   are willing to be considered to serve in positions the committee is
   responsible for filling.

Status of This Memo

   This document specifies an Internet Best Current Practices for the
   Internet Community, and requests discussion and suggestions for
   improvements. Distribution of this memo is unlimited.

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1. Introduction

   The Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG), the Internet
   Architecture Board (IAB), and at-large IETF representatives to the
   IETF Administrative Oversight Committee (IAOC) are selected by a
   "Nominating and Recall Committee" (universally abbreviated as
   "NomCom"). [RFC3777] defines how the NomCom is selected, and the
   processes it follows as it selects candidates for these positions.

   The NomCom is responsible for filling positions across the breadth of
   the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF). The NomCom needs
   relevant information about nominees being considered for these
   positions, but current [RFC3777] requirements for confidentiality
   limit the ability of the NomCom to solicit that information. The
   process change described in this document allows the NomCom to openly
   solicit information about nominees who are willing to be considered.

2. Current Rules on Confidentiality

   [RFC3777] is the latest in a series of revisions to the NomCom
   process, and it describes the confidential nature of NomCom
   deliberations in Section 3, "General", bullet 6, which states:

      All deliberations and supporting information that relates to
      specific nominees, candidates, and confirmed candidates are
      confidential.

      The nominating committee and confirming body members will be
      exposed to confidential information as a result of their
      deliberations, their interactions with those they consult, and
      from those who provide requested supporting information. All
      members and all other participants are expected to handle this
      information in a manner consistent with its sensitivity.

It is consistent with this rule for current nominating committee
members who have served on prior nominating committees to advise
the current committee on deliberations and results of the prior
committee, as necessary and appropriate.

3. Problems with Existing Rules

There are two problems with existing practice -- nominee lists aren't
as confidential as [RFC3777] would lead the reader to believe, but
they aren't visible to the entire IETF community, either.

Since at least 1996, most NomComs have sent out a "short list" of
nominees under consideration to a variety of audiences. The target
audiences differ from year to year, but have included members of
specific leadership bodies, working group chairs in a specific area
(for IESG positions), all working group chairs (for IAB and IAOC
positions), and all document authors. The combined target audience
for all short lists includes hundreds of recipients -- recent NomComs
have sent out about 1500 requests for short list feedback.

This practice is unavoidable, because most NomCom members will not
have personal experience with most nominees for most positions, but
it is periodically challenged because it's not explicitly allowed as
an exception to the blanket requirement for confidentiality.

In an attempt to maintain the required level of confidentiality, past
NomComs have also included "ringers" (as "padding") on the short list
-- nominees who are NOT under active consideration for a specific
position. Since anyone who sees the short list does not know who the
ringers are, conscientious IETF participants also provide feedback on
nominees who have already declined. This is a waste of precious
IETF-participant cycles, and there are widespread reports that strict
confidentiality about which candidates are "real", and which are
included as "padding", is not successfully maintained in practice.

Even if confidentiality about padding is maintained, the community is
aware that some nominees on the short list aren't under active
consideration. In some cases, people have guessed incorrectly that
an actual nominee is part of the padding, and didn't provide needed
feedback to the NomCom about a nominee who was actively being
considered.

We also note that the practice of disclosing a "short list" penalizes
IETF participants who aren't members of one of the target audiences
being surveyed -- they have no way of knowing who is being
considered, except for incumbent(s), and have little incentive to
provide feedback to the NomCom on individuals who might not even be
nominees.

4. Asking the Entire Community for Feedback

   NomComs are not required to ask for community input at all, but at
   the current IETF scale, many NomComs do request community input,
   because members do not have personal experience with all nominees for
   all positions under review.

   We assume that asking the larger community for feedback about these
   nominees is preferable to NomCom members without personal experience
   simply deferring to the members of the NomCom who do have personal
   experience with specific nominees.

   We assume that asking for feedback from the entire community is
   preferable to asking for feedback from large segments of the
   community, while keeping the rest of the community "in the dark".

5. Disclosing a Nominee List

   In proposing that a nominee list be disclosed as part of the NomCom's
   request for feedback from the community, we considered three
   possibilities:

   1. Asking for feedback on all nominees, whether or not they are
       willing to be considered.

   2. Asking for feedback on all nominees who are willing to be
       considered.

   3. Asking for feedback on the nominees that the NomCom is seriously
       considering (the "short list").

   Asking for feedback on nominees who are not willing to be considered
   is a waste of precious IETF-participant cycles, and may make it less
   likely that the NomCom would receive feedback on some nominees who
   ARE willing to be considered.

   Asking for feedback on all nominees who are willing to be considered
   allows the community to point out specific strengths and weaknesses
   of all willing nominees, and this feedback should be useful to the
   NomCom in deciding which nominees to seriously consider. It also
   allows the NomCom to receive feedback on nominees who might not
   appear on a "short list" initially, in the event that a strong
   nominee is suddenly unwilling or unable to serve.

   We also note that the list of willing nominees will include
   incumbents who are willing to be considered for an additional term.

6. Updated Text from RFC 3777

   At the end of the three paragraphs in [RFC3777], Section 3,
   "General", bullet 6, which are currently:

      All deliberations and supporting information that relates to
      specific nominees, candidates, and confirmed candidates are
      confidential.

      The nominating committee and confirming body members will be
      exposed to confidential information as a result of their
      deliberations, their interactions with those they consult, and
      from those who provide requested supporting information. All
      members and all other participants are expected to handle this
      information in a manner consistent with its sensitivity.

      It is consistent with this rule for current nominating committee
      members who have served on prior nominating committees to advise
      the current committee on deliberations and results of the prior
      committee, as necessary and appropriate.

   add the following paragraphs:

      The list of nominees willing to be considered for positions under
      review in the current NomCom cycle is not confidential. The
      NomCom may disclose a list of names of nominees who are willing to
      be considered for positions under review to the community, in
      order to obtain feedback from the community on these nominees.

      The list of nominees disclosed for a specific position should
      contain only the names of nominees who are willing to be
      considered for the position under review.

      The NomCom may choose not to include some names in the disclosed
      list, at their discretion.

      The NomCom may disclose an updated list, at their discretion. For
      example, the NomCom might disclose an updated list if the NomCom
      identifies errors/omissions in a previously disclosed version of
      the disclosed list, or if the NomCom finds it necessary to call
      for additional nominees, and these nominees indicate a willingness
      to be considered before the NomCom has completed its
      deliberations.

      Nominees may choose to ask people to provide feedback to the
      NomCom, but should not encourage any public statements of support.
      NomComs should consider nominee-encouraged lobbying and
      campaigning to be unacceptable behavior.

        IETF community members are encouraged to provide feedback on
        nominees to the NomCom, but should not post statements of support/
        non-support for nominees in any public forum.

7. Security Considerations

    This specification describes issues with the current IETF Nominating
    Committee process ([RFC3777]) and proposes an update to allow the
    NomCom to solicit feedback from the entire community on nominees
    under consideration. No security considerations apply.

8. Acknowledgements

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    observations and guidance on previous versions of this document: Fred
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    The editor also thanks IETF plenary meeting participants who have
    provided useful feedback on previous versions of this document.

9. Normative References

    [RFC3777] Galvin, J., "IAB and IESG Selection, Confirmation, and
               Recall Process: Operation of the Nominating and Recall
               Committees", BCP 10, RFC 3777, June 2004.

Appendix A. Concerns about Open Nominee Lists

    This section acknowledges possible concerns about disclosing open
    nominee lists in previous NomCom-related discussions. Thanks to
    Leslie Daigle for providing this set of concerns to the document
    editor.

    One concern is that nominees who are willing to be considered if the
    nominee list is not disclosed would not be willing to be considered
    if the nominee list is disclosed. This reluctance might be cultural,
    the result of personal pride, or the result of the fear of
    retribution for a nominee being considered as a replacement for the
    nominee's managing Area Director (this concern is usually raised in
    an IESG context).

    Another concern is that publishing the nominee list publicly would
    lead to "lobbying", public statements supporting nominees on the IETF
    mailing list, etc.

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