IETF Meeting Venue Selection Criteria
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Abstract

This document provides the IAD with technical and logistic criteria for selecting venues for IETF meetings.
# Table of Contents

1. Introduction .................................................. 3  
2. Location and Hosting Criteria ............................... 3  
   2.1. Vacation Destinations .................................. 4  
   2.2. Hosting and Sponsorship ................................ 4  
   2.3. Freedom of Participation .............................. 5  
   2.4. Productivity and Working Environment .................. 5  
   2.5. Attendance Limitation and Visas ...................... 5  
   2.6. Decision and Reporting ............................... 6  
3. Logistic Criteria for Venue Selection ...................... 6  
   3.1. Meeting Rooms ......................................... 7  
   3.2. Other Venue Considerations ............................ 9  
   3.3. Sleeping Rooms ........................................ 10  
   3.4. Local Transportation ................................... 10  
   3.5. Airport/Wide-Area Transportation ...................... 11  
   3.6. Food Logistics ......................................... 11  
   3.7. Technical and Regulatory Considerations .............. 12  
   3.8. Health Considerations ................................ 12  
4. Logistic Risks and Contingencies ........................... 12  
5. Technical Requirements and Contingencies .................. 13  
6. Timing and Planning .......................................... 13  
7. Venue Acceptance/Rejection Report ......................... 14  
8. Process and Openness ........................................ 14  
9. Security Considerations .................................... 15  
10. IANA Considerations ........................................ 15  
11. Acknowledgements .......................................... 15  
12. References ................................................ 15  
   12.1. Normative References ................................ 15  
   12.2. Informative References ............................... 15  
Author’s Address .............................................. 17  
Intellectual Property and Copyright Statements ................ 18
1. Introduction

IETF meetings are an important part of the IETF process. As such, their hosting and organization should be planned carefully. This will ensure that attendees make the best use of their meeting time, maximize their performance and that unexpected developments (such as cancellations, inadequate working conditions, and unreliable connectivity) do not occur.

This document describes logistic and technical criteria for venue selection, logistic and technical contingency measures, and details related to the planning and timing of meetings.

Generally, this document does not present a strict list of "MUST" items. Instead, it lists what needs to be evaluated, various alternative solutions, or combinations thereof, that may apply. In the end, the IAD will make the final decision and will be accountable for it, and therefore he is responsible for applying the criteria defined in this document according to the hosting/sponsorship availability.

Experience shows that things could go wrong when there is too strict a dependence on specific people or equipment and when no alternatives are provisioned for. Consequently, contingencies are a very important consideration.

2. Location and Hosting Criteria

The number of participants in the IETF is growing. Although many of these participants are from North America, experience shows that when a meeting is organized elsewhere, fewer than half the participants come from there. Consequently, to ensure open international access, it has been suggested that the IETF meet outside North America at least once every three times.

However, this recommendation is often too simple. The overall selection criteria from this document will qualify the location.

When a location is being chosen, it is important to consider that the monetary surplus coming from the meetings goes toward sustaining the IETF. Each meeting’s overall cost should be considered part of a global operation. A lower meeting cost (food, facilities, network, meeting fees, host capabilities, sponsorship) may not necessarily mean a lower secretariat cost. At the same time, the overall average participant cost must also be taken in consideration. Although a cheap venue generates a high surplus for the IETF, the average cost for attendees (flights, hotels, other costs) might become much more
expensive, which might generate a drop in the attendance.

2.1. Vacation Destinations

Vacation destinations may seem difficult for some people to justify as a business expense, but for a few people this could also be true for other situations. Often, frequent contributors to the IETF will not need to justify their participation regardless of the location.

If a vacation spot is to be chosen as a meeting location, places with a very heavy concentration of visitors should be avoided. Congested airport traffic could make transit for IETF participants difficult. It should be confirmed that the additional load caused by IETF participants would not be an issue.

2.2. Hosting and Sponsorship

The choice of continent and country depends not only on the logistical and technical criteria listed in this document, but also on offers of hosting and sponsorship. The IETF desires to meet in countries with significant actual or potential participation.

Hosting and sponsorship have a particular financial and organizational impact. Experience shows that when the IETF goes to a new country, an eager and committed local host organization is vital. A local host willing to sponsor some facilities for the meeting (without marketing noise) may be of great budgetary assistance, regardless of the country.

Some of these matters may be subject to confidential negotiations, which should be in the hands of IASA and, in particular, the IAD [1].

Regarding the sponsorship itself, the meetings are not directly rewarding as a marketing action, as is usually the case for other events. This is because the IETF community mainly comprises engineers, who are generally not the decision makers who may become customers. However, sponsoring IETF offers an important reward from the perspective of community contribution. This "lower-level" reward is one more reason to make sure that not all sponsorship details are openly disseminated, unless the host clearly authorizes this. Even if the host does, open dissemination can be counterproductive for future meetings.

However it may be interesting to have, after each meeting, a summary evaluation of all the issues and costs, overall figures, which will help to improve the criteria and the performance of the following meetings.
2.3. Freedom of Participation

Meetings should not be held in countries where some attendees could be disallowed entry or where freedom of speech is not guaranteed for all participants.

IETF is an open organization, and anyone from any region should always be able to participate, so the meeting place cannot be a barrier.

The country hosting the IETF meeting should not restrict the participant’s freedom of expression; for example, by blocking web sites or redirecting dns that may be required during the meeting for usual participant’s business, censoring of personal communications, blocking of VPN/SSH and other similar practices.

Freedom of speech during the meeting must be guaranteed.

Abridged participation by local participants should be seriously considered as well. For example, local participants could be under pressure to support national technical policies on threat of imprisonment or other punitive actions.

Local participants should be able to attend a meeting without any special government approval. Otherwise, the venue does not support increased local participation, which is one of the IETF’s goals.

2.4. Productivity and Working Environment

The productivity of working groups in IETF meetings is very important. This means that the "ideal" venue should try to facilitate good participation from frequent WG contributors and lots of local participation (first-time attendees often want to participate again in the future and may become our next generation of contributors).

It is also important to rotate locations so that the participation of new people will increase.

The working environment should enable participants to do their business without too much outside interference.

2.5. Attendance Limitation and Visas

The country hosting the event should not limit the attendance for any participant. Places in the world where a significant number of contributors can’t go (or get to without doing a lot of work) should be rejected as candidates to host the IETF.
The average time that is required to issue a visitor visa suitable for a short-term visit for IETF business needs to be confirmed. If this time is not predictable in advance and measurable in a small number of months, that itself is a barrier to participation.

The IAD must make special considerations if the visa requirements are so stringent that it is extremely difficult or even impossible for some participants to attend.

The host country should not have unreasonable visa regulations. That is, either visas should not be required for most participants, or, if they are required, they should be obtainable at low cost and shouldn’t take any unnecessary overhead from the organization or the attendees.

Citizens of certain countries may have difficulty in obtaining visas for political reasons. The IASA should take all possible steps to ensure that official governmental support is available for such people.

Furthermore, explicit requirements and procedures should be worked out in advance, coordinated with the host country government, and posted in the IETF meeting web page.

If a particular country refuses to cooperate with the IETF in setting up procedures for a meeting in their country, this should be posted on the IETF meetings web page so that this problem can be considered when future venues are selected.

2.6. Decision and Reporting

The IASA, acting through the IAD and the Secretariat, has the power of the final decision about meeting venues and hosts. The IASA should consult with the IETF Chair, the IESG, the IAB and the volunteer team as necessary.

Despite the need for confidentiality, the IETF should be somehow informed about general aspects of the evaluation criteria as to why a venue/location is or is not adequate. Therefore, some form of open report should be produced after each venue is evaluated.

3. Logistic Criteria for Venue Selection

The average attendance at an IETF meeting is about 1,300 people. However, this may reach up to 2,300 people in some circumstances (for instance, depending on the meeting location).
Therefore, the suggested venue meeting room capacity is calculated for about 1,600 people: a meeting space of about 60,000 square feet or 5,500 square meters.

3.1. Meeting Rooms

The following table shows the approximate needs for meeting rooms and their expected size, including the usual setup time a few days before the meeting. This represents only a basic guideline for minimum requirements.

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</tbody>
</table>

Meeting room requirements

Table 1

Legend:
- Room Name/Usage (Terminal Room, NOC Room, Storage Room, IETF Office, Staff Lounge, Host Lounge, Registration Area, Reception, Meeting Room, AM/PM Breaks, Plenary).
- Room Capacity Requirement (People for Reception, Theater for Meeting Rooms, Hollow Square for last two meeting rooms). Plenary is 1500 Theater.

- Room Size in Square Meters.

- Wednesday, Tuesday, Friday, Saturday (meeting setup). Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday (meeting). Saturday (end of meeting).

Obviously, these figures could change from meeting to meeting and are only a guideline. Indeed, over time the space in the meeting rooms is becoming too small, and this should be considered in the future. Adequate planning will take in consideration change in participant’s interests in different work areas, which may create logistic troubles when configuring each specific meeting agenda. Additional space allows a more convenient working environment for participants.

Note that some meeting rooms can be used for several functions, according to the meeting schedule. For example, the plenary meeting room could be used only when the other sessions aren’t underway, and breaks could be taken in the registration area in the foyer.

For some of the meeting rooms, such as the storage and NOC, multiple keys should be available so that they can be adequately distributed to the relevant staff.

All meeting rooms should have a sufficient number of power sockets and cords for connecting the laptops of about 80% of the expected attendees.

When conference facilities are used instead of meeting rooms in hotels, it may be necessary to increase the security when there are too many entrances. Some additional technical issues may also arise according to previous experience, such as access to wiring closets or AV facilities.

Rooms are generally held on a 24-hour basis, and it is highly recommended that they may be used at any time without restrictions, except for the time required for cleaning service. In certain places, this could be a cost issue and may not be convenient. This may be the case when using conference facilities.

However, from the IETF perspective, the rooms generally do not need to be available on a 24-hour basis (with the exception of the terminal room), but removing and reinstalling cabling, access points or other equipment, should not be required by the venue.
Regarding the rooms availability and considering the variability of them, if we define "access" as the ability to enter set up a room (e.g., to plug in equipment) but not necessarily to occupy it, it should be possible to get access to the meeting room at least 12 hours prior to holding a meeting in that room.

3.2. Other Venue Considerations

There should be reasonable seating space in open areas outside the meeting rooms, but not far removed from them, for impromptu hallway discussions and such. Power outlets should also be available in those areas. Apart to the terminal room, it may be convenient, if possible, to have some "quiet" rooms, where people can go to read and think in peace.

The venue should also provide adequate space for participants to take refreshments during breaks, in a comfortable way.

The technical team should review the security of the location; for example, placement of cameras in critical locations should be considered.

Access to a loading dock and a pallet jack will facilitate the receipt of network gear and other materials used in the meeting.

The NOC should set up a router on-site before the meeting, in order to test everything in advance. It is extremely important that the location of this equipment be accessible for the NOC.

The venue’s wiring plan (power and data) should be fully available up front as part of the evaluation and during the meeting, with immediate access to control rooms (for example, to make sure that if a circuit trips, it may be flipped back on almost immediately).

The venue needs to be wheelchair accessible. The host should also be aware of other possible attendees’ handicaps. Some regular attendees are blind, hypoglycemic, diabetic, or afflicted with any number of other handicaps. Some attendees may have concerns about the availability (and even the legality) of the drugs they need. There are countries in which possession of some drugs (even with a prescription) might get a person in serious trouble. Some information from the host in this regard is very welcome.

Weather conditions should not be prohibitive, and the movement of attendees in likely weather conditions to and from the airport, venue, and suggested hotels should be considered.

Similarly, the venue’s air conditioning or heating capacity should be
adequate according to the expected attendance and external weather conditions, including humidity and altitude. The host should consider the effect when 80% of the attendees use their laptops, each of which will typically dissipate 150 to 200 watts of heat. Obviously, this does not mean that the air conditioning or heating system must be on all the time; on the contrary, thermostats should work automatically in order to allow a comfortable working environment.

3.3. Sleeping Rooms

The approximate requirements for sleeping rooms will be a block of around 5.515 rooms/ nights. This is only a generic guideline.

The following table shows the needs for sleeping rooms, including a setup time a few days before the meeting.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thu</th>
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<th>Mon</th>
<th>Tue</th>
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<td>970</td>
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<td>200</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Sleeping room requirements

Table 2

3.4. Local Transportation

The location of the venue (and of the main hotels if the venue is not a big hotel) should allow quick movement of the attendees between the sleeping and meeting rooms. It is strongly suggested that the meeting rooms be located in the main hotel (which would have a minimum capacity of about 60% of the required sleeping rooms).

If the meeting rooms are not located in the same place as the main block of sleeping rooms, inexpensive public transportation should allow the movement of 100% of the attendees in less than 30 minutes’ time; meeting timing and usual public transport utilization by the locals should be considered. This may be the case when the meeting is being hosted in a convention center instead of at a big hotel (which may not be available in some locations). This is becoming a frequent practice for a number of meetings.

Ideally, a number of alternative hotels will be within walking distance (10 to 15 minutes) of the event venue.

If the IETF has to recommend several "official" hotels, which is
often the case, especially when the main hotel is insufficient to house most of the participants, some sort of free-of-charge network connectivity should be provided at all the official hotels.

3.5. Airport/Wide-Area Transportation

The airport and other means of wide-area transportation need to have adequate capacity and decent connections.

There should be easy and inexpensive transportation from the nearby airports to the meeting site. Typically, an airport should be less than 50 kilometers’ distance from the site, and public transportation and affordable taxi services should be available.

The airport should have a capacity adequate for the number of attendees arriving and departing; for example, with sufficient number of scheduled flights, and without bottlenecks due to local immigration practices.

Traveling to the venue should be possible with a maximum of one flight hop from a major hub. The airport must have several international carriers.

Detailed instructions for transportation and of the approximate cost to get to and from hotels should be made available.

3.6. Food Logistics

The attendees (1,600 to 2,000 people) should be able to get lunch and dinner, according to the meeting timing, in a maximum of 60 to 90 minutes, including transit time back and forth.

In general, a variety of restaurants will be required within walking distance, allowing reservation of small and medium tables. Special requirements (such as vegetarian food, among other choices) must be satisfied.

As a general consideration, meals must be available when the IETF needs them. If what this section specifies is not completely possible, a combination of off-site restaurants and on-site delivery of good-quality sandwiches (including vegetarian and alternative choices) could be acceptable.

A list of places that can deliver food to the venue would be helpful.

Places for casual meetings, such as BAR BoFs, should also be available.
3.7. Technical and Regulatory Considerations

It should be possible for the IETF participants to rent cell phones. This is especially relevant for the secretariat/registration/NOC staff.

It should be possible to know a country’s specific technological regulations up front, especially those that could affect the provision of the network and equipment often used by the staff and the attendees. For instance, some countries do not authorize 802.11a frequencies.

3.8. Health Considerations

Any high risk to health for a high number of participants (such as malaria, other infections or mandatory health checks at immigration) should be considered a barrier.

It would be acceptable if the vaccination of the participants did not adversely affect the attendance. In any case, appropriate recommendations about vaccinations and mandatory health checks should be provided ahead the meeting, far enough in advance for the participants to take appropriate measures.

Obviously, these recommendations are only guidelines for the attendees to check according to their own specific situations. Often, health considerations will depend on a number of factors, such as a traveler’s nationality, where the traveler has been recently, where the traveler intends to go within the destination country, the length of the stay, and even the mode of transportation into the destination country.

4. Logistic Risks and Contingencies

Physical safety and security threats at the location must be evaluated. It should be understood that the attendees come from all over the world. Any specific threats must be addressed in advance (hiring guards, etc.).

Appropriate warnings (e.g., about local crime risks) must be given.

An emergency response plan and risk analysis must be in place throughout the meeting, covering issues such as food intoxication, medical problems, theft, and indications when something is stolen.

A red-colored paper should be included in each participant’s registration envelope, with details about the evacuation plan. It
should also include a clear statement regarding the situation in case of cancellation (for instance, attendee costs versus committed costs with the host/hotel, retention of meeting fees).

An evaluation of war and terrorism risks and countermeasures is also required. The location should have no exceptional security considerations on this regard.

Appropriate insurance should be investigated for IETF meetings.

Adequate contingency plans should be available for those risks.

5. Technical Requirements and Contingencies

IETF meetings have strict requirements concerning to the network that need to be evaluated altogether which the criteria described in this document.

Similarly, there are other important technical details which should also be considered.

A venue can perfectly match all the criteria described in this document and however be inadequate for deploying the required network (wired, wireless) and to match other required technical details.

The failure to comply with the technical requirements and have adequate network/technical contingency plans, is obviously a very important handicap to accept a venue as a good candidate.

For simplicity and in order to make easy the understanding of non-technical and technical/network aspects, the later ones are described in a separate document "IETF Meeting Network and Other Technical Requirements" [2].

6. Timing and Planning

IETF meeting dates should be planned sufficiently in advance, looking to the calendars of related meetings (in terms of people attending them), in order to avoid having meetings clash.

The IETF is a meeting of a considerable size, which often makes it difficult to find a reasonable venue in a short time. The general recommendation is that any candidate venue should be explored and surveyed with a leading time not less than 24 months’ time ahead of the expected meeting dates. Similarly, the final decision for the selected venue should be made no later than 18 months in advance of
the meeting’s starting date.

Note that network setup and testing often require around one week in order to ensure an appropriate and quality deployment.

In order to provide the best conditions for meals, the meeting schedule should be adjusted appropriately according to local habits.

7. Venue Acceptance/Rejection Report

Despite the information provided by the proponent of a given venue (and before making a final decision about its acceptance or rejection), the IAD should make an on-site survey for venues that seem to pass the criteria defined in this document.

The on-site survey report will compare the selection criteria against the proposal information and the actual on-site findings, describing possible discrepancies or issues that may need further consideration (even if this document doesn’t include them as part of the criteria set).

A "site report" for the selected site is important for future planning. A report is also important for "failed" sites, possibly describing them in an anonymous way such as "X, Y, and Z were also considered but had to be postponed or abandoned due to lack of available space, sponsor agreement, technical considerations, local conditions, etc."

8. Process and Openness

In order to demonstrate compliance with the IETF meeting venue selection criteria, the main information related to a site proposal will be made publicly available on the IETF web site, excluding some or all of the negotiation’s confidential issues that could be subjected to the sponsor or host’s decision.

A summary of the information has to be made public regardless of whether the site is finally selected. If agreed to by the proponent, this summary could be highly detailed, including all the options being considered (such as a given city and several venues in the same city). Alternatively, it can be made available without citing the city, but instead making clear the reasons why it has not been selected, in order to help future proponents foresee similar issues.

This will not only help the openness of the process but also as collective knowledge help a better organization and solution of
issues for future meetings.

In principle, details should not be hidden from the community regarding the proponent and site options, and this should be the overall rule for the publication of the details. However, once a venue is selected, there may be contractual bindings that may not allow all the negotiation details to be disclosed. Obviously, this withholding will be restricted to a minimum.

The published information will describe what the proponent offered and report the on-site survey, which should be done by the IAD before the final acceptance or rejection of a proposed venue.

9. Security Considerations

This document does not have any protocol-related security considerations.

10. IANA Considerations

This document does not have any specific IANA considerations.

11. Acknowledgements


12. References

12.1. Normative References

12.2. Informative References

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