



The Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF)

Case for Support

In just a few decades, the Internet has grown from a tiny academic experiment to a global network relied on by billions of people every day. The Internet has succeeded because of one visionary decision by the people who invented it—they made the foundational technical specifications (RFCs) freely available for anyone to read. Using those specifications, a pioneering generation of engineers and entrepreneurs created the Internet of today.

Those people and that ethos became the Internet Engineering Task Force, the IETF, and today, 7000 active participants from more than 60 countries continue to produce hundreds of new specifications per year, still freely available. Much of the Internet, from email and domain names to video conferencing and secure messaging, is built—and continues to be built—on IETF specifications.

“The Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) is where core Internet standards are developed. Founded in 1986, its roots go much deeper to 1979 as the nascent Internet was taking shape. I was there. ... IETF participants work tirelessly to improve the safety, security, and functionality of the Internet through elaboration of existing and new protocols.”

Vinton G. Cerf, co-creator of the Internet Protocol, VP and Chief Internet Evangelist, Google

What makes the IETF special?

The IETF allows anyone to participate for free, no membership required. No company or individual can buy any control of the IETF or its work. Decisions are made by participant consensus, not leadership. IETF participants include equipment designers, operational specialists, software engineers, academics, researchers, expert consultants, policy professionals, and more. Specifications are developed in a rigorous process where every aspect is challenged and tested until all requirements are addressed and then full community consensus established.

IETF specifications are robust, truly independent, and work reliably at Internet scale. They have been proven time and again to be immediately usable to build new products and introduce new features that are commercially successful. IETF specifications drive the growth of the global Internet-connected economy.

Why is the IETF vital to a free and open Internet?

The Internet was designed to be free and open—a design ethos that remains core to the IETF to this day.

A decade ago the IETF recognized that Internet protocols were not secure enough, leading to widespread, pervasive monitoring of end users. It set out to review and fix all of its protocols in order to prevent further breaches of end user security and privacy. Today this focus on end user privacy and security is at the core of the IETF, and any attempt to introduce a new specification that weakens it is fiercely resisted. Other standards bodies, particularly those controlled by governments or commercial interests, have very different priorities.

The IETF is open to all individuals and all companies, whatever their home country, on an equal basis. This ensures that the IETF is a neutral venue where participants work on a single open Internet, despite international political tensions pushing towards fragmentation and closed networks.

What happens to the Internet without the IETF?

Without the IETF, control of Internet specifications will cede to governments and companies, putting political and commercial interests above all else, and the robust bottom-up process of the IETF will be replaced by voting for specifications based on those interests. This will quickly erode the security and privacy of end users, see the Internet split into islands, and see the Internet become increasingly unreliable as politically chosen specifications are broken by the realities of Internet scale.

“The IETF is unique because no one can buy influence—no one can buy board seats or technical outcomes. The IETF makes its decisions on the basis of technical merit. If you had to try to build the IETF anew today, with this same model, you wouldn't be able to do it. There are too many commercial and political interests that depend on the Internet for that to be possible. And that's why supporting this special model of the IETF as a neutral venue remains so important.”

Alissa Cooper, Vice President of Engineering and Fellow, Cisco Systems

Who are the financial supporters of the IETF?

Whole industries have been built with IETF specifications at their core, and some far-sighted companies recognize this by supporting the IETF:

- Internet equipment and services: Cisco, Ericsson, Huawei, Juniper
- Internet operators: Comcast, Hurricane Electric, Nokia
- Internet services: Akamai, Cloudflare, Oracle
- Domain names: ICANN, Identity Digital, Verisign
- IP addresses: Afnic, ARIN, LACNIC, RIPE NCC
- Media: NBC Universal, Netflix
- Social Media: Google, Meta

In a world where every corporation relies on the Internet both for internal administration and connecting with customers, every corporation has a stake in the IETF.

The IETF also receives excellent support from civil society organizations and individual donors who want to protect the ethos of the IETF: open participation, independence from commercial or political control, freely available standards and a strong focus on end user security and privacy.

Financial support is provided as operating grants, meeting sponsorships, endowment gifts, legacy bequests, and equipment and services donations.

“The IETF is tackling real-world issues at a global scale, and the standards it develops are critical to innovation. For business models reliant on an open, ever-evolving Internet, the IETF is an invaluable resource of experts unlike any other. Ericsson is proud to support the work of the IETF to ensure both the future of the IETF and the Internet as one of our most valuable technical resources.”

Gonzalo Camarillo, Head of Data, IT Standardization, Ericsson

Why does the IETF need your support?

By supporting the IETF today, you are ensuring a free and open Internet exists tomorrow.

Your support will directly help the IETF continue its work. It will provide the platform IETF participants around the world need to convene and collaborate. It will help ensure a strong, financially stable IETF of the future, working truly independently and not reliant on any single funding source.

Your support of the IETF will also directly benefit your company and industry. You are protecting your internal business infrastructure, your ability to innovate, and your use of an open Internet for connecting with customers and building partnerships.

Finally, your support will help the global community. With a gift to the IETF, you are mitigating threats to an open and interconnected world, and ensuring that the benefits of an open Internet are available to the next generation of Internet users and entrepreneurs everywhere.

The success of the Internet and those who use it rely on technologies developed in the IETF. Support the IETF today and be a part of the Internet's future success.

To learn more or to make a gift, please contact:

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