

Nominet Working Group Guidelines and Procedures

Author

Ben Laurie <ben@algroup.co.uk>
Jay Daley <jay@nominet.org.uk>
Alex Bligh <alex@nominet.org.uk>

1. Introduction

The Policy Advisory Board (PAB) has responsibility for making recommendations on policy matters for the Nominet Council of Management (CoM). Sometimes the PAB would like to solicit wider input from stakeholders. One mechanism by which this can be achieved is through the formation of Policy Working Groups (WGs). This document describes the guidelines and procedures for formation and operation of Nominet policy working groups. It does not cover operational working groups as they are different entities.

This document draws heavily on the IETF document, RFC 2418 "IETF Working Group Guidelines and Procedures".

2. Working group formation

Anyone interested in creating a Nominet working group MUST obtain the advice and consent of the PAB and MUST proceed through the formal steps detailed in this section.

Some of the work of managing the formation of working groups is via the Working Group Sub-Committee (WGSC) of the PAB, which is described fully below.

Working groups are typically created to address a specific problem or to produce one or more specific deliverables (a guideline, standards specification, etc.). Working groups are generally expected to be short-lived in nature. Upon completion of its goals and achievement of its objectives, the working group is terminated. Alternatively, with the concurrence of the PAB, the WG Chair, and the WG participants, the objectives or assignment of the working group may be extended by modifying the working group's charter through a rechartering process.

2.1. Criteria for formation

When determining whether it is appropriate to create a working group, the PAB will consider several issues:

- Are the issues that the working group plans to address clear and relevant to the stakeholder community?
- Are the goals specific and reasonably achievable, and achievable within a reasonable time frame?
- Is there sufficient interest within the stakeholder community in the working group's topic with enough people willing to expend the effort to produce the desired result?
- Is there enough expertise within the stakeholder community in the working group's topic, and are those people interested in contributing in the working group?
- Do the working group's goals overlap with known work in another body, and if so is adequate liaison in place?

Considering the above criteria, the PAB, using their best judgement, will decide whether to pursue the formation of the group through the chartering process.

2.2. Charter

The formation of a working group requires a charter which is primarily negotiated between a prospective working group Chair and the PAB via the WGSC. Final approval is made by the PAB, though interim approval may be given by the WGSC. Prospective charters for working groups whose chairs seek their approval MUST be presented to the PAB as a PAB paper. A charter is a contract between a working group and the PAB to perform a set of tasks. A charter:

1. Lists relevant administrative information for the working group;
2. Specifies the direction or objectives of the working group and describes the approach that will be taken to achieve the goals;
3. Enumerates a set of milestones together with time frames for their completion.

When the prospective Chair(s) and the PAB are satisfied with the charter form and content, it becomes the basis for forming a working group.

Charters may be renegotiated periodically to reflect the current status, organization or goals of the working group.

Specifically, each charter consists of the following sections:

Working group name

A working group name should be reasonably descriptive or identifiable.

Chair(s)

The working group may have one or more Chairs to perform the administrative functions of the group. The email address(es) of the Chair(s) shall be included. Generally, a working group is limited to two chairs.

Mailing list

A Nominet working group MUST have a general Internet mailing list, with an on-line archive of messages. This will be provided by the PAB secretariat. Most of the work of a Nominet working group will be conducted on the mailing list.

Description of working group

The focus and intent of the group shall be set forth briefly. By reading this section alone, an individual should be able to decide whether this group is relevant to their own work. This section should give a brief summary of the problem area, basis, goal(s) and approach(es) planned for the working group.

Goals and milestones

The working group charter MUST establish a timetable for specific work items. While this may be renegotiated over time, the list of milestones and dates facilitates the tracking of working group progress and status, and it is indispensable to potential participants identifying the critical moments for input. Milestones shall consist of deliverables that can be qualified as showing specific achievement. It is helpful to specify milestones for every 3-6 months, so that progress can be gauged easily. This milestone list is expected to be updated periodically.

2.3. Charter review & approval

Proposed working groups often comprise competent participants who are not familiar with the history of Nominet or PAB processes. This can, unfortunately, lead to good working group consensus about a bad policy. To facilitate working group efforts, the PAB MAY recommend to the CoM the

assignment of additional support from Nominet. At the discretion of the PAB, approval of a new WG may be withheld in the absence of sufficient resources.

Proposals to create a working group SHOULD be submitted to the WGSC in advance of their submission to be PAB, and submission of the proposal to the PAB SHOULD be deferred until the WGSC has produced an opinion.

Proposals to create a working group, together with a charter, MUST be submitted to the PAB as a PAB paper in accordance with the normal PAB procedures. As PAB papers are published prior to a PAB meeting, this provides a public review period of at least a week. At the following PAB meeting the PAB MAY approve the charter as-is, it MAY request that changes be made in the charter (and approve it with those changes), or MAY decline to approve chartering of the working group. In making its decision, the PAB MUST have regard to the opinion of the WGSC.

The WGSC MAY give interim approval to the creation (but not the rechartering) of a Working Group in situations where it feels that

1. The activities of a Working Group would be seriously delayed by waiting for full PAB approval (and in any case by more than 3 weeks);
2. The PAB is unlikely to come to a different opinion on approval from the WGSC and;
3. The working group chair submits the same documents to the WGSC as he/she would have been required to submit to the PAB.

Any WGSC member MAY veto the interim approval of a Working Group. In the absence of any such veto, the WGSC MAY give interim approval no sooner than 10 working days after the submission of the proposal. Interim approval shall only be effective until the next full meeting of the PAB, where it shall lapse. If the WGSC gives interim approval, the same papers as submitted to the WGSC shall be deemed to have been submitted to the next PAB meeting. Working Groups with interim approval (as opposed to full approval) MUST NOT submit documents for approval by the PAB.

Once the PAB has reviewed the working group charter, the proposed charter is posted to the Nominet-announce mailing list as a public notice that the formation of the working group is being considered. After a review period lasting at least a week the PAB MAY approve the charter as-is, it MAY request that changes be made in the charter, or MAY decline to approve chartering of the working group.

If the PAB approves the formation of the working group it remands the approved charter to the PAB Secretariat who records and enters the information into the Nominet tracking database. The working group is announced to the Nominet-announce by the PAB Secretariat. The announcement MUST state whether the approval was full, or interim approval.

2.4. Birds of a Feather (BOF)

Often it is not clear whether an issue merits the formation of a working group. To facilitate exploration of the issues the PAB may commission a Birds of a Feather (BOF) session. A BOF is a session at a Nominet meeting which permits "market research" and technical "brainstorming".

A BOF description and agenda and nominated chair are required before a BOF can be scheduled. The Chair of the BOF is responsible for providing a report on the outcome of the BOF.

In general, a BOF on a particular topic is held only once (ONE slot at one Nominet meeting). Under unusual circumstances the PAB may, at their discretion, allow a BOF to meet for a second time.

Usually the outcome of a BOF will be one of the following:

- There was enough interest and focus in the subject to warrant the formation of a WG;
- While there was a reasonable level of interest expressed in the BOF some other criteria for working group formation was not met.
- The discussion came to a fruitful conclusion, with results to be written down and published, however there is no need to establish a WG;
- There was not enough interest in the subject to warrant the formation of a WG.

2.5. The Working Group Subcommittee (WGSC)

The WGSC is a standing subcommittee of the PAB which has an advisory role in the administration of working groups. As the PAB only meets every two months, the WGSC gives chairs of potential working groups an informal way to negotiate and liaise with the PAB without waiting for a PAB meeting. The WGSC makes no formal decisions, and every decision consists of a recommendation which has no effect unless and until approved by the PAB. The WGSC operates predominantly by email and teleconference. The WGSC consists of such PAB members who wish to join it, and is supported by the PAB secretariat.

All formal decisions that the PAB is required to take with regards to working groups SHOULD be put before the WGSC first, in order that they can make a recommendation which can be published as a PAB paper alongside the PAB paper containing the main item for approval.

The WGSC has no role with respect to the decisions of working groups.

3. Working Group Operation

The PAB has basic requirements for open and fair participation and for thorough consideration of alternatives. Within those constraints, working groups are autonomous and each determines most of the details of its own operation.

Working groups will operate through mailing lists as this allows for a much wider representation than in-person meetings. Consideration will be given later to the provision of in-person meetings but these will not be for decision making but purely for the WG to report on progress.

Working groups make decisions through a "rough consensus" process. Nominal consensus does not require that all participants agree although this is, of course, preferred. In general, the dominant view of the working group shall prevail. (However, it must be noted that "dominance" is not to be determined on the basis of volume or persistence, but rather a more general sense of agreement.) Note that 51% of the working group does not qualify as "rough consensus" and 99% is better than rough. It is up to the Chair of the working group to determine if rough consensus has been reached.

It can be particularly challenging to gauge the level of consensus on a mailing list. There are two different cases where a working group may be trying to understand the level of consensus via a mailing list discussion. But in both cases the volume of messages on a topic is not, by itself, a good indicator of consensus since one or two individuals may be generating much of the traffic.

The challenge to managing working group sessions is to balance the need for open and fair consideration of the issues against the need to make forward progress. The working group, as a whole, has the final responsibility for

striking this balance. The Chair has the responsibility for overseeing the process but may delegate direct process management to a formally-designated Facilitator.

3.1. Contention and appeals

Disputes are possible at various stages during the Nominet WG process. As much as possible the process is designed so that compromises can be made, and genuine consensus achieved; however, there are times when even the most reasonable and knowledgeable people are unable to agree. To achieve the goals of openness and fairness, such conflicts must be resolved by a process of open review and discussion.

Reviews will be conducted by the PAB on written request, as time permits.

4. Working Group Termination

Working groups are typically chartered to accomplish a specific task or tasks. After the tasks are complete, the group will be disbanded.

If, at some point, it becomes evident that a working group is unable to complete the work outlined in the charter, or if the assumptions which that work was based have been modified in discussion or by experience, the PAB, in consultation with the working group can either:

1. Recharter to refocus its tasks;
2. Choose new Chair(s);
3. Disband.

5. Rechartering a Working Group

Updated milestones are renegotiated with the PAB via the WGSC and then are submitted to the PAB Secretariat.

Rechartering (other than revising milestones) a working group follows the same procedures that the initial chartering does. The revised charter SHOULD first be sent to the WGSC for an opinion and then MUST be submitted to the PAB for approval. As with the initial chartering, the PAB may approve new charter as-is, it may request that changes be made in the new charter (including having the Working Group continue to use the old charter), or it may decline to approve the rechartered working group. In the latter case, the working group is disbanded.

6. Staff Roles

6.1. WG Chair

The Working Group Chair is concerned with making forward progress through a fair and open process, and has wide discretion in the conduct of WG business. The Chair must ensure that a number of tasks are performed, either directly or by others assigned to the tasks.

The Chair has the responsibility and the authority to make decisions, on behalf of the working group, regarding all matters of working group process. The PAB has the authority and the responsibility to assist in making those decisions at the request of the Chair or when circumstances warrant such an intervention.

The Chair's responsibility encompasses at least the following:

Ensure WG process and content management

The Chair has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that a working group achieves forward progress and meets its milestones. The Chair is also responsible to ensure that the working group operates in an open and fair manner.

Moderate the WG email list

The Chair should attempt to ensure that the discussions on this list are relevant and that they converge to consensus agreements. The Chair should make sure that discussions on the list are summarized and that the outcome is well documented (to avoid repetition).

Communicate results of sessions

The Chair and/or Secretary must ensure that minutes of a session are taken and that an attendance list is circulated. The WG chair MUST provide each PAB meeting with a short report (this can be as short as one paragraph) on progress so far.

Distribute the workload

Of course, each WG will have participants who may not be able (or want) to do any work at all. Most of the time the bulk of the work is done by a few dedicated participants. It is the task of the Chair to motivate enough experts to allow for a fair distribution of the workload.

Document development

Working groups produce documents and documents need authors. The Chair must make sure that authors of WG documents incorporate changes as agreed to by the WG.

6.2. Document Editor

Most Nominet working groups focus their efforts on a document, or set of documents, that capture the results of the group's work. A working group generally designates a person or persons to serve as the Editor for a particular document. The Document Editor is responsible for ensuring that the contents of the document accurately reflect the decisions that have been made by the working group.

As a general practice, the Working Group Chair and Document Editor positions are filled by different individuals to help ensure that the resulting documents accurately reflect the consensus of the working group and that all processes are followed.

6.3. Design teams

It is often useful, and perhaps inevitable, for a sub-group of a working group to develop a proposal to solve a particular problem. Such a sub-group is called a design team. The output of a design team is always subject to approval, rejection or modification by the WG as a whole.

7. Working Group Documents

7.1. PAB-Drafts

The PAB-Drafts directory is provided to working groups as a resource for posting and disseminating in-process copies of working group documents. This repository is replicated at various locations around the Internet. It is

encouraged that draft documents be posted as soon as they become reasonably stable.

It is stressed here that PAB-Drafts are working documents and have no official standards status whatsoever. They may, eventually, turn into an official PAB document or they may sink from sight.

7.2. Submission of documents

Once a WG has determined at least rough consensus exists within the WG for the advancement of a document the following MUST be done:

- The version of the relevant document exactly as agreed to by the WG MUST be in the PAB-Drafts directory.
- The WG Chair MUST send email to the PAB. A copy of the request MUST be also sent to the PAB Secretariat. The mail MUST contain the reference to the document's ID filename, and the action requested. The copy of the message to the PAB Secretariat is to ensure that the request gets recorded by the Secretariat so that they can monitor the progress of the document through the process.

Working groups without full approval (i.e. with only interim approval) MUST NOT submit documents to the PAB.

The email, and the document to which it refers form a PAB paper; thus the document MUST be submitted and the email sent in accordance with the normal procedures for the submission of PAB papers. The PAB secretariat will arrange that it is thus posted on the PAB agenda and is available for public review.

8. Review of documents

The PAB MUST review all documents submitted for publication.

The PAB review will lead to one of these possible conclusions:

1. The document is accepted as-is for the status requested.
2. The document is accepted as-is but not for the status requested.
3. Changes regarding content are suggested to the author(s)/WG.
4. Changes are suggested by the PAB and a change in status is recommended.
5. The document is rejected. Although the working group process is structured such that this alternative is not likely to arise for documents coming from a working group, the PAB has the right and responsibility to reject documents that the PAB feels are fatally flawed in some way.

The available statuses are

Final recommendation

Final Recommendations represent a recommendation by the PAB to the CoM.

Interim recommendation

Interim Recommendations represent an indication of the current thinking of the PAB, but do not constitute a formal recommendation.

For information only

This is used where the WG wishes to communicate a more detailed report on progress to the PAB but is not in a position to make any recommendations.

The PAB secretariat shall be responsible for communicating interim and final recommendations to the CoM.

9. Acknowledgments

This document relies heavily on RFC 2418 which was edited by Scott Bradner.

Full Copyright Statement

Copyright (C) The Internet Society (1998). All Rights Reserved. Copyright (C) Nominet UK (2003).

This document and translations of it may be copied and furnished to others, and derivative works that comment on or otherwise explain it or assist in its implementation may be prepared, copied, published and distributed, in whole or in part, without restriction of any kind, provided that the above copyright notice and this paragraph are included on all such copies and derivative works. However, this document itself may not be modified in any way, such as by removing the copyright notice or references to the Internet Society or other Internet organizations, except as needed for the purpose of developing Internet standards in which case the procedures for copyrights defined in the Internet Standards process must be followed, or as required to translate it into languages other than English.

The limited permissions granted above are perpetual and will not be revoked by the Internet Society or its successors or assigns.

This document and the information contained herein is provided on an "AS IS" basis and THE INTERNET SOCIETY AND THE INTERNET ENGINEERING TASK FORCE DISCLAIMS ALL WARRANTIES, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO ANY WARRANTY THAT THE USE OF THE INFORMATION HEREIN WILL NOT INFRINGE ANY RIGHTS OR ANY IMPLIED WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE.