

How to say “no”

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Saying no

- Sometimes IETF leadership needs to decline a request or demand, to stop an action in progress, or pre-exempt an action that is likely.
- Must be done :
 - Politely
 - Professionally
 - Respectfully
 - Ethically
 - Clearly
 - ONLY when it is in the best interests of the IETF


No

¹no  *adverb* \ˈnō\
—used to give a negative answer or reply to a question, request, or offer

—used to give a negative answer or reply to a question, request, or offer

: in a way that shows a negative response


—used to introduce a statement that corrects an earlier statement

³no  *noun* \ˈnō\
: a negative answer : an answer of no

: a negative answer : an answer of no

: a vote of no

: people who are voting no

plural **noes** or **nos** 

Full Definition of NO

1 : an act or instance of refusing or denying by the use of the word *no* : **DENIAL** <received a firm *no* in reply>

2 a : a negative vote or decision

b plural : persons voting in the negative

“No” Comes In Different Flavors

- Culturally it may be awkward, hard or just not polite to say “no”...so other phrases are used:
 - Maybe
 - Yes / Yes, but..
 - Do whatever you want.
 - It is difficult..
 - Thank You
 - I’ll think about it / We’ll be in touch / I’ll Call You
 - In a minute
 - [Responds with alternatives.]

English as Lingua Franca

- English is accepted as the lingua franca of technology...including the IETF, of course.
 - May pose issues of intercultural communication that are really discourse-related, and not strictly grammar-related.
 - We need to consider communication in light of the styles of different cultures.
 - Even among English speaking countries the expressions used might have different meaning.

Remember

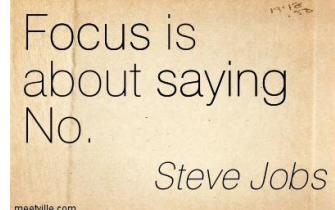
- Explain why you are saying no.
- Explain how your concerns may be addressed or mitigated, or provide an alternative if one does exist.
- Balance the needs of the individual with the needs of the organization/WG
- We are a multi-cultural, volunteer organization
- You need to listen to the feedback and if necessary explain the appeal process

Context

- We say no in a context
- We say no differently in different contexts
- So – let's look at some common scenarios within the job of a WG Chair.

...it is the function of the Working Group Chair(s) to manage the group process, keeping in mind that the overall purpose of the group is to make progress towards reaching rough consensus in realizing the working group's goals and objectives.

RFC2418 - IETF Working Group Guidelines and Procedures



Focus is
about saying
No.

Steve Jobs

meetville.com

Why say no – meeting time?

- When the WG has higher priority tasks
- When the time request adds nothing to the WG
 - Repeat request – nothing changed
 - No issue to discuss
 - “Presenting” not resolving
- Consensus is not to work on the topic
- Out of scope for WG
- Standards shopping

Why say no – I-D adoption

- The I-D conflicts with IETF policy
- The I-D is out of charter
- The I-D is clearly in scope or a better match for the scope of another WG
- The I-D conflicts with a current WG consensus position
- Time is not right – work sequencing
- There is no consensus to adopt
- There is no likelihood of critical mass to complete the work
- The I-D has fatal technical flaws

Why not to say no – I-D adoption

- Minor technical flaws
- Language improvements needed
- Remember – adoption means that the WG is working on the topic, and this I-D is a good starting point

Why say no – Authors

- The chairs choose the Editors/Authors of WG I-Ds
- Chairs need to pick the document author team best suited to the task –
 - Adequately competent
 - Fair/Open-minded/Good listeners
 - Able to step away from the detail of the argument
 - Good leaders
 - Accepted by the WG as best for the task.
 - Finishers
- It may be necessary to say no to other authors, including the authors of the individual draft.

Why say no – I-D Completion

- When it is incomplete!
- When it has unaddressed technical flaws
- When WG consensus says not to move forward
- When the draft is poorly written and/or otherwise lacks clarity
- When the requirements to go forward have not been met
- When experience tells you it will fail next stage review

Resources

- You are not alone you have
 - Charter
 - Mailing List
 - Your co-chair
 - Secretary
 - Your review team
 - Other chairs
 - Area directorate
 - Experienced members of the IETF
 - Your ADs
 - Other ADs
- Note that this may need to be an in-confidence discussion.

Remember

- Saying no can be difficult and uncomfortable
- You have to say no if that really is in the best interests of the IETF
- Always be fair, respectful and clear when you say no
- Help is at hand if you need it