

Summarized Feedback on the ISOC Chapter Affiliation and Support Programme

Introduction

This document describes both the background to the Chapter Affiliation and Support Programme (CASP) and the feedback received on the programme. The CASP programme includes the Letter of Affiliation (LoA), the Chapter Guide and the Chapter Dashboard. This document provides a historical snapshot as well as summarized feedback on the comments received.

A note of thanks

Sincere thanks to all those who provided feedback by participating in the webinars or providing detailed written comments. In particular we would like to thank Norbert Klein, Klaus Birkenbihl, Veni Markovski, Christopher Wilkinson, Christian de Larrinaga, John More, Ed Tric, Elena Zvarici, Olivier MJ Crepin-Leblond, Victor Ndonnang and Lajos Balint for their contributions. We would also like to thank all those on the original Task Force and participants of the Sphere Project.

Background

The genesis of the “Letter of Affiliation” (LoA) dates back to the ISOC Board of Trustees meetings in March 2007 where the BoT discussed the nature of unclear policies and expectations regarding ISOC Chapters. Staff were requested by the Board (and also by Chapters themselves) to work on clarifying and revising the policies for Chapters. Subsequently, “Chapter Policies and Procedures” featured as part of the [‘The Chapter Development Plan’](#).

In response, in 2008 the “[Sphere](#)” project was launched which sought to address a number of issues and frustrations among the Chapter community through a collaborative peer-to-peer approach. The project featured a survey of Chapter leaders to identify the issues, which later formed into 4 groups: “Sphere-labels” became the group that looked at the policy framework for Chapters.

The LoA describes the minimum performance standards necessary to be considered an active Chapter and to define a set of minimum performance standards for ISOC headquarters. It is based on a commitment to a shared vision, with a clear framework for expectations, obligations, roles and responsibilities for everyone. In so doing and with supporting documentation and tools, it is intended to be helpful.

How was the current Letter of Affiliation developed?

With extensive Community Consultation

In late 2009 Peter Houstle was contracted to help with the policy revision in a project titled “Chapter of the Future”. The project began with chapter community consultations with the topics below in four consultations. All of the results were [archived](#):

- “What does success look like?”
- “To what extent do you think the vision, mission and programmes of your Chapter is aligned with ISOC Global?”
- “What are the Basic Operating Principles necessary to ensure we advance the work of the Internet Society in a demonstrable way?”
- “What services should ISOC Global provide to ensure the success of the chapters? What should ISOC Global expect of the chapters in return for those services?”

A volunteer Taskforce was assembled consisting of the following persons

Ed Tric, (ISOC Romania Chapter), David Solomonoff (ISOC New York Chapter), Anupam Agrawal (ISOC India, Kolkata Chapter), Khaled Khoubaa (ISOC Tunisia Chapter), ISOC Board of Trustees, Leslie Daigle (ISOC Staff), Jon McNerney (ISOC Staff), Anne Lord (ISOC Staff).

The “Taskforce” participated in several homework assignments and conference calls as follows: (all were archived) and are available at: <http://wiki.chapters.isoc.org/tiki-index.php?page=Titles+Labels+Images&bl=y>.

In April 2010, a two-day face-to-face meeting was held in Reston, VA to discuss and agree the basic framework for the Affiliation Agreement. The [first version of the agreement](#) was published for feedback and a [second version](#) was translated into French and Spanish and was circulated for feedback deadline October 2010.

The entire process of community consultation can be reviewed [here](#).

There was a gap of approximately one year between the end of the feedback on the 2nd version and the version published in early 2012. However in that time the ‘performance standards’ contained in the LoA were introduced and discussed at regional Chapter workshops (5) as well as at face-to-face Chapter meetings and feedback was also gathered at these events.

Why the long gap?

The feedback at the time was for the most part very positive. However there was substantial feedback at the time indicating that it was not clear what ISOC was trying to accomplish with the LoA and that more contextual information and supporting tools would be useful.

During this one-year period, work focused on developing the tools to help Chapters easily and objectively measure against the performance indicators ([Chapter Dashboard](#)) and on developing comprehensive supporting and guiding information (the [Chapter Guide](#)). This was done in response to the community feedback on the LoA. Through the feedback, it also became clear that a Dashboard for ISOC

Headquarters was also necessary. This is now collectively known as the “**Chapter Affiliation and Support Programme**”.

Where are we now - 2012 webinars?

We chose initially to gather feedback from a smaller group of chapter leaders to provide a “focus” group style review. Personal invitations to review the LoA were sent out. The goal of the personal outreach was to gather more feedback from a wide variety of Chapter representatives who do not normally engage in the larger more public feedback sessions or debate. The webinars were then conducted regionally so as to provide opportunities to comment that better suited the regions time-zones.

Care was taken to include a review and description of the supporting tools: the Chapter Dashboard, the Chapter Guide and to provide the history of “How we got here”.

Documents

February 2012 - Draft Letter of Affiliation - version

https://fileshare.tools.isoc.org/groups/membership/public/LoA_DRAFT_Watermark.pdf

February 2012 - Slides for the webinar:

<https://fileshare.tools.isoc.org/groups/membership/public/Webinar-chapter-affiliation.pdf>

Feedback statistics

- A total of 6 webinars were conducted from 8th February until 1st March 2012, with a combined total of 26 attendees at the webinar and provided feedback
- Over 40 postings were made on the Chapter Delegates mailing list by approximately 12 individuals
- Feedback on the ‘performance standards’ was also received via the regional Chapter workshops and face-to-face meetings in 2011.

The Feedback Summarised by Topic

During the process of developing the LoA since 2009, there has been widespread support for the concept of an LoA. It is seen as necessary to establish a well-understood operational framework for both Chapters and HQ that support the needs of the Internet Society into the future

“The Affiliation Agreement is an extremely important document. Its goals are laudable -- to strengthen the Internet Society and the Chapters by creating accountability” and “I think the main idea of the LoA was that it has to be a more or less win-win situation. We all do want the task force work to succeed”.

This summary is not a repeat of every comment made. It provides a high level view of the re-occurring themes cited by Chapter officers to help the Internet Society with the next version of the LoA. The summary is provided below.

Governance

It was felt that the LoA should be “balanced” both across the organization and in terms of content:

- Symmetry required between other membership groups within ISOC with equal framework required. Eg. Organizational members.
- The agreement should be balanced. Some felt it was not balanced in terms of obligations and benefit

Performance indicators

It was felt that more clarity is needed around the role of membership and their role in ISOC before Chapters can understand their relationship with HQ as well as the need for longer time frames where global policy initiatives are concerned:

Membership

- Clarity is needed on the intended status of members of ISOC. This is absolutely crucial to how chapters need to respond. I think this is a matter for the Trustees and if Staff are engaged on an urgent quest for Affiliation / Franchise style agreements that makes it urgent for the Trustees to grasp these questions too.

Activities and reporting

- ISOC HQ should inform in advance its chapters about global policy initiatives or contributions, like the recent ones around SOPA, PIPA, ACTA. These initiatives arrive too late for the market and the chapters are not involved in drafting these contributions.

Form

Concern was expressed that a legal agreement would be difficult to implement:

- An 'exchange of letters' similar to the ICANN ccTLD process is more balanced
- A much lighter LoA is suggested – a declaration of mutual working in accordance with common principles with respect to the mission and objectives of ISOC
- A shorter MoU is suggested with an agreement on principles of ISOC

Legal

A number of Chapter leaders expressed concern around specific legal aspects :

- Dispute resolution clauses and clauses defining who administers the process
- “Introduction” maintains that ISOC and our Chapters are separate entities.
- Legal basis for request to change their names in the event of cessation of chapter
- “Responsibilities of the Parties” There is one party not two: the Internet Society.

- Concerns about who can sign the LoA document and potential conflict with local laws under which Chapters are incorporated and serving “foreign interests”.

General comments (not on LoA specifically)

Financial Support for ISOC Chapters

- Funding is needed for Chapter administration, especially local lawyer support
- It should be a requirement that the Chapter raise some money (even a nominal amount). Charity is not a good model. No financial contribution, no ownership -- a primary principal of organizing.
- Chapters can be fundraisers - We sometimes tend to see chapters only as a money spenders, neglecting the fact that they can be excellent local fund raisers for HQ

ISOC Governance and Organisation

- More even distribution of finances is needed: a reasonable share of the PIR money directly and permanently to the Chapters for their management, administration and Internet presence.
- Board composition within ISOC is unbalanced between membership groups
- If LOA is not balanced, a wise decision would be to create a new task force with the specific purpose of modernizing (democratising, adapting) ISOC as a global NGO.

SUMMARY and NEXT STEPS

Concluding Summary points on the LoA

- Form of the LoA should be reviewed (MoU, Letters)
- Review the LoA for specific problems with respect to international jurisdictions
- Dispute resolution clauses need to be added
- Review the LoA for “balance” both across the organization and in terms of content

Many suggestions not directly related to the LoA were also made during the process. The most prominent of these relate to funding Chapter expenses on an ongoing basis as well as the relationship between ISOC headquarters and its members

- Bylaws review needs to be concluded to provide clarity on membership
- Specific suggestions for funding should be considered.

Next steps

- Assemble a taskforce consisting of Chapter leaders and ISOC staff
- Invite the taskforce to review the feedback received to the LoA (note that the

timing of this may well be subject to the conclusion of the ISOC Bylaws review).

APPENDIX

Specific editorial suggestions

1. Dispute resolution at the Sierra Club (John More)

"8.4. The Board may, by affirmative vote of at least nine (9) Directors, suspend or annul a chapter if, in the judgment of the Board, such action is in the best interest of the Club. Such action shall not affect the standing of the individual members as members of the Club. The Board shall not suspend or annul a chapter until the following conditions are met: (1) written specification of the ground or grounds upon which the proposed action is to be based shall have been furnished to the members of the chapter involved and to the officers of the Sierra Club Council; (2) a reasonable opportunity shall have been provided for members of the chapter to present evidence in opposition to the proposed action with a full opportunity to be heard thereon; and (3) the advice of the Sierra Club Council on the proposed action shall have been received.

Note that the Council, an advisory body consisting of one representative from each Chapter, has an advisory role before a action can be taken against a Chapter. This is a legal document that should have this sort of due process protection."

2. Bi-lateral exchange of Letters suggested (Christopher Wilkinson)

<https://fileshare.tools.isoc.org/groups/chapters/public/Redraft%20of%20LoA%20as%20Exchange%20of%20letters2.pdf>

3. Edited comments (Veni Markovski)

<https://fileshare.tools.isoc.org/groups/chapters/public/Veni-feedback.pdf>