ITU-T

TELECOMMUNICATION
STANDARDIZATION SECTOR
OF ITU

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SERIES A: ORGANIZATION OF THE WORK OF ITU-T

Focus groups: Working methods and procedures

Recommendation ITU-T A.7

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Summary

This Recommendation describes working methods and procedures of a focus group such as its establishment, terms of reference, leadership, participation, financing, support, deliverables, etc.

FOREWORD

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is the United Nations specialized agency in the field of telecommunications, information and communication technologies (ICTs). The ITU Telecommunication Standardization Sector (ITU-T) is a permanent organ of ITU. ITU-T is responsible for studying technical, operating and tariff questions and issuing Recommendations on them with a view to standardizing telecommunications on a worldwide basis.

The World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly (WTSA), which meets every four years, establishes the topics for study by the ITU-T study groups which, in turn, produce Recommendations on these topics.

The approval of ITU-T Recommendations is covered by the procedure laid down in WTSA Resolution 1.

In some areas of information technology which fall within ITU-T's purview, the necessary standards are prepared on a collaborative basis with ISO and IEC.

NOTE

In this Recommendation, the expression "Administration" is used for conciseness to indicate both a telecommunication administration and a recognized operating agency.

Compliance with this Recommendation is voluntary. However, the Recommendation may contain certain mandatory provisions (to ensure e.g. interoperability or applicability) and compliance with the Recommendation is achieved when all of these mandatory provisions are met. The words "shall" or some other obligatory language such as "must" and the negative equivalents are used to express requirements. The use of such words does not suggest that compliance with the Recommendation is required of any party.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

ITU draws attention to the possibility that the practice or implementation of this Recommendation may involve the use of a claimed Intellectual Property Right. ITU takes no position concerning the evidence, validity or applicability of claimed Intellectual Property Rights, whether asserted by ITU members or others outside of the Recommendation development process.

As of the date of approval of this Recommendation, ITU had not received notice of intellectual property, protected by patents, which may be required to implement this Recommendation. However, implementers are cautioned that this may not represent the latest information and are therefore strongly urged to consult the TSB patent database at http://www.itu.int/ITU-T/ipr/.

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Focus groups: Working methods and procedures

(2000; 2002; 2004; 2006; 2008)

1   Scope

The objective of focus groups is to help advance the work of the ITU Telecommunication Standardization Sector (ITU-T) study groups and to encourage the participation of members of other standards organizations, including experts and individuals who may not be members of ITU.

Procedures and working methods are established to facilitate the financing of focus groups, the completion of work on a well-defined topic and the documentation of the results.

The process of establishment is described in order to help identify, in a timely and collaborative manner, all study groups concerned by the scope of a potential focus group, and to validate a study group or the Telecommunication Standardization Advisory Group (TSAG) as the parent group.

The management of a focus group is placed under the responsibility of a parent group, in association with other involved study groups in the case where the work area of the focus group overlaps with the responsibility and the mandate of those study groups.

2   Establishment, terms of reference and leadership

Within the ITU-T standardization working structure, the initiation of a focus group should be led in a transparent manner.

For each step of the establishment process, the compliance of the focus group proposal with every clause of this Recommendation should be checked, and all decisions are by consensus.

2.1   Establishment

A focus group may be established to help advance the work of ITU-T study groups.

A proposal, including terms of reference, to set up a focus group on a specific topic should be in the form of a written document to a study group or to TSAG and supported by ITU-T members.

Attention should be paid to distinguishing between the following two situations:

a)   Study topic is within the mandate of one study group

When the terms of reference of the focus group fall within the mandate of a single study group, that study group has the necessary authority to approve the formation of a focus group and become its parent study group, provided that the chairman of this study group consults with the chairmen of all possibly impacted study groups. In case of doubt, the decision of such an establishment should be referred to TSAG.

b)   Study topic is within the mandate of multiple study groups

In this case, following a consultation process, TSAG has the necessary authority to approve the formation of the focus group and designate its parent group.

The study group or TSAG, when receiving the written document, should check to see which study group could best address the proposed activity for the focus group. The study group dealing with the proposal for a focus group that contains topics felt as potentially falling under the responsibility and mandate of one or more other study groups remains responsible for the consultation with the other relevant study group chairmen and for informing TSAG and the Director of TSB. The whole procedure for consultation should be kept responsive and fast by using, as often as possible, consultation of relevant parties by e-mail and teleconferencing tools, rather than physical meetings.

In all cases, the Director of TSB and the chairman of TSAG are to be kept duly advised during the procedure.

2.1.1 Establishment by a study group

2.1.1.1 Establishment at a study group meeting

For establishment at a study group meeting, the submission of a proposal for a focus group should take the form of a written document submitted at least ten calendar days before that study group meeting.

In the case that all topics fall without doubt within the work area of this study group, the establishment will be discussed during this meeting, and even decided at the same meeting.

If there is any doubt that all the topics fall under the responsibility and mandate of only this study group, establishment of the focus group, including appropriate consultations of other study groups, should be organized by the chairman between scheduled meetings and by correspondence, to enable a transparent, efficient and timely examination of the proposal.

If views are expressed that the proposed topic overlaps with the mandate of one or more other study groups, the chairman of the study group to which the proposal is addressed will transmit the case to the chairman of TSAG. The chairman of TSAG will then proceed as described in clauses 2.1.2.1 or 2.1.2.2 below.

2.1.1.2 Establishment between study group meetings

Exceptionally, in response to urgent marketplace needs, a focus group for the purpose of studying technical issues (i.e. those that have no regulatory or policy implications) may be established between study group meetings.

The proposal, including terms of reference, to set up a focus group on a specific technical topic (within the mandate of the parent study group) may be transmitted by any member to the chairman of a study group selected by the initiators according to the foreseen work content. The chairman coordinates the first review of the proposal with the vice-chairmen and the chairmen of working parties of the study group. In the case of agreement after this review to establish the focus group, the proposal, completed where required (e.g., actual terms of reference), will be posted on the ITU website and distributed to the study group e-mail distribution list, allowing four weeks for comments.

In the absence of unresolved comments, the study group chairman may decide the immediate establishment of the focus group. As far as possible, the chairman should seek to resolve comments by correspondence; however, if this is not possible, the consideration for approval of the establishment of the focus group is to be deferred to the next meeting of the study group.

If views are expressed that the proposed topic may overlap with the mandate of one or more other study groups, the chairman of the study group to which the proposal is addressed will transmit the case to the chairman of TSAG. The chairman of TSAG will then proceed as described in clauses 2.1.2.1 or 2.1.2.2.

2.1.2 Establishment by TSAG

Initiators of a focus group may choose to submit a proposal to TSAG in the form of a written document, including terms of reference, submitted at least ten calendar days before a scheduled TSAG meeting.

2.1.2.1 Establishment at a TSAG meeting

The TSAG plenary can decide to establish the focus group and designate the parent study group or be its parent group.

This way of proceeding can also be adopted to decide on cases transmitted according to clause 2.1.1.2 above, when the schedule of the TSAG meeting is compatible with a timely response.

2.1.2.2 Establishment between TSAG meetings

Exceptionally, in response to urgent marketplace needs, a focus group for the purpose of studying technical issues (i.e. those that have no regulatory or policy implications) may be proposed between TSAG meetings.

A proposal, including terms of reference, to set up a focus group on a specific technical topic may be submitted by any member to the chairman of TSAG.

The chairman of TSAG will organize a review of the proposal with the vice-chairmen and working party chairmen of TSAG and chairmen of all potentially impacted study groups. Following agreement by this review team to initiate the focus group, the proposal, including its terms of reference and the nomination of the parent group, will be posted on the ITU-T website and distributed to the TSAG e-mail distribution list, allowing four weeks for comments.

In the absence of unresolved comments, the chairman of TSAG may decide the immediate establishment of the focus group. As far as possible, the chairman of TSAG should seek to resolve comments by correspondence; however, if this is not possible, the establishment of the focus group is to be considered for approval by the next meeting of TSAG.

This way of proceeding can also be adopted to decide on cases transmitted according to clause 2.1.1.2 above, when the schedule of the TSAG meetings is not deemed to be compatible with a timely response.

2.2 Terms of reference

The specific topic for a particular focus group is to be well defined (prior to approval), and the terms of reference must include a plan of action, the expected deliverables and the time schedules for completion.

The relationship of this work to that of the parent group must be indicated, in addition to relationships with other ITU study groups, standards organizations, forums and consortia, etc., and the degree of urgency of the specific topic. The justification that the intended activity cannot be handled as efficiently by study groups should be given.

It is intended that a focus group will complete its work in a short period of time, typically 9-12 months, following approval of its formation. In appropriate circumstances, and subject to review and approval by the parent group, the term and scope of a focus group may be extended.

During the activity of the focus group, its terms of reference (including scope) cannot be modified by the focus group itself. Any desired modifications to the terms of reference are to be submitted for consideration and approval by the parent group.

If more than one study group is involved (i.e. the topic falls under the responsibility and mandate of one or more other study groups), a possible modification of the terms of reference (including scope) should be discussed with the other involved study groups before a decision is taken.

Extension of the lifetime requires a decision of the parent group (with no reservations by the other involved study groups in the case where a topic falls under the responsibility and mandate of one or more other study groups). If no decision is reached, the focus group will automatically stop.

2.3   Leadership

A chairman and vice-chairman are initially appointed by the parent group. If needed, after the initial establishment of the focus group, subsequent management appointments will be made by the focus group, and the parent group informed accordingly.

ITU-T members will provide the leadership, but vice-chairmanships can be open to external experts.

3   Participation

Participation is open to any individual from a country that is a member of ITU who wishes to contribute to the work. This includes individuals who are also members of international, regional and national organizations.

Participation in focus groups should not be used as an alternative to ITU membership.

A list of participants is to be maintained for reference purposes.

Participation in focus groups that have impacts on strategic, structural and/or operational aspects of ITU-T is limited to ITU-T members.

4   General financing of focus groups

Each focus group will determine its own method of financing.

Focus groups shall not use ITU-T funds or resources except for the use of Telecommunication Information Exchange Services (TIES) and for those situations where deliverables and progress reports are made available to ITU-T, as in clause 10.

Non-ITU members must pay a fee, determined by TSB, for the use of TIES.

4.1   Financing of meetings

It is suggested that financing of meetings and their preparation be accomplished by volunteer hosting in a similar manner to rapporteur groups, or on the basis of financial arrangements determined by the focus group.

5   Administrative support

Focus groups can establish their own method of providing and financing administrative support between meetings.

Where administrative services are requested from TSB, the costs, except costs for the use of TIES, are to be covered by the focus group concerned.

6 Meeting logistics

The frequency and location of meetings is decided by each focus group. Electronic document handling methods should be used as much as possible to advance the work rapidly, e.g., by using electronic conferences and the World Wide Web.

7 Working language

The language to be used will be mutually agreed by the focus group participants.

8 Technical contributions

Any participant may submit a technical contribution directly to the focus group, in accordance with the time schedule adopted. Electronic document transfer methods should be used whenever possible.

9 Intellectual property rights

The Common Patent Policy for ITU-T/ITU-R/ISO/IEC is to be used.

The chairman of a focus group should recall this during every meeting and record all responses in the meeting report.

The copyright provisions in Recommendation ITU-T A.1 are to be followed.

10 Deliverables

Deliverables can be in the form of technical specifications, reports, etc., and are expected to form input to the work of the parent group. The focus group will send all of its deliverables to the parent group for further consideration.

For the sake of clarity, all the output/deliverables of a focus group should be posted on the parent group's website, whether or not one or more study groups are involved.

10.1 Approval of deliverables

Focus groups can establish their own rules of approval. However, it is expected generally that approval be obtained by consensus in which each focus group participant can express an opinion.

10.2 Printing and distribution of deliverables

Focus groups may select the method of printing and distribution of deliverables, including the target audience. Deliverables to the parent study group, including progress reports, will be processed as temporary documents by the parent group.

Use of the World Wide Web is encouraged.

All costs must be covered by the focus group. ITU-T will not be expected to offer any printing and distribution services free of charge, except for progress reports submitted according to clause 11 below, and deliverables to study groups.

11 Progress reports

Focus group progress reports are to be provided to the parent group meeting, and transmitted in copy to all involved study groups. They will be posted in the form of temporary documents.

These progress reports to the parent group should include the following information:

– an updated work plan, including a schedule of planned meetings;

– status of work with reference to the work plan, including a list of outputs and the study groups for which they are intended;

– summary of contributions considered by the focus group;

– list of attendees at all meetings held since the last progress report.

The parent group chairman should keep TSAG advised of the progress of the focus group.

12 Meeting announcements

The establishment of a focus group will be announced in cooperation with the parent group and TSAG via ITU publications and other means, including communication with other organizations and/or experts, technical journals and the World Wide Web.

The process of announcing subsequent meetings can be decided by the focus group and will be published at least four weeks in advance on the ITU website.

13 Working guidelines

Focus groups may develop additional, internal working guidelines, as required.

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