



The Strategic Operating Plan of The Internet Society

5 August 2005

Part I—Strategy

Our Vision

The Internet Society believes that *the Internet is for everyone.*

From its inception the purpose of the Internet Society has been to promote the open development, evolution, and use of the Internet for the benefit of all people throughout the world.

We envision a future in which *people in all parts of the world can use the Internet to improve their quality of life because standards, technologies, business practices, and government policies sustain an open and universally accessible platform for innovation, creativity, and economic opportunity.*

Complementing this vision of the future is our vision of the Internet Society's role in creating it: *As the hub of a global network of individuals and organizations, the Internet Society is an effective advocate for the core values of an open and accessible Internet.*

The purpose of this Strategic Operating Plan is to define and document our tangible commitment to realizing this vision.

1 Introduction

1.1 Strategic Plan Objectives

The objective of the strategic planning process is to develop and document the fundamental operating model for the Internet Society. The Strategic Operating Plan (SOP) is the framework that connects our vision, our mission and values, our goals and objectives, and our programs and projects. It asserts a specific and consistent value system, and defines a model for deriving our activities from our values.

The Strategic Operating Plan is the framework for board, staff, and community discussion of our mission and purpose; the basis for defining (and regularly reviewing) our programs and projects; the basis for establishing collaborative relationships with other organizations; and the source of inspiration for the public face that we present to the rest of the world. The value of such a plan lies not in *having* it, but in *using* it to run the organization. In principle, most major operational decisions should follow “automatically” from the plan.

A good strategic plan is a call to action, not a scholarly essay. The plan is the “front end” of the process whereby we declare, by what we actually do, what we are; in this sense the annual report is the “back end” assessment of how well aspiration and intention were translated into measurable real-world effects during a particular year.

1.2 Background

The Internet Society was founded in 1992 to promote the evolution and growth of the Internet as a global communications infrastructure, to provide support for the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), and to encourage the responsible and effective use of the Internet through education, discussion, and advice to public policy makers. Many of the improvements that have been realized since then in Internet technology and operation and Internet access and use in developing countries can be attributed to our activities. We enjoy a well-deserved reputation for integrity and service to the public interest, and are recognized as a strong advocate for the core values of an open¹ and accessible Internet.

The Internet and its role in the lives of people around the world have undergone profound changes since ISOC was founded. As we enter a new phase with new expectations and challenges for the Society, it is essential that our goals and objectives be well-defined, and that our actions, and the positions we take on issues that confront the evolving Internet, be grounded in exemplary and well-articulated fundamental principles and governed by a clear, robust, and ambitious strategic operating plan.

¹ In this document, the term “open” refers to activities and processes that are transparent and present no artificial barriers to participation by all parties; it does not extend to other meanings, such as “open source.”

2 Mission and Role

The Internet Society's mission is to achieve our vision of a world in which everyone everywhere is connected to an open and universally accessible Internet:

The mission of the Internet Society is to promote the open development, evolution, and use of the Internet for the benefit of all people throughout the world.

Along with our natural partners—our members and chapters, the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), and the Public Interest Registry (PIR)—the Internet Society is embedded within a fabric of organizations concerned with the many different aspects of the Internet, each with its own role to play and pursuing its own mission.² Collectively, these organizations “tile” or span the Internet policy, operations, and management space.

Within this network of shared purpose, our specific role is to promote the formulation and adoption of policies that make the Internet accessible to everyone; to safeguard the integrity and continuity of the context within which the Internet develops and operates; to support and contribute to the continuing evolution of the Internet as an open, decentralized platform for innovation, creativity, and economic opportunity; and to bring authoritative, unbiased information about the Internet to individuals and organizations in every part of the world.

3 Core Values

Our core values are the fundamental principles that guide all of the Society's activities. These are the beliefs and commitments on which our mission is based. Many of them are shared by the other Internet organizations with which we collaborate.

² Examples—intended to be illustrative, not definitive or exclusive—include the International Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), the Network Startup Resource Center, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the Regional Internet Registries (RIRs), and the Swedish Development Authority.

- 1) The quality of life for people in all parts of the world is enhanced by their ability to enjoy the benefits of an open and global Internet.
- 2) Well-informed individuals and public and private policy makers are the essential foundation of an open and global Internet society.
- 3) The genius of the Internet is that its decentralized architecture maximizes individual users' power to choose (or create) and use the hardware, software, and services that best meet their needs, and if the Internet is to continue to be a platform for innovation and creativity, its open, decentralized nature must be preserved.
- 4) Enduring and sustainable progress toward our vision is best achieved by a combination of global initiatives and activities at a local level that engage people in their home regions.
- 5) Technical standards and Internet operating procedures should be developed and asserted through open and transparent processes, with minimal barriers to participation or access to information.
- 6) The social, political, and economic benefits of the Internet are substantially diminished by excessively restrictive governmental or private controls on computer hardware or software, telecommunications infrastructure, or Internet content.
- 7) Rewarding and productive use of the Internet depends on the ability to trust critical services.

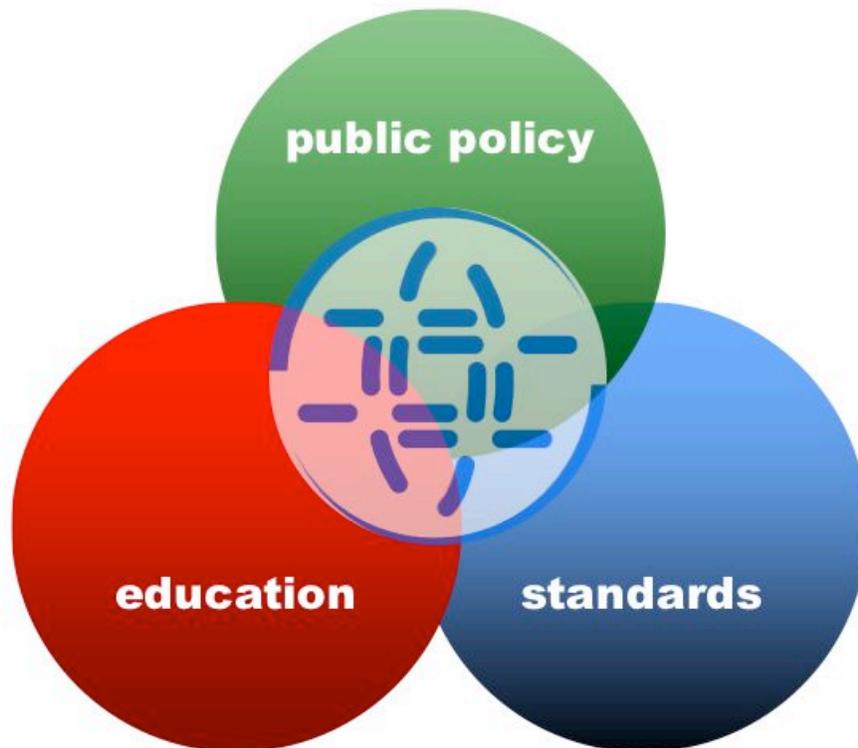
Among the greatest challenges facing us in the 21st century is the increasingly exploited potential for *misuse* of the Internet as an insidious side-effect of the very "open and universally accessible" attributes that make *use* of the Internet so valuable. Our ability to sustain an Internet that continues to reflect our core values will depend on the development of mechanisms and practices that enable trustworthy internetworking to support the deployment of critical and pervasive applications.

4 Scope and Beneficiaries

The scope of our activities is both broad and central. Because we believe that *the Internet is for everyone*, everyone is a potential beneficiary of our activities on behalf of an open and accessible Internet. We are uniquely positioned at the intersection of development-oriented (technical) groups, public policy, and educational activities; and we serve as the hub of a global network of individuals and organizations that are collectively working toward the shared vision of an Internet that benefits everyone everywhere.

The interaction among our activities in three complementary areas—Standards, Education, and Public Policy—is a particularly important source of credibility

and impact for the Internet Society. The relationship between ISOC and the IETF, for example, enables us to speak with unique authority on technical matters in educational workshops and in public policy forums; and our reputation as a reliable source of accurate and unbiased information contributes to our policy objective to ensure that government decision-makers are well informed.



The beneficiaries of the Internet Society include both *present* and *future* users. An important dimension of our mission is its commitment to future Internet users, to whom we recognize a responsibility to sustain the progress of Internet innovation that has brought so many benefits to today's users.

5 Goals and Objectives

We pursue our mission and uphold our core values through programs and projects (the details of which are described in Part II of this Strategic Operating Plan) that are designed to achieve specific goals and objectives in all three of the areas that define our scope. The goal of each program is directly related to the achievement of our mission, and the operating plan for each program is

governed by our core values. These goals and objectives link our mission (theory) to our specific programs and projects (practice).³

In each area, our strategic plan asserts an *ambitious objective* that serves both to arouse the expectation of significant, meaningful accomplishment and to motivate all of the programs and projects that we undertake within that area.

5.1 Standards

Our standards activities support our mission by upholding the model of Internet standards development that maximizes participation and delivers the greatest benefits to people throughout the world, and by making the fruits of that process freely available to everyone.

Our goals for our standards programs are:

- to ensure the integrity and continuity of the environment within which the IETF pursues its open, inclusive, and transparent bottom-up model of Internet standards development;
- to ensure that the Internet standards process is accessible to every person who wishes to participate; and
- to make information about the Internet standards process and its products freely and widely available to everyone.

Our ambitious standards objective is universal recognition of the IETF as the forum for the development of core Internet standards, and of the IETF process as the best model for the development of all Internet standards.

5.2 Education

Our education activities support our mission by bringing essential Internet-related information and training to people throughout the world.

Our goals for education programs are:

- to provide and distribute information related to the Internet and its technologies to individuals and to public and private organizations, including governments;
- to provide assistance with Internet deployment and use to people in technologically developing countries and regions; and
- to promote the development of self-sustaining communities able to effectively deploy and exploit local and regional education and training resources.

³ With respect to the organization of this document, the goals and objectives are the link between Part I and Part II.

In pursuing these goals, our posture is determined by our core values and principles, but is otherwise deliberately impartial, objective, fair, and non-commercial.

Our ambitious education objective is to bring accurate and reliable information about the Internet and assistance with Internet deployment and use to everyone everywhere in an accessible local context (including language, culture, medium, and economics). Our members and chapters play increasingly important roles in this area.

5.3 Public Policy

Our public policy activities support our mission by upholding and defending our core values in local, national, and international public policy forums, where decisions that affect the ability of people throughout the world to enjoy the benefits of the Internet are made.

By “public policy,” we mean the context, process, and results of government or government-sponsored activities that affect, either directly or indirectly, the way in which the Internet operates, evolves, or is used.

In pursuing our public policy objectives, we operate collaboratively and inclusively, working with governments, national and international organizations, and other parties to reach decisions about the Internet that conform to our core values.

Our goals for public policy programs are:

- to adopt, assert, and actively defend policy positions consistent with our mission and core values; and
- to promote awareness of public policy issues and activities that affect the Internet.

Our ambitious public policy objective is to promote, support, and defend the following six “abilities” on behalf of all Internet users:

- *The Ability to Connect.* The edge-dominant end-to-end architecture of the Internet is essential to its utility as a platform for innovation, creativity, and economic opportunity. To preserve this quality, we will oppose efforts to establish standards or practices that would make it difficult or impossible for some users of the Internet to use the full range of Internet applications of all kinds.
- *The Ability to Speak.* The Internet is a powerful mass medium for self-expression which depends on the ability of its users to speak freely. We believe that the Internet must support private—and, where appropriate, anonymous—means of communication and collaboration among individuals and groups, and will oppose efforts to restrict the type or content of information exchanged on the Internet.

- *The Ability to Innovate.* The remarkable growth of the Internet and the limitless variety of Internet applications follow directly from the open model of Internet connectivity and standards development. Any individual, organization, or company can develop and distribute a new Internet application that can be used by anyone. We recognize the enormous value of this innovation, and oppose governmental or non-governmental restrictions on the evolution and use of Internet technology.
- *The Ability to Share.* The many-to-many architecture of the Internet makes it a powerful tool for sharing, education, and collaboration. It has enabled the global open source community to develop and enhance many of the key components of the Internet, such as the Domain Name System and the World-Wide Web, and has made the vision of digital libraries a reality. To preserve these benefits we will oppose technologies and legislation that would inhibit the freedom to develop and use open source software or limit the well-established concept of fair use, which is essential to scholarship, education, and collaboration.
- *The Ability to Choose.* Government regulation and the economic power of incumbent telecommunication monopolies can delay or prevent the growth of the Internet by limiting the ability of competitors to provide new, better, cheaper, or more innovative Internet-related services. We advocate policies that promote competition in telecommunications, Internet services, Internet-related software, and e-commerce applications.
- *The Ability to Trust.* Everyone's ability to connect, speak, innovate, share, and choose depends on the Internet's ability to support trustworthy internetworking—ensuring the security, reliability, and stability of increasingly critical and pervasive applications and services.

6 Members, Chapters, and Partners

The Internet Society's members and chapters promote and pursue our mission in all parts of the Internet community and all parts of the world. We also partner collaboratively with other organizations that share our vision and core values.

6.1 Individual Members

The Internet Society was founded in 1992 as an individual membership organization for people who believed in the potential of the Internet to improve the lives of everyone everywhere, and individual members from all parts of the world continue to play important operational and strategic roles in ISOC. We differ from traditional membership organizations, which typically focus mainly on serving their members, in that our primary mission is to support the development of the Internet in accordance with our core values. Internet Society members are partners who participate in the pursuit of our mission.

Anyone who agrees to our Code of Conduct⁴ may join the Internet Society as an individual member. Regular individual members—“global members”—pay no membership fee. Individual members may choose to pay an annual membership fee set by the Society; in addition to the benefits enjoyed by global members, these “sustaining members” are invited to participate in the election of ISOC Trustees.

Our individual members form a diverse worldwide community of people who believe in our vision, are committed to our mission, and embrace our core values. Some of them are professionally interested in the Internet and its technology, but many are simply concerned about the role that the growing and evolving Internet will play in their lives and in their own communities. The Internet Society links all of its members both to each other and to the many companies, organizations, and government bodies that are shaping the future of the Internet.

Individual members also serve the Society as volunteers, and are encouraged to participate in chapters (which are described in the following section).

6.2 Organization Members

Organization members complement the perspective of individual members by attuning ISOC to the broad range of Internet standards, public policy, and infrastructure interests of the private sector, civil society, non-commercial, governmental, and non-governmental institutions. Their perspective is infused with the insight of organizations that in one way or another depend on the global Internet for their success. Representatives of each member organization bring this perspective to ISOC through the Advisory Council.

Our organization members include corporations; non-profit, trade, and professional organizations; foundations; educational institutions; government agencies; and other national and international organizations that share our commitment to an open and accessible Internet. Their financial and institutional support is critical to the success of all of our standards, education, and public policy activities.

The Internet Society welcomes organization members at several different levels of annual financial support, and also receives general and directed grants that are offered in addition to membership fees. Organization members also underwrite the contributions of individual volunteers, and enhance our credibility and authority by endorsing the Internet Society and our mission.

⁴ <http://www.isoc.org/members/codeconduct.shtml>

6.3 Chapters

Internet Society chapters are voluntarily organized by members⁵ who reside in a particular geographic region (*e.g.*, a city, country, or larger geographical area) or share an interest in a common subject (*e.g.*, disability and special needs). Chapters are approved by ISOC under procedures developed to empower locally meaningful activity while retaining an overall commitment to the joint achievement of our common mission. They are expected to serve the interests of their specific geographic or non-geographic segment of the global Internet community in a manner that is consistent with the mission and core values of the Internet Society.

The role of chapters within the Internet Society is both to locally and regionally amplify our efforts to achieve our mission and to infuse ISOC with local and regional perspectives on developments and issues that could affect the evolution of the Internet. The chapter relationship is therefore very much a “two-way street”—chapters are effective local and regional agents of our mission, and also an important source of the information that informs that mission. Like our members, our chapters are partners that participate in the pursuit of our mission.

Chapters enable members to be more personally involved in the future of the Internet through initiatives that meet the needs of local or issue-specific Internet communities. They bring a sharper and more personal focus to local and regional issues affecting the Internet, and provide opportunities for those issues to be recognized and included in the discussion of global issues. Chapters also provide opportunities for members to network with other Internet-oriented people, and to participate in locally-organized programs and events that promote our core values.

6.4 Partners

Our ability to accomplish our goals and objectives is significantly enhanced by the way in which we actively seek and invest in partnerships with other organizations that share our vision and core values. Some of these partnerships are wide ranging and deep; others are issue-specific. Along with our natural partners—our members and chapters, the IETF, and the PIR—the Internet Society is embedded within a fabric of Internet organizations, each with its own role to play and pursuing its own mission, but motivated by a common vision of an open and accessible Internet.

The Public Interest Registry is a good example of a natural Internet Society partner. We created PIR to operate the .org top-level domain registry when ICANN awarded that registry to ISOC in 2003. The partnership between ISOC and PIR is largely focused on educational and outreach activities, including those

⁵ Chapters establish their own criteria for membership, subject to approval by ISOC, but in general both individual and organization members of ISOC may join chapters. A chapter may also allow organizations that are not members of ISOC to join the chapter.

that concern the Domain Name System and registry operations. Each partner benefits substantially from the support and cooperation of the other, with the result that efforts on both sides are leveraged beyond what could be achieved by either partner acting alone.

In our partnerships with other organizations, such as the Regional Internet Registries (RIRs) or the IPv6 Forum, we extend our ability to achieve education and public policy goals; collaborating with the IETF and Intenet2 increases the effectiveness of our standards activities; and working with the Swedish Development Agency improves the impact and effectiveness of our developing country workshops. In all of these examples, the key element is individual organizations doing what each does best, coordinating their activities to create the greatest possible impact.



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Part II—Programs and Projects

Programs and projects are the tactical expression of our commitment to our mission, and are designed to achieve specific goals and objectives in one or more of the Internet Society's strategic arenas. Because projects will come and go dynamically as opportunities, funding availability, and other circumstances demand, they are defined in a separate Part II of the Strategic Operating Plan.

[The substance of Part II is the annual budget document.](#)