Tips for Presenters at IETF

Presenting an internet-draft at IETF can be intimidating for people who are not comfortable with public speaking or who are new to the IETF. The most important thing to remember is that the goal of the working group is to produce the best possible document.

Your goal in presenting your document is to get good feedback to improve your document. If there is no consensus supporting your internet-draft, it is better to give it up quickly. Thus:
- If your draft has had no discussion on a working group mailing list, your first goal in presenting it is to get people interested in reading it.
- If your draft has had discussion, then your goal is to ask questions arising from that discussion to find consensus answers from the working group.
- If your draft is mature, and has been revised to reflect previous comments, then your goal is to seek consensus on any remaining issues.
- If there are no significant issues, then your goal is to seek thorough reviews before final publication.

Most people use slides to support their presentation. Some guidelines for slides:

1. Text. Your slides need to be legible from the back of a large room.
   a. No smaller than 18 point font
   b. Only quote text from your document if you need to debate wording.
   c. Use contrasting colors. Black and white work best.
2. Diagrams
   a. Very useful to explain technology
   b. Charts showing data support your point
3. Animation
   a. Avoid if possible.
   b. It doesn't work in PDF or archive.
   c. Impossible for jabber participants to follow.
4. Number your slides
   a. Easier to refer in discussion
   b. Easier to follow by Jabber
5. Use documentation examples
   a. Domains .example (rfc2606)
   b. IP addresses 2001:db8::/32 (rfc3849) and 192.0.2.0/24 (rfc3330)
6. Do not use company logo or template
   a. The Tao of the IETF http://www.ietf.org/tao.html#rfc.sec=on.4.4
   b. It's also embarrassing for slides to say "Company Confidential"
7. Send your slides to the working group chairs the week before the meeting, so they have time to review and suggest changes.

Language

English is the official language of the IETF, so you will be presenting in English, and comments will be in English.

Native speakers of English often cause communication problems by speaking too fast, or using language or cultural references to make a point or a joke. Good discussions of language-related IETF issues are at https://www.ietf.org/edu/tutorials/90-WGClunch-all.pdf and https://www.ietf.org/edu/tutorials/90-WG-Chairs-Lunch-Notes.pdf

General guidance then is to keep sentences short and simple. If there are multiple authors, consider having the best English speaker present, with others standing together to respond to questions. Also, speak slowly, and consider matching spoken words to the slides, so foreign language speakers who do miss a word can refer to the written material.

Microphones

Using a microphone properly is essential for remote participants to be able to follow the presentation. It also helps people in the room to hear. Microphones are directional: they must point at your mouth in order to pick up the sound. This includes lavalier (lapel) microphones, which clip to the shirt or jacket; if you turn your head to look at slides, you are not facing the microphone.

One of the most common problems is the speaker holding the microphone too far from his or her mouth. Quiet speakers, in particular, find that the microphone needs to be nearly touching their lips. Louder speakers may need more distance to prevent distortion of sounds, especially letters P and B, and S and F. Often, holding the microphone just in front of the chin (instead of the mouth) provides the best position.

Finally, there should be a square of pink tape on the floor at the presenter's microphone; stand inside this box. Within that box, you are visible to remote users watching the video stream. Do not stand in front of the speaker system: sound coming out of the speaker may be picked up by the microphone, resulting in ear-splitting feedback.

Presenting Remotely

It is also possible to present from a remote location using MeetEcho. The MeetEcho team provides materials and suggestions; for instance, this was the guidance for IETF93:

Remote presenters should send their slides as early as everyone else, and rely on the chairs to display them in the room and advance by verbal cue ("Next slide"). As a presenter, you should also have your slides in front of you, to follow while you speak. It is especially important to have numbered slides in this case, so others can say, "Please back up to slide 4," and both meeting room and presenter are in sync.

It's essential for presenters to make sure they have a quiet location, secure from interruption, and reliable headset. External speakers risk echo. Because echo can be so distracting, it's a good idea to have a mechanism for chairs (or Jabber scribe) to interrupt the presenter for questions. It's a good idea to have the Jabber room open, so questions can be relayed, if needed. Jabber can also be used to convey sound quality and volume from each end.

If there's a problem with the video or audio, mention "Meetecho" in the Jabber room and you will get their attention.

There may be an audio delay, so speakers (both presenters and in the room) need to wait patiently when they stop speaking, and not try to interrupt or continue a thought.

After Your Presentation

If you have done a good job, people will have comments and clarifying questions after your presentation. Your presentation should use no more than half of the time allotted to you, so that there is time for discussion.

Remember that your goal is to produce the best possible document. If people criticize your ideas, it is much more productive to figure out how to incorporate their criticisms in the document than to defend your ideas. Listen carefully, and ask for specific wording. It's always a sign of good grace to thank people for their criticism.

When the chairs let you go, return to your seat immediately write down what you remember you need to do. Later, review the minutes, jabber transcript, and mailing list messages. Make a list of things to do, and revise your document.

Privately, ask others how you could improve your presentation to be more effective at building consensus toward a good document.