

40 Years of RFCs

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Abstract

This RFC marks the 40th anniversary of the RFC document series.

1. RFCs and Jon Postel

Forty years ago today, the first Request for Comments document, RFC 1, was published at UCLA [RFC1]. This was the first of a series that currently contains more than 5400 documents (roughly 160,000 pages) on computer networking in general and on the Internet protocols in particular. The RFC series emerged from the US government-funded research efforts that created the ARPANET and later the Internet. When the IETF was formed in the mid-1980s, RFCs became the primary publication vehicle for IETF standards, and thus became centered on the vendor and user communities.

For the first 29 years, Jon Postel [Postel] was *the* RFC Editor, until his untimely death in October 1998. Postel, with substantial help from Joyce K. Reynolds, was responsible for the collection, editing, online publication, and archiving of the RFC documents. From 1978 until 1998, Postel was a research scientist at the USC Information Sciences Institute (USC/ISI) in Marina del Rey, California. Postel was also the original IANA as well as Director of the Computer Networks Division at ISI.

Upon the occasion of the 30th anniversary of RFC 1 and as a tribute to the massive contribution of Jon Postel, the RFC Editor published RFC 2555 [RFC2555] on April 7, 1999. This RFC contained recollections from three networking pioneers: Steve Crocker who wrote RFC 1, Vint Cerf whose long-range vision continues to guide us, and Jake Feinler who played a key role in the middle years of the RFC series.

Ten more years have now passed, and we have reached the 40th anniversary of the RFC series. The series has more than doubled in size during the last ten years, and it is expected to continue far into the future. All the good things said in RFC 2555 still hold true ten years later.

We should, however, note some changes that have occurred over the past ten years.

- o After Jon passed away, Joyce Reynolds and Bob Braden put together a small organization at USC/ISI to continue the RFC Editor function. This was motivated by a desire to honor Postel by continuing his remarkable effort and to provide a service to the Internet community.
- o Funding of the RFC Editor, which had been supported by the US government until 1998, was taken over by the Internet Society. During 1998-2006, ISOC funded the RFC Editor under a series of annual contracts and extensions. ISOC put the function out for competitive bid for 2007 (USC/ISI was selected to provide RFC Editor services from 2007-2009), and the contract will be put out to bid again for post-2009.

During 2009 there will be a significant transition for the RFC Editor function, as some new organization or set of organizations takes over this service that has been performed at USC/ISI continuously since 1978.

- o Many improvements have increased the efficiency and transparency of the RFC editorial process [RFCed09].
- o The RFC Editor formed an RFC Editorial Board, a group of people with broad and deep knowledge of the Internet and networking. One of its major functions is to assist the RFC Editor by reviewing RFCs in the Independent Submission stream.
- o An email list, rfc-interest@rfc-editor.org, was created to obtain community input on the RFC Editor functions.

2. Security Considerations

This document does not raise any security issues.

3. Acknowledgments

It has been an honor for USC/ISI to serve the community during the past 31 years.

4. Informative References

[Postel] "Remembering Jonathan B. Postel",
<<http://www.postel.org/remembrances/>>.

[RFCed09] Braden, R., Ginoza, S., and A. Hagens, "The RFC Editor Function at ISI", <<http://www.rfc-editor.org/RFCeditor.at.ISI.pdf>>, January 2009.

[RFC1] Crocker, S., "Host Software", RFC 1, April 1969.

[RFC2555] RFC Editor, et al., "30 Years of RFCs", RFC 2555, April 1999.

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