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| Member States of the Inter-American Telecommunication Commission (CITEL) |
| Proposed modification of Recommendation ITU-T A.7 |
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| **Abstract:** | Revisions to Recommendation ITU-T A.7 will provide the additional guidance needed for the establishment and operation of ITU-T focus groups. |

Introduction

Recent proposals for new ITU-T focus groups have generated substantial debate and highlighted potential gaps in Recommendation ITU-T A.7, particularly in terms of the criteria for establishment. Likewise, the proliferation of focus group activity in recent years has demonstrated the need to further clarify the mechanisms by which focus group deliverables are transferred to, and handled by, the parent group. Given that focus groups have significant operational, financial, and strategic implications, it is important for Recommendation ITU-T A.7 to provide sufficient guidance.

Proposal

Modify ITU-T Recommendation A.7 in order to strengthen the criteria for the establishment of ITU-T Focus Groups and clarify the process by which Focus Group deliverables are transferred to, and handled by, the parent group, as well as improve the logical flow of the text through structural reorganization.

MOD IAP/39A20/1

Recommendation ITU‑T A.7

Focus groups: Establishment and working procedures

(2000; 2002; 2004; 2006; 2008; 2012, 2016; 2022)

Summary

Recommendation ITU-T A.7 describes working methods and procedures of a focus group such as its establishment, terms of reference, leadership, participation, financing, support, deliverables, etc.

ITU-T focus groups are a flexible tool for progressing new work. Such flexibility may allow for groups developing a wide range of deliverables. Since there have been many instances in which the membership of a focus group does not have experience in the development of technical specifications, it has been common that focus group deliverables, although useful, needed to be reworked by the parent study groups.

The creation of focus group guidelines for their working, including continued coordination with their parent group, could facilitate the swift development of deliverables by the parent group.

Appendix I provides a set of guidelines to guide study groups and focus groups when implementing ITU-T A.7 focus groups that aim at producing specifications that can be efficiently streamlined from focus group deliverables to ITU-T Recommendations or Supplements, or otherwise.

This 2016 edition of the Recommendation integrates the 2012 edition and its Amendment 1 without introducing any modifications to the text.

# 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. Focus group activities may include an analysis of gaps between current Recommendations and expected Recommendations, and provide material for consideration in the development of Recommendations.

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 agree on 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 (study group or TSAG), 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 (see clause 2.2).

# 2 Establishment, terms of reference and leadership

Within the ITU‑T standardization working structure, the establishment procedures of a focus group should be progressed in a transparent manner.

For each step of the establishment process, the compliance of the focus group proposal with all clauses of this Recommendation should be ensured, and all decisions are to be made by consensus.

## 2.1 Establishment

A focus group is established to address a well-defined topic requiring solutions that directly advance the work of ITU‑T study groups.

To justify the establishment of a focus group, the following basic criteria shall be fulfilled to their full extent:

• There is significant interest in a subject within the mandate of ITU-T and a timely need to help advance the work of the ITU‑T study groups. Because the work of the ITU-T study groups is to prepare recommendations with a view to standardizing telecommunications on a worldwide basis, the subject should have a broad level of industry interest and market maturity that clearly demonstrates the need for international standardization.

• The subject is not already addressed by work underway in ITU‑T study groups, or cannot be handled by a study group, and avoids duplication of work with other standards organizations, forums or consortia.

• There should normally be at least four parties (i.e., Member States and/or Sector Members and/or Associates and/or Academia) from different countries who commit to actively support the new focus group.

• The subject is not better addressed through an alternative mechanism.

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

a) 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 group (see clause 2.1.1), provided that the chairman of this study group consults with the chairmen of all possibly impacted study groups. If there is any doubt that all the topics fall under the responsibility and mandate of only this study group, the decision of such an establishment should be referred to TSAG.

b) Topic is within the mandate of multiple study groups

When the terms of reference of the focus group fall within the mandate of multiple study groups, TSAG has the necessary authority to approve the formation of a focus group (see clause 2.1.2) and to become its parent group or appoint a study group as the parent group.

The study group or TSAG, when receiving the written contribution, 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 establishment procedure.

The establishment of a focus group and its first meeting will be announced according to clause 12 by the Director of TSB in cooperation with the parent group.

### 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 to set up a focus group on a specific topic should take the form of a written contribution submitted as far in advance as possible of that study group meeting, but no later than at least twelve calendar days before. The proposal must include well-defined terms of reference (fulfilling all requirements described in clause 2.2 below), as well as a gap analysis, which the study group will assess in line with the criteria in clause 2.1 above.

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 may be decided at the same meeting.

If discussions as to establishment of the focus group result in significant revisions to the contribution that substantively change the nature of the focus group as originally proposed, the study group should direct the proponents to submit a revised proposal in the form of a new written contribution to the next study group meeting.

If views are expressed that the proposed topic overlaps with the mandate of another study group, the chairman of the study group to which the proposal is addressed will send the proposal 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 may be established between study group meetings for the purpose of studying technical issues (i.e., those that have no regulatory or policy implications).

The proposal, including terms of reference, to set up a focus group on a specific technical topic (within the mandate of the parent group) may be sent by any member to the chairman of an appropriate 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. If the proposal to establish the focus group is agreed, the proposal, with completed 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 decision to approve 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 focus group overlaps with the mandate of another study group, the chairman of the study group to which the proposal is addressed will send the proposal 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

#### 2.1.2.1 Establishment at a TSAG meeting

For establishment at a TSAG meeting, the submission of a proposal to set up a focus group on a specific topic should take the form of a written contribution submitted as far in advance as possible before that TSAG meeting, but no later than at least twelve calendar days before that TSAG meeting. The proposal must include well-defined terms of reference (fulfilling all requirements described in clause 2.2 below), as well as a gap analysis, which TSAG will assess in line with the criteria in clause 2.1 above.

If discussions as to establishment of the focus group result in significant revisions to the contribution that substantively change the nature of the focus group as originally proposed, TSAG should direct the proponents to submit a revised proposal in the form of a new written contribution to the next TSAG meeting.

The TSAG plenary can decide to establish the focus group and designate the parent 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, whereby the proposal must be available for the members at least twelve calendar days before the meeting.

#### 2.1.2.2 Establishment between TSAG meetings

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

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

The chairman of TSAG coordinates the first review of the proposal with the vice-chairmen and working party chairmen of TSAG and chairmen of all study groups. If the proposal to set up a focus group is agreed, the proposal, with completed 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 decision to approve establishment of the focus group is deferred to 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 topic for a particular focus group is to be well defined (prior to approval), and the terms of reference must include the scope of actions, a plan of action, the expected deliverables and the time schedules for completion, which should not exceed a period of 9 to 12 months.

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 by study groups, or an alternative mechanism, must be given.

It is expected that a focus group will complete its work in accordance with the plan of action and time schedules defined in the terms of reference of its formation. If a focus group requires more time to fulfil its mandate, the extension of its term will be subject to review and approval by the parent group.

During the life of the focus group, its terms of reference cannot be modified by the focus group itself. Any proposal to modify the terms of reference is to be submitted as a written contribution to the parent group for its consideration and approval.

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 approval is granted.

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). The focus group will automatically stop if the parent group does not agree to extend the lifetime of the focus group.

## 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. Appointment of chairman and vice-chairman shall be primarily based upon demonstrated competence both in technical content of the parent group and in the management skills required.

Member States and ITU‑T Sector Members will provide the chairmanship, but vice-chairmanships can be open to ITU‑T Associates and academia, as well as to external experts.

A focus group chairman who is unable to carry out his or her duties is replaced by one of the vice-chairmen, who is chosen and appointed by the parent group at its next meeting. If none of the vice-chairmen is an ITU member, the parent group calls for candidates and the chairman is appointed at the next meeting of the parent group.

# 3 Focus group working procedures

## 3.1 Participation

Any individual from a country that is a member of ITU and who is willing to contribute actively to the work may participate in a focus group. This includes individuals who are also members of international, regional and national organizations.

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

A list of participants is to be maintained by the focus group for reference purposes. This list will include information for persons with disabilities on how their participation shall be facilitated.

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

To facilitate the efficient transfer of deliverables from focus groups to the parent group, it is suggested that experts leading the work within a focus group have experience in developing ITU-T texts (e.g., ITU-T Recommendations, Supplements, or Technical Reports). Additionally, training should be provided to the focus group management and participants on the ITU-T working methods.

## 3.2 Working language

The language to be used will be mutually agreed by the focus group participants. However, any communication with the parent group shall preferably be in English or one of the other ITU official languages.

## 3.3 Technical contributions

Any participant may submit a technical contribution directly to the focus group, in accordance with the time schedule adopted. A template for contributions can be found on the ITU-T website.

## 3.4 Working guidelines

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

## 3.5 Meeting announcements

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

The first meeting of a focus group will be arranged by the parent group and the initially appointed chairman.

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

## 3.6 Progress reports

Focus group progress reports are to be provided at each meeting of the parent group meeting at least twelve calendar days before the meeting and transmitted in copy to all involved study groups. They will be posted in the form of TDs.

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.

# 4 Financing of focus groups and their meetings

Financing of meetings and their preparation is accomplished by volunteer hosting in a similar manner to rapporteur groups, or on the basis of financial arrangements determined by the focus group, provided there is no incremental increase in expenditure and no adverse impact on the normal work of the study groups and TSAG, except for encouraging the participation of persons with disabilities in accordance with Resolution 175 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) of the Plenipotentiary Conference, and for supporting the participation of representatives of developing countries[[1]](#footnote-1)1 in accordance with Resolution 123 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) of the Plenipotentiary Conference.

# 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, there shall be no incremental increase in expenditure and no adverse impact on the normal work of the study groups and TSAG, except for encouraging the participation of persons with disabilities in accordance with Resolution 175 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) of the Plenipotentiary Conference, and for supporting the participation of representatives of developing countries in accordance with Resolution 123 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) of the Plenipotentiary Conference.

# 6 Meeting logistics

The frequency and location of meetings is decided by each focus group. Participation of persons with disabilities, including the provision of electronic documents in accessible formats, shall be encouraged in accordance with Resolution 175 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) of the Plenipotentiary Conference.

# 7 Deliverables

Deliverables can be in the form of technical specifications, reports on standards gap analysis results, base material for the development of draft ITU-T texts (e.g., ITU-T Recommendations, Supplements, or technical reports), etc., and are expected to inform the advanced work of the parent group. Not all focus groups aim at producing base material for the development of draft ITU-T texts. In many cases, it is acceptable that a focus group will produce other types of deliverables, such as ex ante standardization studies, roadmaps and analyses of gaps between current Recommendations and expected Recommendations.

Where appropriate, deliverables of a focus group should be prepared and formatted in a manner that facilitates their possible development and adoption by the parent group into draft ITU-T Recommendations, Supplements, or technical reports (e.g., base material formatted in the structure of an ITU-T Recommendation).

Focus group deliverables aimed as future ITU-T Recommendations or Supplements should follow the *Author's Guide for drafting ITU-T Recommendations* and must have content that is expected for ITU-T Recommendations or Supplements.

Drafts of focus group deliverables aimed as future ITU-T Recommendations or Supplements should be shared with the parent group on a regular basis via liaison statements. When focus group deliverables aimed as future ITU-T Recommendations or Supplements would fall under the responsibility of different study groups, the parent group should share the draft focus group deliverables with the relevant study groups as soon as possible

## 7.1 Approval of deliverables

Approval shall be obtained by consensus.

## 7.2 Transfer of focus group deliverables to the parent group

The focus group will send all of its deliverables to the parent group for further consideration. The deliverables shall be submitted as contributions to the parent group in accordance with Recommendation ITU-T A.1 and Recommendation ITU-T A.2.

# 8 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 announce 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.

1. 1 These include the least developed countries, small island developing states, landlocked developing countries and countries with economies in transition. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)