Recommendation

ITU-T A.7 (08/2024)

SERIES A: Organization of the work of ITU-T

Focus groups: Establishment and working procedures

Recommendation ITU-T A.7

Focus groups: Establishment and working procedures

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 and deliverables.

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

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 relevant study groups.

Appendix I provides guidance to 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 informative texts.

History *

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3.1	ITU-T A.7 (2004) Amd. 1	2006-07-07	TSAG	11.1002/1000/8793
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5.1	ITU-T A.7 (2012) Amd. 1	2015-06-05	TSAG	11.1002/1000/12527
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Keywords

Focus groups.

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* To access the Recommendation, type the URL https://handle.itu.int/ in the address field of your web browser, followed by the Recommendation's unique ID.

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/software copyrights, 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 appropriate ITU-T databases available via the ITU-T website at http://www.itu.int/ITU-T/ipr/.

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Focus groups: Establishment and working procedures

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 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).

1bis   References

The following ITU-T Recommendations and other references contain provisions which, through reference in this text, constitute provisions of this Recommendation. At the time of publication, the editions indicated were valid. All Recommendations and other references are subject to revision; users of this Recommendation are therefore encouraged to investigate the possibility of applying the most recent edition of the Recommendations and other references listed below. A list of the currently valid ITU-T Recommendations is regularly published. The reference to a document within this Recommendation does not give it, as a stand-alone document, the status of a Recommendation.

[ITU-T A.1]   Recommendation ITU-T A.1 (2019), *Working methods for study groups of the ITU Telecommunication Standardization Sector (ITU-T)*.

[PP Res. 123]   Resolution 123 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) of the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference, *Bridging the standardization gap between developing and developed countries*.
<https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts-2023/RES-123-E.pdf>

[PP Res. 175]   Resolution 175 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) of the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference, *Telecommunication/information and communication technology accessibility for persons with disabilities and persons with specific needs*.
<https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts-2023/RES-175-E.pdf>

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-scoped topic that directly advances the work of ITU-T study groups.

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

•   There is a significant interest in a subject and the need to timely 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, market relevance and anticipated interest for international standardization.

•   The subject is not already addressed by work underway in ITU-T study groups or other focus groups, or cannot be currently handled by a study group.

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

•   The subject is not better addressed through another type of appropriate mechanism (e.g., a joint coordination activity, a correspondence group or a new Question).

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 chair of this study group consults with the chairs 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. TSAG shall consult the lead study group on the topic, if any (see clause 2.1.5 of [b-WTSA Res. 1]).

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 chairs, 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 chair 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 3.5 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 submitted written contribution (see clause 3.1 of [ITU-T A.1], and in particular clause 3.1.9). The proposal must include well-defined terms of reference (fulfilling all requirements described in clause 2.2), which the study group will assess in line with the criteria in clause 2.1.

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 views are expressed that the proposed topic overlaps with the mandate of another study group, the chair of the study group to which the proposal is addressed will send the proposal to the chair of TSAG. The chair of TSAG will then proceed as described in clauses 2.1.2.1 or 2.1.2.2.

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 chair of an appropriate study group selected by the initiators according to the foreseen work content. The chair coordinates the first review of the proposal with the vice-chairs and the chairs 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 chair may decide the immediate establishment of the focus group. As far as possible, the chair 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 chair of the study group to which the proposal is addressed will send the proposal to the chair of TSAG. The chair 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 (see clause 3.1 of [ITU-T A.1], and in particular clause 3.1.9). The proposal must include well-defined terms of reference (fulfilling all requirements described in clause 2.2), which TSAG will assess in line with the criteria in clause 2.1.

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, 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 chair of TSAG.

The chair of TSAG coordinates the first review of the proposal with the /vice-chairs and working party chairs of TSAG and chairs 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 chair of TSAG may decide the immediate establishment of the focus group. As far as possible, the chair 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, 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.

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.

NOTE – It is suggested to provide (as a separate document) a gap analysis with the work in other ITU study groups, standards organizations, forums, consortia, etc. (see [b-ITU-T A-Suppl.6]).

It is expected that a focus group will complete its work in a short period of time, typically 9 to 12 months, in accordance with the plan of action and time schedules defined in the terms of reference. The scope and breadth of work identified in the terms of reference should take this timeline into account. 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 chair and vice-chair 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. If the focus group was established by TSAG with a different parent group, TSAG will also be informed accordingly. Appointment of chair and vice-chair 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 chairship, but vice-chairships can be open to ITU-T Associates and academia.

A focus group chair who is unable to carry out his or her duties is replaced by one of the vice-chairs, who is chosen and appointed by the parent group at its next meeting. If none of the vice-chairs is able to take on the role of chair, the parent group calls for candidates and the chair 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 and made available to focus group participants. 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 a focus group to its 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

In accordance with its terms of reference (see clause 2.2), it is recommended that the focus group agrees as soon as possible on a working structure (e.g., working groups), a related management team and a working schedule.

A focus group may, at its discretion, share working documents via liaison statements (see clause 1.5.1 of [ITU-T A.1]).

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, e.g., communication with other organizations and/or experts, technical journals.

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

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 the parent group. Meetings will be announced at least six weeks in advance on the ITU website.

3.6 Progress reports

Focus group progress reports are to be provided at each parent group meeting at least twelve calendar days before the meeting (or as a minimum every six months) 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 possibly a suggested list 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;
–   details of any financing provided to the focus group. The parent group chair should also 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 [PP Res. 175], and for supporting the participation of representatives of developing countries[1] in accordance with [PP Res. 123].

5 Administrative support

Focus groups can establish their own method of providing and financing administrative support between meetings. This shall be documented in the progress report (see clause 3.6).

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 [PP Res. 175], and for supporting the participation of representatives of developing countries[1] in accordance with [PP Res. 123].

All costs must be covered by the focus group. ITU-T will not be expected to offer any distribution services free of charge, except for progress reports submitted according to clause 3.6, or deliverables to study groups.

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 [PP Res. 175].

7 Intellectual property rights

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

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

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[1]   These include the least developed countries, small island developing states, landlocked developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

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

8 Deliverables

8.1 Form of deliverables

Deliverables can be in the form of technical specifications (e.g., terminology, requirements, functional architecture), technical reports on standards gap analysis results (e.g., landscape, use cases, technical maturity assessment), base material for the development of draft ITU-T texts (e.g., ITU-T Recommendations, Supplements or technical reports – see also Appendix I), etc., and are expected to form input to and advance the work of the parent group and other involved study groups.

8.2 Approval of deliverables

Approval shall be obtained by consensus.

8.3 Transfer of focus group deliverables to the parent group

The focus group will send all its deliverables to the parent group for further consideration. The deliverables shall be submitted as TDs to the parent group in accordance with [ITU-T A.1], but not later than four calendar weeks before the meeting of the parent group.

Appendix I

Guidelines for the efficient transfer of focus group deliverables to its parent group

(This appendix does not form an integral part of this Recommendation.)

I.1   Scope

The guidelines in this appendix are intended to facilitate the efficient transfer of deliverables from focus groups (FGs) aimed at being base material for the development of draft ITU-T Recommendations (see [b-WTSA Res. 1], [ITU-T A.1] and [b- ITU-T A.8]) or informative texts (see [b-ITU-T A.13]).

Focus groups are a flexible tool for progressing new work. According to the core text of this Recommendation, focus group deliverables can be in the form of technical specifications, reports on standards gap analysis results or base material for the development of draft Recommendations.

Such flexibility may allow focus groups to develop a wide range of deliverables with the involvement of external stakeholders. However, this flexibility can sometimes be a shortcoming, as their deliverables may not be structured or contain material ready to be used as specifications, or their development is not sufficiently coordinated with the relevant study groups to ensure a speedy handling at study groups after completion of the deliverables by focus groups.

I.2   Streamlining the transfer of deliverables by focus groups and their approval by study groups

The following streamlining guidance is provided:

NOTE – It should be noted that not all focus groups aim at producing base material for the development of draft Recommendations or informative 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 gap analyses.

1)   ITU-T focus groups should be created with terms of reference and working guidelines that clearly indicate the expected deliverables to be developed, including, but not limited to, formatted base material for the study group's development and approval of a draft ITU-T Recommendation or of an informative text.

2)   Where appropriate, deliverables of a focus group should be prepared and formatted in a manner that facilitates their development and adoption by the appropriate study group(s) into draft Recommendations (e.g., base material formatted in the structure of an ITU-T Recommendation) or informative texts.

3)   Where appropriate and necessary, the parent group of the focus group should provide coordination for the timely transfer of focus group deliverable(s) to the appropriate study group(s). This is expected to be required especially in instances where the deliverable(s) of a focus group has an unclear destination study group or multiple destination study groups.

4)   Experts leading the work within a focus group should have experience in developing ITU-T Recommendations or informative texts. Additionally, training should be provided to the focus group management and participants on the ITU-T working methods.

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

6) Drafts of focus group deliverables intended to become ITU-T Recommendations or informative texts should be shared with the parent group on a regular basis. When focus group deliverables intended to become ITU-T Recommendations or informative texts would fall under the responsibility of different study groups, the focus group should share their deliverables with the relevant study groups as soon as possible.

7) Once mature, focus group deliverables intended to become ITU-T Recommendations or informative texts are approved by the focus group for transmission to the parent group for appropriate consideration.

8) The parent group is expected to tally the number of ITU-T Recommendations approved by relevant study groups, and the number of agreed informative texts, that were based on its focus group's deliverables.

Bibliography

[b-ITU-T A.8]   Recommendation ITU-T A.8 (2024), *Alternative approval process for new and revised ITU-T Recommendations*.

[b-ITU-T A.13]   Recommendation ITU-T A.13 (2019), *Non-normative ITU-T publications, including Supplements to ITU-T Recommendations*.

[b-ITU-T A-Suppl.6] ITU-T A-series Recommendations – Supplement 6 (2024), *Guidelines for the development of a standardization gap analysis*.

[b-WTSA Res. 1]   WTSA Resolution 1 (Rev. Geneva, 2022), *Rules of procedure of the ITU Telecommunication Standardization Sector*.
                     <https://www.itu.int/pub/T-RES-T.1-2022>

[b-Author's]   *Author's Guide for drafting ITU-T Recommendations*.
                     <https://www.itu.int/ITU-T/go/authors-guide/>

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