

Global Good Practices

Practice: **Establish a national multistakeholder platform to promote standards**

#MSPlatform

“Better safe than sorry.” Prevention means increasing the security of the system, including through implementing the latest standards. How can we make sure the right players are gathered to discuss the right things and support the community in the right way? A multistakeholder networking platform serves as a vehicle for initiating and coordinating efforts among partners, promoting and giving exposure to activities, and serving as a contact point for various players.

Related thematic areas:



Standards



Cooperation and
community building

Of particular interest to:



PRIVATE
SECTOR



EXPERTS



GOVERNMENT

Description

A voluntary-based cooperation platform, that gathers various stakeholders and has a common goal and shared responsibility, can ensure an increased level of security. Such a platform encourages partners to raise awareness about the weaknesses in systems, discuss main challenges and solutions, and provide support for preventive measures. This mechanism is transparent and triggers improvement, and its results are an incentive for organisations to do better.

The platform can set up test tools to identify weaknesses in systems (*#TestingTool*), organise webinars and workshops on certain topics for interested parties, and provide support to address weaknesses (through questions and answers, or a repository of how-to guidelines). If a member of the platform identifies a topic that could be useful to discuss, it is flexibly addressed.

The practice is focused on promoting the use of existing standards, rather than developing new standards.

Actors (or who this is for)

The platform formula stimulates multistakeholder cooperation and the sharing of expertise through its diversity. This is needed because the implementation of security standards is a collective effort by many parties.

A typical platform is comprised of technical Internet organisations and departments – the national CERT, the Ministry or NRA in charge of Internet policy-making, and umbrella organisations representing businesses in the ICT sector, for example ISPs, ICT solution providers, manufacturers, and hosting providers. There can also be other organisations that underpin and support the activities, as long as their participation is not driven by an individual commercial interest.

The big picture

Prevention is a fundamental aspect of security, and adhering to some of the many global standards is an important component. A specific regulatory environment that requires entities to implement leading security standards might not be the only – or the best – approach: economic interests can be an incentive for self-regulation. A voluntary-based cooperation platform which gathers various stakeholders – and particularly those that can ensure the implementation of particular security standards (such as the technical community and the private sector) – is also a valid instrument.

The platform contributes to the development of an enabling environment at national level, as institutions become more sensible to the need for existing Internet standards. It also contributes to partnership building by creating mechanisms and frameworks for cooperation and collaborative learning. It therefore develops the capacities of the involved parties through cooperation, awareness raising, focused workshops and discussions, expert support and advice, exchange of resources, and development of guidelines for deployment of standards.

Instructions

- Involve organisations and institutions particularly interested in the specific technical topic, such as security standards. Participation should have a low barrier - open to parties that support the mission and activities, and will not use the platform for product presentation or commercial reasons.
 - Prepare and agree on a code of conduct which outlines the basic principles of participation.
 - Find the most meaningful and feasible way of participation for each partner. Partners should contribute to the platform by offering the time of their employees involved in activities, hosting or facilitating meetings, or utilising their communication channels for outreach.
 - Organise the platform as a lightweight 'organised network' rather than an organisation; it does not need a headquarters, employees, or formal partnerships.
 - Avoid unnecessary overhead costs and bureaucracy. Ensure a basic budget – through contributions of several actors and possibly the government – for basic support (active chairperson, website and tools development, secretariat functions). Other contributions should be in-kind by partners.
 - Focus the discussions and work on technology – challenges and solutions – rather than on broad aspects.

Some possible challenges in replication of this practice include:

- Different national playing fields need to be examined. In general, the platform formula works best in an environment that already is acquainted with and has experience of multistakeholder cooperation. In environments where a multistakeholder model is a new concept, a different approach might be considered.
 - The biggest challenge is in the initiating phase. Most parties in the private sector acknowledge the need for action, but are not willing or do not feel the responsibility to take the necessary first step.
 - A possible extension of the platform beyond borders would increase the number of requests for support, and a voluntary model of support with no budget would not be feasible. It is therefore better if the model is adapted nationally, in different countries, to make it locally specific.
 - As the GFCE membership comprises only states and companies, an extra effort is needed to reach out to Internet organisations, civil society, and umbrella organisations for ICT to cooperate on a national platform. The member state/regional organisation should therefore take on the role of approaching stakeholders in its respective country or region.

Timing

There is no general scheme or timescale for setting up a platform. It depends highly on the local environment. Drawing from practice in the Netherlands, it took about one year to set up an operational platform. New local initiatives could be set up faster, learning from the experience of other platforms.

Once established, the lifetime of a platform depends on the initial goal; for example the platform could dissolve when a certain percentage of implementation has

been achieved. In principle, the platform continues to be useful as long as the implementation of standards does not achieve a certain maturity. For certain standards, this can take a long time. For instance, a similar task force for the promotion of IPv6 still exists after about 10 years, since the IPv6 roll-out is rather slow.

Example

The GFCE Internet Infrastructure Initiative follows experience in the Netherlands of testing and monitoring compliance with international Internet standards, and seeks to broaden this know-how. In this regard, a voluntary cooperation platform with targeted activities was established.

The Dutch government embraced the public interest of this initiative and became an active driving force in setting up the platform. It gave initial funding (being a majority financial contributor) and gathered interest and participation. Although still substantial, the government's involvement in terms of money and time spent has decreased after two years as a result of the increased involvement of other partners.

The platform focuses only on technical standards, specifically on standards of service. It is not being extended beyond these, as it mainly comprises technical organisations and departments.

The platform organises two seminars or workshops a year for interested parties. The events are narrowly focused – such as on e-mail security – covering implementation practices and tools, preferably open source, and how various tools complement each other. Another example is a paper on encryption and Transport Layer Security, also taking into account political aspects. Emerging issues, such as the pros and cons of Digital Objects Architecture, were also among the topics.

The number of companies and organisations involved in the platform has increased each year, and the platform has maintained the tempo of a minimum two seminars a year. The increase in the use of the testing tool (#TestingTool) drove more requests for support to the platform. There has been a general improvement recorded in the implementation of security standards across the Netherlands.

Source, support, and mentoring

Internet Infrastructure Initiative at the GFCE [website: https://www.thegfce.org/initiatives/i/internet-infrastructure-initiative](https://www.thegfce.org/initiatives/i/internet-infrastructure-initiative)

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