Recommendation for a Stable Funding Mechanism for the International Forum on AMPS Standards Technology (IFAST)

1. Background

The International Forum on AMPS Standards Technology (IFAST) is an open international telecommunications forum with a mission to discuss and resolve any issues related to the successful offering of international roaming services.

IFAST membership is open to any person or entity directly affected by the offering of these services.

The IFAST has been in existence since 1997 and has grown significantly in both the scope of its handled issues and the size of its membership. As the IFAST has grown, there has been an increased need for forum support functions. All such support functions require funding.

As is typical of a newly evolving forum, there is an increasing need for a stable funding mechanism to sustain these functions. The IFAST as discussed this issue at its last several meetings. However, solutions, to date, have been temporary, at best, resulting in the need for a permanent and stable funding mechanism to ensure the ongoing viability of the functions necessary to support a vibrant forum.

This paper, therefore, analyzes alternative funding mechanisms appropriate to IFAST and recommends a stable funding method for the IFAST's consideration.

2. Funding Requirements

As the scope and quantity of the issues discussed and resolved by the IFAST have increased so have the size of the membership and need for ongoing support functions. The support functions necessary to sustain the IFAST are detailed below. Each function has previously been reviewed and approved by the IFAST at one of its full membership meetings.

The level of funding necessary to sustain the detailed functions is contained in a separate document to be reviewed concurrently with this document.

2.1. Full Secretariat

The IFAST has reached a scope and size that requires support from a full Secretariat function. "Full" does not mean full-time, but relates to the level of the function, i.e., "full" Secretariat functions are necessary. It is estimated that, as of this time, one person is required approximately halftime. Funding for this function includes both time and travel expenses. The secretariat function includes, but is not limited to:

- Maintenance of IFAST records (e.g., membership lists, email directory, meeting minutes).
- Collection of revenues and performance of necessary accounting procedures.
- Development, approval, and dissemination of real-time meeting notes.
- Coordination of correspondence between the IFAST and the global telecommunications community.
- Coordination of the logistics necessary for three IFAST meetings per year (e.g., meeting announcements, collection meeting fees, coordinating audio-visual equipment availability, document availability and copying, arranging meeting and hotel accommodations, meeting agenda coordination and preparation).
- Respond to numerous voice and electronic queries regarding all aspects of IFAST, e.g., IRM/SID applications and conflicts, meeting details, roaming issues.

2.2. Active Chairperson

It was recognized from the inception of the IFAST that the chairmanship of a global forum, particularly one tasked to impartially administer an international numbering resource, requires unique expertise. The necessary expertise includes not only the usual attributes (forum management, meeting management, interpersonal skills, technical knowledge, etc.) but skills such as international relations, global numbering plan knowledge, numbering plan administrative processes, and a positive international reputation. It is also necessary that the chairman be able to dedicate at least 30 days per year to the chairman responsibilities (including meetings). Historically, this function also involves the handling of voluminous voice and electronic queries regarding IFAST and its functions.

Funding for this function includes both time and travel expenses.

2.3. Active Co-convener

Forums normally have a member or members that have positions in support of the Chairperson and the Secretariat. These members, together with the Chairperson and the Secretariat make up the IFAST Management Team. Some forums title these members as vice chairperson; the IFAST titles them co-conveners in that many of their routine responsibilities related to the convening and functioning of IFAST meetings. In an international forum it is important that

their be multiple and equal co-conveners (or vice chairpersons) that reflect the international composition of the forum. As with the Secretariat and the Chairperson, the co-conveners also must respond to numerous voice and electronic queries regarding IFAST and its functions. The IFAST currently has two co-conveners to perform this function.

Funding for this function includes both time and travel expenses. The level of funding for co-conveners will be on an individual basis, i.e., some entities may be willing to subsidize co-convener responsibilities either directly or by in-kind recognition.

2.4. IRM/SID Administrative System and Responsibilities

This function contains two aspects, the maintenance of a support system and the performance of the administrative responsibilities for the International Roaming MINs (IRMs) and System Identifier (SID) ranges that were develop by, and are under the continued purview, of the IFAST. In order to ensure the effective and efficient management and administration of any numbering resource, a support system (database, peripherals, and communications) must be developed, maintained, and operated. Additionally, there must be a person or entity tasked to perform the administration and management of the IRMs and SID ranges, in accordance with the IRM Assignment Guidelines that were developed by the consensus of the IFAST members. A significant administrative aspect of this function is the resolution of IRM and SID conflicts. The cost of this function includes the system maintenance (the development is completed and has been provided by an IFAST member), and time for the administrator to perform the administrative responsibilities.

2.5. Informational and Active Web Site

It's routine for forum to develop and maintain unique Web Sites. These web Sites normally perform multiple functions: forum awareness information, document publication, meeting announcements/minutes, issues awareness, communications with their members and the pertinent community. In addition to these functions, the IFAST Web Site reports IRM assignments and provides an interactive method for members to comment on pending IRM applications. To date, the IFAST Web Site development and maintenance was funded by member contributions. That funding has "dried up" and the site has not been adequately maintained for the last several months. In order to ensure an effective Web Site, there needs to be stable funding for this function.

2.6. Logistical Support for Meetings

Forums that conduct regular full membership meetings always establish a procedure for subsidizing the costs of such meetings. Costs include, but are not limited to: copying, refreshments, meeting room, audio-visual equipment. Of the

many methods of subsidizing meeting costs, the IFAST has, to date, decided to charge each meeting attendee a prorated share of the meeting costs. The amount has been predetermined and paid by the meeting participants either in advance of a meeting, as part of the meeting registration, or onsite at the meeting.

3. Funding Alternatives

Forum funding is often obtained by both monetary fees/contributions and by services in-kind. The alternatives described below can accommodate both revenue sources.

3.1. Membership fees

This method involves the assessment of an annual fee payable by each member entity in an amount that covers the annual budget of the IFAST.
- Advantages:
  - Can provide a stable and single source of income if the forum membership is stable and adequate.
  - Fee collection is simple since it usually involves one consistent annual billing and the membership is established, committed, and accustomed to the funding process.
- Disadvantages:
  - For a newly established and evolving forum, such as the IFAST, the quantity of permanent membership is unknown and may not be adequate to meet the financial needs of the forum.
- Issues requiring resolution
  - Definition of "member", e.g., person, entity, organization within an entity.
  - Determination of the fee basis, e.g., entity size-based.
  - The criteria for "in-kind" fee payments, i.e., the offering of IFAST support services for in-kind deferral of membership and meeting fees as well potential IFAST Website recognition.

3.2. Meeting attendance fees

This method involves the assessment of a per meeting fee equally to each meeting participant that covers the actual costs for conducting each meeting.
- Advantages
  - Charges are for a specific and identifiable function.
  - Charges are assessed on a user specific basis.
  - Limits the financial burden on entities hosting meetings, thereby increasing the potential number of entities that would be willing to host such meetings.
- Disadvantages
  - Collection mechanism is inherently cumbersome, i.e., requires effort prior to the meeting, during the meeting (when there's enough else to do), and sometimes after the meeting.

- Difficult to obtain revenues adequate enough to sustain all the forum's functions in a fair and equitable manner.

3.3. Member contributions

This method involves the annual solicitation of funding from members of the IFAST. The funding must equal the annual IFAST budget and must be obtained annually.

- Advantages
  - If there are enough members willing to contribute at a consistent level and on an annual basis, this can be the simplest method to administer.
- Disadvantages
  - Requires significant commitment by the Forum's staff to constantly solicit and acquire contributions and contributors.
  - Unless there are adequate and consistent contributors, the level of funding will not be stable.
  - Results in disproportionate funding across the entire membership, possibly resulting in, at least, the perception of undue influence for the contributors and a perception of being "lesser" members by those entities not able to contribute.

3.4. IRM application fees

This method involves a set fee per IRM application (fee is for each IRM requested) payable by each applicant and to accompany the submittal of an application form. The fees would be assessed for a multiple year period in order to minimize the administrative costs and to maximize the funding stability – similar to the current procedures for Internet domain names. The revenues from such a fee could be calculated to subsidize only the cost of processing an application or expanded to cover a portion of, or the entire, IFAST budget.

- Advantages
  - Charges are for a specific and identifiable function – application processing.
  - Charges are assessed on a user specific basis.
  - Charges are assessed to a broad cross-section of the industry.
  - Easy to assess – a flat fee consistently obtained with each application.
  - Conservation of resources – applicants will only request the exact quantity of resources required at the time of application, if the fee is large enough.
- Disadvantages
  - Potentially unfair to new applicants if not assessed from the beginning of the IRM application process.
  - Difficult to obtain revenues adequate enough to sustain all the forum's functions in a fair and equitable manner.

3.5. IRM annual fees

This method involves a set fee per assigned IRM payable by the assignee of each IRM on an annual basis. The revenues from such a fee could be calculated to subsidize only the cost of the IRM support system maintenance and IRM administration or expanded to cover a portion of, or the entire IFAST budget.

- Advantages
  - Charges are potentially for a specific and identifiable function – administrative system support.
  - Charges are assessed on a user specific basis.
  - Charges are assessed to a broad cross-section of the industry.
  - Easy to assess – a flat fee consistently billed to identified IRM assignees.
  - Conservation of resources – assignees will only maintain the quantity of IRMs that they need to provide near-term roaming services, if the fee is large enough. It is anticipated that some of the large blocks of assigned IRMs may be returned for reassignment.
- Disadvantages
  - Cumbersome collection process requiring numerous bills.
  - Potential collection problems (a potential legal minefield).
- Issues Requiring Resolution
  - Method by which to terminate the international networks' recognition/ call processing of IRMs for which fees have not been paid.

4. Funding Recommendation

The funding recommendation is in two phases: long-term method and short-term method. If this recommendation is accepted, the IFAST will need to closely monitor the evolution of the Forum. Once the need for IRMs is diminished and the Forum has become more technical issue oriented, the funding method should change from the short-term to the long-term method.

4.1. Long-term method recommendation

It is recommended that the long-term method of IFAST funding should be by membership fees. This is the most stable and fair method of funding.

However, this method requires a stable and active membership. Currently the IFAST is evolving from the forum largely responsible for IRM allocation to a forum that resolves all technical and administrative issues with regard to international roaming. Consequently, the large number of entities currently on the membership list is due largely to the number of entities attending meetings to obtain IRM allocations. Therefore, there is concern that the assessment of membership fees, at this time, would cause the list to be significantly depleted until there is sufficient interest in the evolving scope of the IFAST, i.e., the resolution of technical issues, to result in a stable and active membership.

4.2. Short-term method recommendation

It is recommended that the short-term method of IFAST should simultaneously include multiple methods detailed above. It is believed that this method, for the current IFAST environment, is the fairest and most equitable and can result in significant resource conservation results.

The IFAST should continue to collect Meeting Attendance Fees, a fair and equitable method of subsidizing the cost of IFAST meetings. Many fora utilize this method of partial funding, but mostly only to recover the costs of meetings.

Additionally, the IFAST should institute both IRM Application Fees and IRM Annual Fees. The IRM Application Fees can, of course, only be assessed to new applications, not retroactively to previous applicants. The IRM Annual Fees, however, will be assessed to all current and future IRM assignees.