

Voluntary Consensus Standards Body

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Discussion

A voluntary consensus standards body is an association, organization, or technical society that plans, develops, establishes, adopts, or coordinates voluntary consensus standards through a qualifying standards development process.

The process includes the following attributes:

- **Openness:** Interested parties receive meaningful opportunities to participate on a non-discriminatory basis, and the development procedures remain transparent
- **Balance:** A broad range of materially affected interests participates, and no single interest dominates decision-making
- **Due process:** Documented procedures provide notice, review time, access to participant views and objections, and a fair process for resolving conflicting views
- **Appeals:** Participants have access to an impartial process for procedural appeals
- **Consensus:** The body reaches general agreement without requiring unanimity and considers comments and objections through fair, impartial, open, and transparent procedures

A voluntary consensus standards body is defined by its standards development process rather than solely by its legal form, geographic location, membership model, or subject domain.

An organization may develop both voluntary consensus standards and other artifacts. Each claimed voluntary consensus standard depends on the process used to develop or adopt that standard.

Definition

association, organization, or technical society that develops or adopts voluntary consensus standards through an open, balanced, due-process-based, appealable, and consensus-based process.

Source

National Technology Transfer and Advancement Act of 1995, Public Law 104-113 Office of Management and Budget, Circular A-119: Federal Participation in the Development and Use of Voluntary Consensus Standards and in Conformity Assessment Activities National Institute of Standards and Technology, Federal Policy on Standards

Note

The terms standards body, standards development organization, and voluntary consensus standards body are not automatically interchangeable. A standards organization qualifies as a voluntary consensus standards body for the purposes of OMB Circular A-119 when its applicable process exhibits the required attributes.

Recognition as a voluntary consensus standards body does not mean that every standard produced by the organization is suitable for every regulatory, procurement, architectural, or operational purpose. The adopting authority evaluates each standard for applicability, technical suitability, legal consistency, availability, and implementation consequences.

Example

A federal agency evaluates whether a standards organization provides open participation, balanced representation, documented due process, impartial appeals, and consensus-based approval before treating one of its specifications as a voluntary consensus standard.

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