

ENGAGING CONSUMERS IN THE AMERICAN NATIONAL STANDARDS PROCESS



*An Informational
Guide for
ANSI-Accredited
Standards Developers*



The *United States Standards Strategy (USSS)*, the *ANSI Essential Requirements*, and the *ANSI International Procedures* all recognize the importance of the representation of a variety of perspectives in voluntary consensus standards development, including consumers who are directly and materially interested in a particular standard.

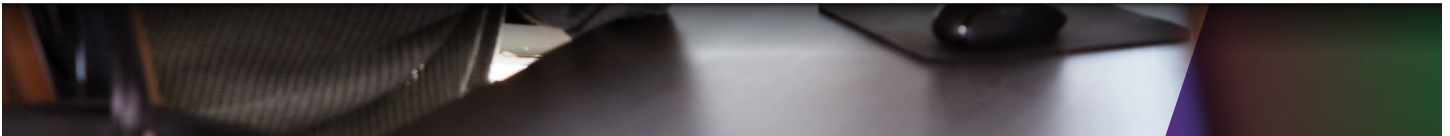
Consumer engagement in the American National Standards (ANS) process is valuable and essential, enabling consumer perspectives to be shared with others involved in the development of a standard, including the ANSI-accredited standards developer (ASD), participating organizations, government agencies, companies, and other stakeholders. Consumers directly enhance the market-relevancy of a standard¹ by:

- » providing feedback on acceptable levels of risk for the products defined by standards;
- » offering advice on communication issues including labeling, product instructions, and warnings;
- » suggesting features needed by consumers with special needs such as children, older adults, or people with disabilities; and
- » giving examples of how goods and services are actually used (or predictably misused) in practice.

¹ International Organization for Standardization. *Involving Consumers: Why and How*. <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui#iso:pub:PUB100277>.



ABOUT THIS INFORMATIONAL GUIDE



ANSI and ASDs have a pivotal role to play in enhancing consumer awareness of the U.S. standardization system. To help improve stakeholder balance, ANSI believes it is important to more fully understand the perspective of consumers, with the goal of increasing their participation in standards development activities. In its unique role as coordinator of the U.S. private-sector standardization system, ANSI convened consumers, consumer advocacy organizations, standards developers, and public interest groups in a series of roundtable discussions to better understand the challenges ASDs may face when seeking to bring consumer voices into a consensus body² or to otherwise contribute to standards development activities. This informational guide for ANSI-accredited standards developers has been developed from the collective input gathered during these roundtable sessions.

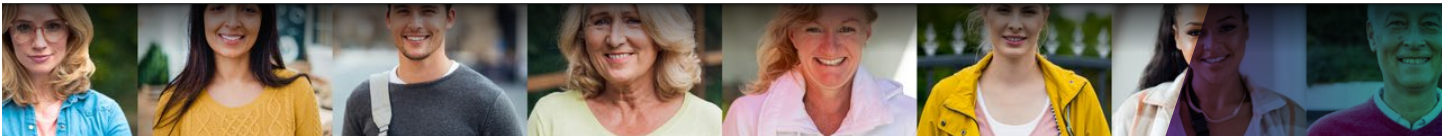
This guide of recommended practices is offered as a practical tool to help address these challenges by encouraging ASDs to:

- » increase consumer awareness of the U.S. standardization system;
- » enhance consumer participation on a consensus body; and
- » create and nurture relationships with consumers in order to achieve sustained, long-term consumer participation.

² A consensus body is the group that approves the content of a standard and whose vote demonstrates evidence of consensus.



WHO ARE CONSUMERS?



For the purpose of this guide, the definition of “consumer” established by the ANSI Consumer Interest Forum (CIF) is used, which defines a consumer as someone who is directly and materially interested in a standards development activity, and is or represents one of the following:



An individual member of the general public who purchases or uses property, products, or services for private purpose



A consumer advocacy organization that is active in consumer protection



A consumer studies or related department in academic institutions



A public interest organization



STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING CONSUMER AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT



Consumer awareness and outreach communications from ASDs are most effective when they make very clear:

- » that the ASD seeks and values substantive consumer participation;
- » how consumers can contribute to the process; and
- » the benefits and impact of consumer participation on a standard.

A consumer-focused value proposition details how participation in a standards development activity can address consumer problems or concerns, or improve their situation (relevancy), the specific benefits consumers can expect (quantified value), and why consumers should choose to participate in a process that meets the *ANSI Essential Requirements* (unique differentiation). This consumer-focused value proposition can readily be shared through in-person communications, as well as through informational flyers, FAQ informational outreach documents, and other easy-to-understand communications designed for non-expert consumer audiences.

CONDUCT DIRECT AND TARGETED OUTREACH

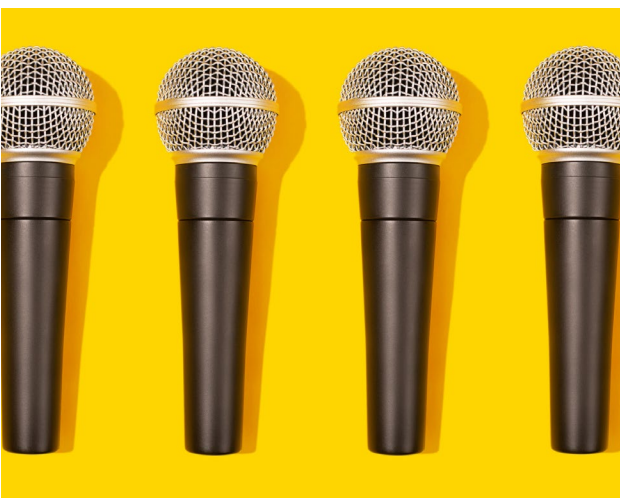


Targeted outreach to directly and materially interested consumers is essential to increasing consumer awareness and participation in the U.S. standardization system. Informing consumers of upcoming activities introduces consumers to the sponsoring ASD and improves awareness of the U.S. standardization system, enhancing the openness and transparency of the upcoming activity.

When reaching out to consumers who are directly impacted by a standard, it is important to keep in mind that unless they are already engaged in some kind of standards activity, they may not be reached via ANSI's Standards Action, social media posts through an ASD's routine channel, or a general press release. Many consumers are not likely to be connected to these resources and will need to be informed and engaged via targeted outreach.

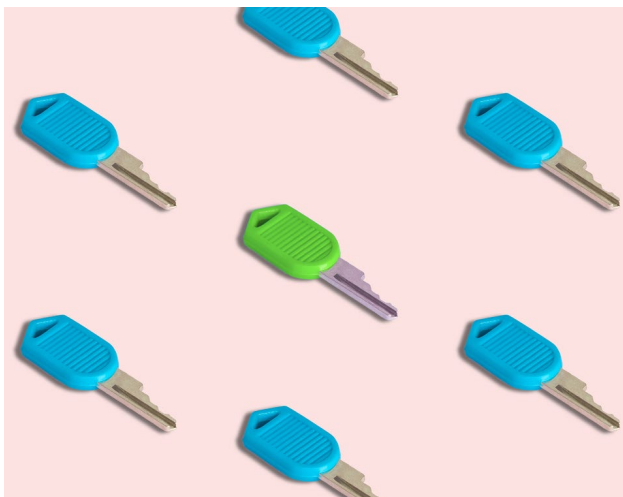
Outreach to notify consumers of upcoming standards development activities is likely to be most successful when issued through consumer-focused websites, social media groups, webinars, blogs, publications, and newsletters. Customized meeting announcements, press releases, articles, and the like should thus be placed strategically.

LEVERAGE PARTNERSHIPS TO AMPLIFY OUTREACH



ASDs should also establish ongoing relationships with consumer advocacy groups and public interest groups who can inform their members of upcoming activities and encourage participation, as well as with individual consumers who can serve as advocates. Such partnerships can help to amplify outreach efforts and increase awareness.

PROVIDE ACCESS TO INFORMATION



To further enhance the culture of openness and transparency, it is essential that ASDs make information readily accessible to all participating stakeholders, including consumers. Improving access to information about upcoming activities and building awareness further develops trust between ASDs and consumers.

ASDs are strongly encouraged to share information and resources via direct and targeted distribution to consumers and all participants in the development process, including:

- » flow charts detailing the ASD's standards development process;
- » online links to the ASD's policies and procedures;
- » ASD contact information for questions;
- » opportunities for contributing to the development of standards, such as participating on a consensus body, submitting comments during a public review period, or participating in a drafting group;
- » advance notice of upcoming standards development activities that have a potential impact on consumer health and safety;
- » information about the level of participation required, both time and commitment; and
- » information about resources to support consumer participation.



STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING CONSUMERS EFFECTIVELY IN STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT



Connecting with consumers and educating them on the standards development process is essential to achieving meaningful engagement and participation. The likelihood of successful engagement is improved if there is a match between consumer interests and the focus of a standards activity, and if the outreach and educational materials are appealing, easy to understand, and targeted to consumers, no matter their technical background or their familiarity with the U.S. standardization system.

MAINTAIN UPCOMING ACTIVITIES LIST



Standards developers should create an annual list of upcoming activities based on the potential impact to consumers' health, safety and the environment. Sharing a prioritized list of upcoming activities of interest to consumers can keep these individuals and organizations informed and provide them with the time needed to allocate adequate finances and staff bandwidth for active participation.

OFFER EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND RESOURCES



Effective engagement can also be achieved through videos or online tutorials that educate consumers on the U.S. standardization system and a particular standards development process. Such videos and tutorials should be simple yet informative, focused, and accessible.

It is also helpful to create online onboarding or training programs for consumers to access and understand the ASD's standards development process as well as a consumer's rights and responsibilities as a participant, such as the level of participation required. Such information should include meeting schedules, participation options, instructions on accessing required technology, and resources for further assistance.

Governing policy and procedure documents should be shared widely among consensus body members and other participants and included in training to set expectations and promote buy-in from all, reinforcing that each member has an equal footing and access to information. These online resources not only benefit consumers, but also help educate all consensus body members and other participants.

Another helpful resource that can be shared is historical information about a standard. Providing previous or redlined versions of a standard, including the committee's explanations and rationale for changes, can help inform a new participant's comments going forward. Sharing this information can provide consumers a fuller perspective of the history and landscape of the activity and discussions.

Consumers note that financial resources to support their participation are often limited, but when available, encourage and sustain consumer participation. Individual consumers, consumer advocacy groups, and public interest groups may be unable to cover the financial costs associated with attending in-person standards development activities. If a standards developer can offer financial support, doing so can result in increased consumer participation. Ideally, such support to cover the cost of travel and accommodations is offered in advance, rather than as later reimbursement.

Consumer advocacy and public interest groups can also lack the financial or human resources necessary for sustained participation in the development of a standard. Many of these groups are non-profit grassroots organizations dependent on small volunteer staffs and limited self-raised funds. Providing grants to such non-profit organizations can generate consistent participation throughout the standards development process.

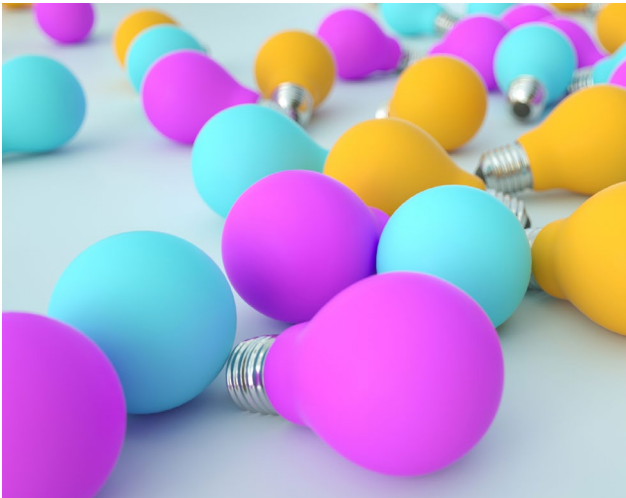


STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINING CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT IN STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT



Good faith efforts should be made to engage and sustain relationships with consumers for the long-term in an effort to promote their participation in future or other related standards development activities.

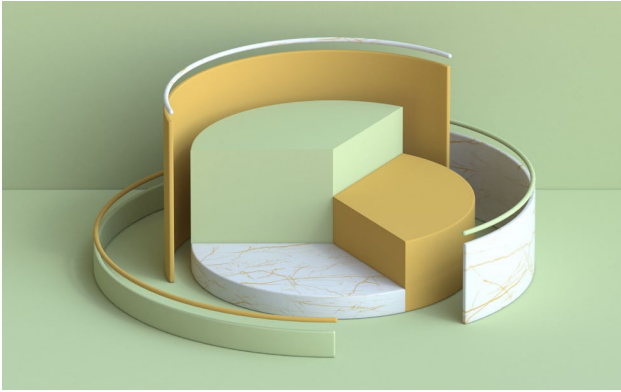
CREATE INFORMATION SHARING AND MENTORING OPPORTUNITIES



An important aspect of relationship development is to support and create opportunities to come together and share information, in-person or virtually. Such mechanisms may include dedicated social media groups, direct messaging platforms, and cloud-based file sharing.

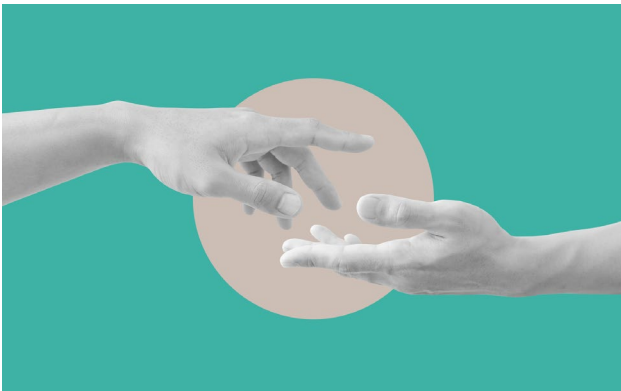
Additionally, establishing mentoring programs or a consumer relations committee that connect new consumer consensus body members to more experienced members can encourage new consumer participants to learn more about the ASD's process and gain insight into that process and its unique landscape.

EXPAND EFFORTS TO INCREASE NUMBERS OF ENGAGED CONSUMERS



One reason cited by consumers as to why they do not stay engaged in standards development is that the number of consumer representatives on standards committees is typically extremely small and they feel they have great difficulty influencing the outcome of a standard. Expanding efforts to increase the number of consumers involved in the consensus process can help address this.

CONSIDER DOCUMENTATION STRATEGY



ASDs can also consider documenting minority opinions in an informative document that is available to current and future participants in a standards activity. This documentation strategy could provide encouragement to the voters in the minority and sustain engagement.

EDUCATE ASD STAFF AND CONSENSUS BODY LEADERSHIP



Lastly, consumer engagement can be enhanced by educating ASD staff on the impact consumers can have in a standards development activity, which can help staff take a holistic and meaningful approach when conducting outreach to consumers. Additionally, it is equally important to train consensus body leadership and chairs and to encourage representation of different interests in leadership roles at various levels in the standards development process.

ANSI RESOURCE LINKS

[ANSI Consumer Affairs Activities](#)

[ANSI Consumer Interest Forum](#)

[General Public Participation in the American National Standards Process](#)

[General Public Participation in ANSI ISO Activities](#)

The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) is a private non-profit organization whose mission is to enhance both the global competitiveness of U.S. business and the U.S. quality of life by promoting, facilitating, and safeguarding the integrity of the voluntary standardization and conformity assessment system. Its membership is comprised of businesses, professional societies and trade associations, standards developers, government agencies, and consumer and labor organizations.

The Institute represents the interests of more than 270,000 companies and 30 million professionals worldwide. ANSI is the official U.S. representative to the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and, via the U.S. National Committee, the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC).

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