

## **Engaging Consumers in Standards Development: Recommendations from Consumer Representatives**

This guidance for engaging consumers in standards development is intended to assist ANSI-Accredited Standards Developers (ASDs) in recruiting appropriate consumer participation in the development of consumer-product-safety standards. By definition, guidance is voluntary – adherence is not essential for ASDs to be in compliance with the *ANSI Essential Requirements* ([www.ansi.org/essentialrequirements](http://www.ansi.org/essentialrequirements)). Rather, this document is an effort to identify possible approaches that a standards developer might wish to adopt, either in whole or in part, for purposes of effectively implementing the *ANSI Essential Requirements* and their accredited procedures. Additional or different steps could also be selected for such purposes.

### **FINDING CONSUMER REPRESENTATIVES WHEN THE NATURE OF THE STANDARD WOULD BENEFIT FROM CONSUMER INPUT**

#### **Useful Suggestions**

1. Contact these groups and similar professional, advocacy and neighborhood groups, as needed: Consumer groups such as Consumers Union, Consumer Federation of America, National Consumers League, Kids in Danger, Public Citizen, American Council on Consumer Interests, and AARP; consumer affairs departments of universities; academic societies; Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals International; retired teachers; and appropriate governmental agencies (not just Federal, but State and local too).
2. Contact ANSI's Manager of Consumer and Government Outreach who can provide advice and guidance regarding your outreach efforts.
3. Conduct individualized outreach outside of your organization's membership.
4. Identify relevant social media groups and community organizations, e.g., groups targeted to neighbors, PTAs, not-for-profits with relevant missions and goals. Seek non-traditional sources for true "consumer" representatives.
5. Find out whether your organization is able to offer funding to support consumer participation (e.g., any out-of-pocket expenses). If so, consumers may appreciate when funds are provided upfront. Determine, as an organization, how funds would be administered and communicate that to qualified interested candidates. (Note: ANSI does not require ASDs to fund participation of consumers or any other directly and materially interested parties in the ANS process. Such funding is, however, one way to potentially support the goal of balance, which is an essential element in the ANS process.)
6. Remember your audience:

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, it is unlikely that this audience will be reached via ANSI's *Standards Action*, a social media post through an ANSI-Accredited Standards Developer's (ASD's) routine channels, or a general press release. Most consumers are not likely to be connected to these resources and will need to be informed and engaged via targeted – and personalized - outreach.

Common outreach mechanisms used to notify stakeholders of upcoming standards development activities should be customized to reach consumers directly. Research may be needed to identify consumer-focused websites, social media groups, webinars, blogs,

publications and newsletters. Customized meeting announcements, press releases, articles, and the like should then be placed strategically. ASDs should also establish ongoing relationships with individual consumers who have been identified as advocates and/or experts, consumer advocacy groups, and public interest groups to inform them and their members of upcoming activities and encourage participation. Partnerships with these organizations amplify outreach efforts and increase awareness.

## **MAKING THE CASE**

To engage consumers in a particular American National Standard (ANS) development process, an ASD should strive to make a straightforward, easily understood case for why an individual or organization's consumer perspective will make the resulting standard safer or more fit-for-purpose. In other words, convince the consumer that their contribution will be respected, valued, considered and can truly make a difference.

Consider addressing these aspects of the standard in your engagement presentation:

- ✓ Relevancy: how participation in a standards development activity can address consumer problems or concerns, or improve a particular situation;
- ✓ Benefits: the specific benefits consumers could obtain from participating and from the standard, e.g., the potential for making consumers safer through the development of standards that could result in safer products being on store shelves (thereby potentially reducing deaths and injuries). Quantify the value of the standard wherever possible;
- ✓ Time commitment: estimate the amount of time and travel any participation option will require – and include milestones and deliverables so consumer participants can plan and expectations are understood; and
- ✓ ANS process value: explain why consumers should choose to participate in a process that meets the *ANSI Essential Requirements*.

## **MAKING THE CONNECTION**

Explaining any standards development process can be a challenge. Connecting potential consumer representatives with seasoned and knowledgeable current participants could help convince them that their participation would be time well spent and could result in a standard that supports and advances the public interest.

## **AFTER THE CONNECTION**

Consider:

- ✓ A mentoring program – introducing a new consumer representative to a knowledgeable consensus body member who has agreed to provide guidance; introduce consumer representatives to each other, and provide appropriate staff support
- ✓ A coffee chat or lunch session to connect individual consumers with other consensus body members – allow attendees to explain their interest in the standard and their motivation for participating
- ✓ A pre/post-meeting educational session for consumers, explaining what they can expect during a particular meeting (or why certain decisions were made) and addressing any process questions or sharing relevant information so they are comfortable going forward
- ✓ The publication of simple, digestible educational videos about the process, how to engage during a meeting, what the rules and expectations for participation are - with a specific follow-up contact

- ✓ A separate live webinar for consumer representatives to allow them to meet each other formally, while a staff person is available to answer process-related questions

### **EFFECTIVE USE OF MEETING TOOLS/TECHNOLOGY**

Understanding the technology your organization uses to conduct meetings, share information, etc. is key to any consensus body member's participation effectiveness. As a consumer representative will likely be new to standards development, including the rules and technology employed by your organization in particular, it makes sense to ensure that ready access exists to information that explains the technology and how a user can optimize their experience with it. An ASD can help achieve this goal by providing a resource (brochure, website, video, etc.) that consolidates and presents all of the key aspects of the technology that allow for and support meaningful participation. Such a resource should explain the use of the technology employed in the specific context of your organization's standards development model.

### **SUSTAINING PARTICIPATION**

It is important to recognize that unlike many consensus body members who are employed by companies, organizations, and government agencies, and who are therefore sponsored to participate and represent the interests of their employers in standards development, consumer participants act in a volunteer capacity and are usually unable to self-fund their participation during what can be a lengthy process. Hence, some form of funding – especially for out-of-pocket expenses – is often necessary. If possible, a small stipend to recognize time devoted to standards work is also helpful.

Ensure that your organization's staff understands why consumer participation is desirable in any given standards development activity, and understands the targeted efforts your organization expects staff to take. Also be sure that your organization has a central tracking mechanism, so internal resources are used efficiently and consumers are not repeatedly contacted by different staff.

It would be helpful to develop and maintain a database of potential consumer participants. In this way, an ASD can create a new consensus body more quickly and more fully.

Investing resources to sustain consumer representation in an ASD's standards development process can result in a consensus standard that is more readily adopted, making the world a safer place – and confirms to stakeholders that your organization is committed to meaningful consumer participation, which is in the public's interest.

**For additional discussion about engaging consumers, see ANSI's website at <https://www.ansi.org/outreach/consumers/engaging-consumers-in-ans-process>**