



The SMPTE Standards Program—Part 3

By Peter Symes

The previous article in this series discussed the committee structure within SMPTE that is the core of the standards program. This article addresses participation, membership options for SMPTE committees, and the various ways to be aware of, and contribute to, the ongoing work.

Participation in SMPTE Committees

The development of useful standards requires the participation of both manufacturers and users. Members of SMPTE committees participate as individual experts, although they are frequently sponsored by a manufacturing or user company. These experts bring to the discussion much more than a company position; they bring a broad range and great depth of experience within the industry.

The level of participation varies widely. Some members just watch, listen, and learn; others contribute consistently to many ongoing projects. Some rarely attend a meeting; some participate by telephone; others attend almost every physical meeting, wherever in the world it may be! The main qualifications are interest and a willingness to engage in frank but courteous discussion. Each participant must agree to a Statement of Participation, which sets out the basic rules. There are two main areas, a patent statement and a confidentiality agreement.

Although it is acceptable (and quite common) for standards to rely on patented technology, the committee must be made aware of possible patent protection and be able to ask the patent holder(s) for a commitment to license under reasonable and non-discriminatory terms. For this reason, all committee participants must agree to inform the committee if they are personally aware of any patents or patent applications that may be essential to the work in progress.

Sometimes standards undergo radical changes during the development process. For this reason, publication of incomplete work is dangerous and can represent a major disservice to the industry. Committee participants are encouraged to discuss ongoing work with their professional colleagues, but they agree not to publish or distribute any incomplete work.

Who Can Join SMPTE Committees?

As discussed in the previous article, there is a hierarchical network of committees; development work is generally conducted in Working Groups and Ad Hoc Groups, often by e-mail and telephone conferences. Document approval is the responsibility of the parent Technology Committee.

Any SMPTE member in good standing may join the standards development process. Non-members who wish to join the committees may do so by paying a separate participant fee. The first step for a member or non-member participant is to join the Standards Community—this is an umbrella group over all of the Technology Committees, and joining the Standards Community requires explicit acceptance of the Statement of Participation mentioned above. At the time of writing there are about 700 members of the Standards Community.

All members of the Standards Community can join any (or all) of the Technology Committees, and their respective subgroups.

What Level of Participation is Required?

SMPTE recognizes that some participants have very limited time to devote to standards activities, and many have interest and/or expertise in only a few specific projects. Also, many participants have important contributions to make, but may not be able to travel to all, or even any, of the physical meetings. However, for the credibility of the standards process, it is important to be able to show that a sensible proportion of the voting members of each committee actively support the adoption of each document. For this reason, there are two classes of membership in Technology Committees.

Everyone initially joins a Technology Committee as an Observer. This class of membership carries no obligations for meeting attendance and has no voting rights.

Participant members (P-members) are full voting members of the committee. To become a P-member, an Observer must first attend at least one Technology Committee meeting (participation by telephone is acceptable) before application. Then, application is made (by e-mail) to the committee Chair to become a P-member. P-members commit to consistent participation in meetings (again, telephone participation counts) and to regular voting in online committee ballots. If this level of activity becomes unmanageable a P-member may request a change to Observer status, and may become a P-member again at any time on request. However, a P-member who misses more than two consecutive meetings,

or fails to vote on two consecutive ballots, will be moved involuntarily to Observer status, and may not re-apply for P-member status for one year.

Observers are still a very important part of the process. They may participate in all meetings and have access to the web services for the committee, and to all committee documents. Most importantly, Observers are informed of all ballots and, although they do not vote, may comment on any ballot in which they have interest or expertise. In finalization of a document, Observer comments must be resolved in the same way as those of P-members.

Note that this distinction applies only to Technology Committees, the consensus bodies that formally approve engineering documents. All development work in subgroups is informal and everyone has Observer status.

Can I Attend a Meeting as a Guest?

Guests are welcome at the meetings; we just ask that every guest sign in, accepting the same rules as the Statement of Participation requires of members (patent declaration and confidentiality). Give it a try... committee descriptions and meeting schedules are available at www.smpete.org/standards/, and we look forward to the opportunity to engage you in the process!

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