



One Community, One Standard

In support of
Family History Information Standards Organisation

Why FHISO?
Position Paper/Comment Draft v01-04

Comments should be addressed to fhiso@fhiso.org. Please include "Why FHISO 01-04" in the subject line.

Family History Information Standards Organisation, Inc.

<http://www.fhiso.org/>

2012-07-25 (July 25)

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Technical Standards

The role standards play in a competitive marketplace

International developers, service providers, family historians and genealogists all depend on a competitive marketplace. Simply put, users have needs that innovative suppliers want to meet. This includes that in an ever more interconnected world, the demands on and benefits of interoperability are great. Change is constant; choice reigns!

Technical standards play an important role in the competitive market place. Developers and service providers depend on standards in order to deliver innovation and value to users. In the case of genealogy and family history, standards also determine the information that can be exchanged between users' programs, and between programs and Internet services.

More than a decade has passed since the release of *GEDCOM 5.5 (5.5.1)*, the industry's current *de facto* standard(s). During this time, development and innovation has continued. Functionality has increased, but so have proprietary information structures. These proprietary structures cause problems in our interconnected world. Better technical standards can solve these problems.

Members of the genealogical community agree that a new standard is needed. The question in 2012 is how to develop the new standard.

Family History Information Standards Organisation (FHISO) would like to see community standards developed democratically in an open forum. Such a forum will allow for consideration of the different and competitive needs of more service providers, program developers and users.

About FHISO

Family History Information Standards Organisation, Inc. (FHISO) is an Arizona non-profit corporation.

FHISO was formed in early 2012 for the purpose of developing international standards for the digital representation of family history and genealogical information.

FHISO will be owned by the international community it serves.

Community Standards Development

Diversity and due process works

Most sectors, from the library sciences to Internet connectivity, routinely gather diverse interests in democratic forums and develop consensus-based standards.¹ A few of the organizations that provide such forums are *International Organization for Standardization* (www.iso.org); *The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers* (www.ieee.org); *National Information Standards Organization* (www.niso.org); *World Wide Web Consortium* (www.w3.org); *Health Level Seven International* (www.hl7.org).

In almost all cases, standards developing organizations have been established because otherwise competitive community leaders expressed a need. The governance and oversight of the organizations created tend to share

common principles that promote pro-competitive benefits by emphasizing diversity and due process. The *American National Standards Institute* (www.ansi.org),² explains that due process “means that any person (organization, company, government agency, individual, etc.) with a direct and material interest has a right to participate ... [it] allows for equity and fair play.”

ANSI, which certifies both standards and standards organizations, has established a framework of nine due process requirements for the development of consensus-based standards. Briefly, five of these requirements are

- Openness. “Participation shall be open to all persons who are directly and materially affected by the activity in question ...”
- Lack of Dominance. “The standards development process shall not be dominated by any single interest category, individual or organization ...”
- Balance. “The standards development process should have a balance of interests...”
- Consideration of views and objections. “Prompt consideration shall be given to the written views and objections of all participants ...”
- Consensus ... “Evidence of consensus in accordance with these requirements ... shall be documented.”

Community organizations typically develop open standards (not to be confused with open source development). Open standards are available to and may be implemented by anyone.

The objective of community standards development is to produce outcomes that benefit the community, and it works. Balanced participation ensures these organizations solve more problems for more users more of the time. The forums are participatory, thus wider adoption of the standards is expected. Open, transparent and continuing operations maximize the pro-competitive benefits, including greater innovation, better access to finance and capital markets, and sustained development.

FHISO

Community standards development for family history and genealogy

The Family History Information Standards Organisation (<http://fhiso.org/>) was created to develop international standards based on the principles of diversity and due process. Standards developed by the organization will better meet the different and competitive needs of all service providers, program developers and users--globally.

Genealogists and technologists will work side by side to define needs and develop solutions. This will provide for a standard that more closely matches universal community requirements.

- Users will enjoy greater functionality and be in the best position to exchange information with other users and between programs. They will be able to connect with information services of their choosing.
- Developers will be able to adopt a single standard with the confidence that their product meets expressed community requirements.
- Service providers benefit because more programs and customers will be able to conveniently access their services.

Did you know?

In the European Union, standards organizations have a responsibility to “design clear rules that reduce the risk of competitive problems.”

European Commission guidelines provide further that “standard-setting will normally not restrict competition if the following four principles are met:”

1. Participation in standard-setting is unrestricted;
2. The procedure for adopting the standard in question is transparent;
3. There is no obligation to comply with the standard;
4. Access to the standard is on fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory terms.

Ruben Schellingherhout, “Standard-setting from a competitive law perspective,” European Commission, *Competition Policy Newsletter* 2011-1: 3-9, for p. 6; electronic edition (http://ec.europa.eu/competition/publications/cpn/cpn2011_1_en.pdf)

As a community owned organization engaged in sustained development, FHISO will provide maintenance of and education about the standards. This means that users and implementers will receive support from the organization, and that the standards will remain relevant as needs and technologies change.

Sustained development also allows the organization to manage projects with objectives that extend across multiple release cycles.

Adoption of FHISO standards will be voluntary; the standards will be made publicly available at zero or minimal cost on a non-discriminatory basis.

FHISO's success depends on all of the different and competitive global stakeholder groups participating voluntarily.

In developing universal community standards, there is *no substitute* for the active involvement of vendors, developers, technologists, users and family history or genealogy organizations.

FHISO is here. The time is now. Help us gather the community within FHISO. Let's develop a standard, together.

Sustained Development

Sustained development means the organization will support the standard. This contributes to more relevant standards and wider adoption of the standards.



Sustained development also allows the organization to tackle longer term projects, those for which comprehensive solutions require work extending beyond a single release cycle.

This is a FHISO Position Paper/Comment Draft. Your input is encouraged. Comments should be addressed to fhiso@fhiso.org. Please include the subject heading, "Why FHISO 01-04."

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¹ In the context of standards, consensus refers not to unanimity, but to general agreement among stakeholders after thoughtful collaboration has addressed material objections.

² "The ANSI Essential Requirements...", 2012, American National Standards Institute (<http://www.ansi.org>). Today, FHISO is neither accredited by nor otherwise affiliated with the American National Standards Institute.