



UNITED STATES STANDARDS STRATEGY FAQ

What are standards, and why do they matter?

Standards are technical agreements and guidance that make products, services, and systems work together safely and efficiently. They're the invisible rules that let your phone charger work at any outlet, ensure credit cards work at millions of terminals worldwide, and allow hospitals to share patient records across different software systems. When companies agree on technical specifications, everyone benefits: products work better together, costs drop, markets expand, and new technologies reach consumers faster.

What is ANSI, and what role does it play?

The [American National Standards Institute](#) (ANSI) is the coordinator of the U.S. standardization system. ANSI provides a neutral forum where companies, government agencies, consumer groups, and technical experts work together to advance American interests in standards. ANSI is not a government agency, but it is recognized by the U.S. government and serves as the U.S. representative to the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC, through the U.S. National Committee), among other regional and global forums.

What is the United States Standards Strategy?

The [United States Standards Strategy](#) (USSS) is our nation's blueprint for maintaining leadership in standards development. First published in 2000 and updated every five years, it's developed collaboratively by an ANSI-led team of standards organizations, industry, academia, consumer groups, and government agencies, with input considered from all stakeholders. The strategy provides a roadmap for how the United States engages in international standards development—ensuring that U.S. innovation, values, and interests shape the technical foundations of global commerce.

Why does the U.S. have a unique approach to standards?

The United States has a voluntary, private-sector-led, market-driven standards system—one of our competitive advantages. While many nations rely on top-down, government-controlled standards processes that can become politically motivated and stifle innovation, the U.S. recognized over a century ago that private-sector leadership allows innovation to thrive. The flexibility of the U.S. approach enables standards to be developed faster and work better, reflecting actual market needs, with the experts building the technology and those who rely on it all at the table.

Who can participate in U.S. standards development?

Anyone with a stake in the outcome can participate, and that's by design. Small businesses work alongside global corporations; government agencies collaborate with consumer advocates; academic researchers partner with industry practitioners. The U.S. system is built on balance, with rules assuring all views receive fair consideration. Whether you're a startup with innovative technology or a consumer group concerned about safety, you have a voice.

How does the U.S. standards system relate to government policy?

U.S. law—specifically the [National Technology Transfer and Advancement Act](#) (NTTAA)—and [OMB Circular A-119](#) direct federal agencies to use voluntary consensus standards developed by the private sector whenever possible. Government plays a vital role by participating in standards development, funding standards-relevant research, and using standards in regulation and procurement when appropriate. But the government doesn't control the process—it's a participant alongside industry, academia, consumers, and other stakeholders.

How do we define international standards, and why do they matter?

International standards are technical agreements developed with adherence to [World Trade Organization \(WTO\) principles](#): transparency, openness, impartiality, consensus, effectiveness, and relevance. They matter because they open markets and reduce technical barriers to trade. When countries agree on common requirements, products can move across borders without costly redesigns or redundant testing. For American companies, international standards based on U.S. technology create pathways for innovations to scale globally.

What are the biggest challenges facing the standards system today?

Technology is advancing faster than ever, creating pressure on traditional standards development processes to keep pace. At the same time, some governments are attempting to shape standards processes for geopolitical advantage rather than technical merit—creating standards designed to favor their domestic industries. Additional challenges include workforce shortages affecting both technical fields and standards expertise, intellectual property theft, and regulatory uncertainty.

Why should businesses care about standards?

Standards aren't overhead—they're infrastructure for competitiveness. Companies that participate in standards development create pathways for their innovations to scale globally on their terms. Standards open new markets, accelerate time-to-market, reduce costs through economies of scale, and build customer confidence. Organizations that ignore standards often find themselves locked out of markets or forced to retrofit products at significant cost. Those that engage early shape the playing field in their favor.

How can my organization get involved in standards development?

Start by identifying standards that affect your business, technology, or stakeholder interests. ANSI's website provides directories of [U.S.-based](#) and international standards developing organizations (e.g., [ISO](#) and [IEC](#)) and information about active [standards projects](#). For companies, meaningful engagement often means committing senior technical talent to standards committees—treating standards participation as strategic investment. For government agencies, it means actively participating alongside industry. For academic institutions, it means integrating standards into curricula and encouraging faculty participation.