IEEE standards process: A short summary

Within the IEEE a standards development project is usually sponsored by a technical committee (such as the TCMM) within a member society (for example, the Computer Society). Anyone may suggest or promote a project. The sponsor submits a PAR to the IEEE Standards Board. When the PAR is approved and a project number issued, a working group considers the various issues and writes drafts for the proposed standard. Eventually the sponsor or a duly delegated body votes on recommending the current draft to the IEEE Standards Board for adoption. It is this vote that is most critical, since it is assumed that the technical expertise of the IEEE and the member societies lie within the technical committees.

There is no technical review past the sponsor ballot. The Standards Board therefore requires that the sponsor ballot contain no less than 10 voters and that "the balloting membership of a sponsor must provide for the development of a consensus by all interests significantly affected by the scope of the standard." IEEE members (and associates) normally constitute the membership of an IEEE Technical Committee (and so too the sponsor balloting group). Sponsor balloting bodies can easily have one or two hundred voters. Public comment during the development phase or during the sponsor ballot is not required per se if indeed all significantly affected interests are already represented. A public comment phase is often adopted to ensure that all those interests get a fair opportunity to participate.

Once the draft has passed its sponsor ballot (more on this another time), it goes to the IEEE Standards Board via RevCom, the board's standing committee for review of submitted proposed standards. RevCom (and the Standards Board) is now primarily concerned that the standards did not violate the required policies and procedures. Even the IEEE must adhere to the rules of ANSI for the development of standards.

When adopted by the IEEE Standards Board, the document becomes an official IEEE standard (or guide, or recommended practice). But the process does not end there. A trial-use standard has only a two-year life and then either dies or becomes a full standard. A full standard must be reviewed at least every five years. During these periods comments are received and responded to. The result often is a revised standard—which must go through the sponsor ballot itself. This process helps to ensure that the extant IEEE standards are relatively current and meaningful.

At the December 1986 meeting of the IEEE Standards Board, four standards were approved (929, 990, 1002, and 1085), three standards were reaffirmed (290, 492, and C37.60), and six revisions were adopted (115A, 390, 416, 484, 620, and 622).

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