OASIS

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(Mostly) Everything You Need To Know About the OASIS Technical Committee Process

In Three Easy Lessons

If you're new to OASIS,

there's three basic questions that you're likely to ask:

- How do Technical Committees work?

- How do I start a new Technical Committee?

- How does something become an OASIS Standard?

This document provides an overview to those processes; I would be remiss if I did not mention that the official document covering all of these questions and more is the OASIS Technical Committee Process Policy.

About this guide

This document was written to provide an overview of the OASIS Technical Committee Process Policy as of 15 October 2010. This update is applicable to all Technical Committees, regardless of their starting date. Any questions about this document, the Policy itself or Technical Committee operations should be forwarded to the OASIS TC Administrator at tc-admin@oasis-open.org.

How a Technical Committee Works

One of the worst things that can happen is a committee consisting of a group of like-minded individuals. While everyone may have the same goal—to create a high-quality standard that will support development, implementation, and interoperability—it's the different perspectives that each member brings to the table that ensures the final product will meet those objectives. Those differences, of course, can mean that there's likely to be a disagreement or two, and that's where a skilled Chair and a copy of Robert's Rules of Order come in handy.

Unlike most standards-setting bodies, a Technical Committee at OASIS conducts its work in the open. Everything—from the roster to the meeting minutes to the work products produced—are always publicly viewable at each and every step of the process. OASIS provides a full suite of tools to support our TCs as they go about their daily operations—and guarantees the openness of all systems and their accessibility long after the TC has completed its work and closed its doors.

The Participants

There are two ways to participate in the work of an OASIS Technical Committee — as a Member of the Committee itself, or by providing feedback to the Committee through the TC's comment list.

To become a Member of a TC you—or the company you work for—must join OASIS. As an OASIS Member you are free to join as many Technical Committees as you wish—as long as your organization approves your participation. Approval certifies that you or your company agrees to the terms of the OASIS IPR Policy.

Similarly, anyone who is not a Member of the TC can contribute via the comment list which requires acknowledgement of the IPR Policy as part of the subscription confirmation process.

Technical Committee Participation Categories/Roles

Role	Description
Non-TC Member	• read-only access to all TC assets (work products, meeting minutes, email list archive, issues lists, etc.) • submit feedback/comments via the TC comment list which is also publicly archived • no attendance at TC meetings

Role	Description
Observer	• read-only access to all TC assets (work products, meeting minutes, email list archive, issues lists, etc.) • submit feedback/comments via the TC comment list which is also publicly archived • subscribed to the TC email list (read-only) • may attend TC meetings but may not participate (listen-only)
Member	• read-write access to all TC assets • participation rights in TC meetings • does not count toward quorum • gains Voting Rights by attending two consecutive meetings
Voting Member	• read-write access to all TC assets • participation rights in TC meetings • counts toward quorum • make/second motions • vote on any motions or electronic ballots • loses Voting Rights by attending two consecutive meetings
Persistent Non-Voting Member	• read-write access to all TC assets • participation rights in TC meetings • does not count toward quorum

When joining a Technical Committee, you specify whether you wish to join as a Member (participant) or as an Observer. If you wish to change your participation settings you must first leave the Technical Committee and then re-join.

Meetings

Meetings are typically held via teleconference and scheduled at a mutually-convenient time which varies depending on the geographic location of the participants and their other commitments. The most common schedule is once every other week, for an hour or an hour-and-a-half. Agendas, call-in access numbers, chat room, web-based meeting URLs and any other requisite information should be posted to the group calendar well in advance.

Every Technical Committee must elect a Chair. The Chair is responsible for scheduling meetings, creating the meeting agenda, ensuring voting rights are properly tracked, that meeting minutes are taken and properly recorded, and of course conducting the meetings themselves.

The first order of business at any meeting is the calling of the roll. A Technical Committee may elect or appoint one or more Secretaries or a scribe may be appointed at the start of a meeting to take minutes. The attendance must be recorded in the meeting minutes. In order for the meeting to be quorate, greater than 50% of the Voting Members must be present. If quorum is not achieved the group may continue to discuss work items but decisions cannot be made until the next quorate meeting.

Most decisions within a Technical Committee only require a simple majority for approval—that means that as long as the meeting is quorate and there are more yes votes than no votes, a motion will carry. Other decisions—such as approval of a document—require a full majority which means that greater than 50% of the total Voting Members (whether in attendance or not) must vote in favor. All decisions must be recorded in the meeting minutes.

The Chair is responsible for updating Members' voting rights at the end of each meeting, whether quorate or not.

Technical Committees may also hold face-to-face meetings. These are often in conjunction with a conference or other event where a large number of the committee Members will be attending, or may be hosted by one of the Members on a periodic basis. A conference bridge should always be provided for those Members unable to attend in person.

Email List

The real work of a Technical Committee happens on the email list. This is where Members will post proposals and argue their merits. List traffic fluctuates depending on the subject matter, the number of participants, and the development stage of the particular work at hand.

It's best practice to keep an email message focused on just one topic, proposal or issue. While it may create more volume, it's much easier to follow a particular conversation. All emails are publicly archived and searchable on both OASIS and MarkMail servers.

Documents

The primary reason for starting a Technical Committee is to create one or more "work products". There's a fair amount of flexibility as to how these documents, schemas, and executables are created and maintained. Documents are most often created in Microsoft Word or OpenOffice, but some committees take advantage of structured markup and use DocBook or DITA. The choice is up to the committee and is usually based on the preference of the actual document editor(s). Templates (which must be used) are provided for the formats mentioned as well as HTML. All work products reside in one or more OASIS-provided / hosted or approved tools and like everything else associated with a Technical Committee, are always publicly viewable.

Comment List

Anyone is who not a member of the TC can submit feedback, comments, suggestions, etc. to the TC by subscribing to the TC's comment list and posting messages. Comments may be submitted at any time; the list is publicly archived. The TC may contact the submitter to discuss the comment further—for clarification, to answer questions, or to correct any misunderstandings.

Other Tools

Technical Committees have the option to take advantage of several other OASIS-provided tools, including an issue tracking system, source code control, and a wiki.

OASIS does not provide teleconference facilities; TCs may use one of the many free conference calling services or a Member company may make their corporate teleconference facility available to the TC. Similarly, a Member company may provide web-based meeting facilities.

Education and Marketing

While the OASIS TC Process is designed to require minimal staff involvement, we're here to help whenever and wherever we can. Whether it's creating press releases, producing webinars, coordinating interoperability demonstrations or providing speaking opportunities, OASIS staff are at your disposal.

Starting a Technical Committee

Before You Begin …

It's a really good idea to answer the following questions:

1. What is being standardized? a system? protocol? vocabulary? model? something else?

2. Does the project meet the needs of the community? Is there market demand?

3. Why would people be interested in standardization? What is the value to the proposers and contributors of the effort? The answer can help identify prospective participants, understand their motives, and estimate their degree of commitment as well as identify those who would oppose the project.

4. Is there a critical mass of participants? potential users? potential supporters? Will there be sustained interest to maintain commitment and complete the project?

5. What work has already been done or is in progress—at OASIS or other organizations? How is it related to the proposed new work? Is there an existing body of work that is anticipated to be contributed to the TC?

That's hardly an exhaustive list, but it should get you well on your way to drafting a Charter proposal.

Creating a Charter

The Charter is basically a contract—amongst the Members of the TC as well as with the general public. It describes exactly what the TC will—and won't—do, what the anticipated results of that work will be and when they the work is expected to be completed and ready for use. If you've answered the questions above you should be able to appropriately scope the effort, making it easier to know exactly what will be accomplished and how success can be measured. While Charters may be 'clarified' over time (typically this is done to add or update deliverables but may also narrow the scope of the TC), the scope cannot be expanded without forming a new Technical Committee. During the initial drafting phase, sharing the charter with potential participants can help to refine it and build support.

The Charter contains the following sections:

- proposed name of the TC
- statement of purpose, including a description of the problem to be solved
- scope of the work, including what is and is not the work of the TC
- list of anticipated deliverables and completion dates
- IPR mode
- audience or users of the work
- language in which the TC will conduct business

Submitting the Charter

The formal TC creation process follows a strict timeline, ensuring that the new committee is established as quickly as possible, without any unexpected delays. On average, the Technical Committee can hold its first meeting in approximately 60 days (75 days for a face-to-face meeting) from the date the charter is submitted to the OASIS TC Administrator.

[INSERT GRAPHIC OF SUBMISSION TIMELINE HERE]

The submission contains two parts: the formal charter itself as well as information regarding the startup of the TC. It includes:

- list of any similar or related work (whether done at OASIS or other organizations), and why this work is different.
- anticipated liaison relationships with other TCs or other organizations
- date/time/location of first meeting
- anticipated meeting schedule
- co-proposers
- Primary Representative statements of support
- Convener
- Member Section affiliation, if any
- anticipated contributions
- draft FAQ
- proposed working title and acronym for work products

Call for Participation

The Call for Participation is issued by the OASIS TC Administrator and signals the formal acceptance of the Charter. A minimum of 30 days from the date the Call for Participation is issued must elapse before the first meeting date if a teleconference; 45 days is required for a face-to-face meeting. The Call for Participation includes the actual Charter as well as links and instructions for joining the TC.

Recruiting

OASIS staff works closely with the co-proposers to build interest in the proposed work and to bring members—whether existing OASIS members or not—into the Technical Committee. Whether it's one-on-one outreach, birds-of-a-feather at a related industry conference, a live webinar where interested parties can ask questions, or a direct mail campaign, we are an active partner in promoting your project.

Before the First Meeting

In order to be considered a Voting Member at the first meeting, participants must join the TC at least 7 days prior to the first meeting. At the end of that period a copy of the roster is captured and used to determine voting rights at the first meeting. Around the same time Members are invited to nominate themselves or other Members for Chair or co-Chair. Nominations remain open through the start of the meeting.

If the meeting will be a face-to-face meeting, logistics information will be posted to the list. The meeting host may ask Members to indicate whether they will be attending in-person or via teleconference to assist with meeting planning.

No other business can be conducted on the email list until the first meeting.

At the First Meeting

Once the roll has been taken and Voting Members established, the first order of business is the election of a Chair or two co-Chairs. Once that is done, the Committee is officially up and running and work on their technical agenda may begin. Prior to any further business, it is customary for a member of OASIS staff to welcome the participants and give a brief overview of OASIS policies, procedures, and tools available for member use. The only other agenda item that must be completed before adjourning is setting a date and time for the next meeting.

The OASIS Work Product Life-cycle

Before you begin …

There's some terminology that you should become familiar with. It always helps to try to make sure we're talking about the same thing!

Terminology

Term	Description
Contribution	any material submitted to the TC and which is proposed for inclusion in a TC deliverable
Working Draft	preliminary document, produced by one or more committee Members
Non-Standards Track Work Product	deliverable that is intended to be informative and explanatory in nature
Standards Track Work Product	deliverable that may be advanced to OASIS Standard; it is subject to the patent licensing and non-assertion obligations requirements of the OASIS IPR Policy
Committee Draft	either a Committee Specification Draft or Committee Note Draft
Committee Specification Draft	an approved Working Draft on the Standards Track
Committee Note Draft	an approved Working Draft on the Non-Standards Track
Committee Specification Public Review Draft	a Committee Specification Draft that has been submitted for Public Review
Committee Note Public Review Draft	a Committee Note Draft that has been submitted for Public Review
Committee Specification	a Committee Specification Draft that has been submitted for Public Review and affirmed by the TC by a special majority vote
Committee Note	a Committee Note Draft that has been submitted for Public Review and affirmed by the TC by a special majority vote
Candidate OASIS Standard	a Committee Specification that is being considered for OASIS Standard approval by the OASIS Membership at-large
OASIS Standard	a Candidate OASIS Standard that has been approved by vote of the OASIS Membership at-large
Full Majority Vote	greater than 50% of all Voting Members in the affirmative
Special Majority Vote	two-thirds of all Voting Members in the affirmative; no more than 25% vote in the negative

Term	Description
Work Product	anything produced by a TC and intended as a deliverable

All Technical Committee work starts off as a contribution or working draft. There is no "fast track" process that allows you to skip over any part of the process.

The first question everyone asks …

How long will it take before a Contribution can be approved as an OASIS Standard?

The answer of course, is — it depends. Let's say that you've been working on a specification for months in a private consortium and the group is going to contribute the work to the Technical Committee. If the newly-formed TC were to approve the Contribution as a Committee Specification Draft at its first meeting and immediately submit it for Public Review, the document could proceed all the way through to final approval in just under six months. While that time line is theoretically possible, in reality the average time is closer to 18 months.

[INSERT GRAPHIC OF SPEC LIFECYCLE HERE]

Working Drafts

Every work product has to start somewhere, and at OASIS we call that a Working Draft. In some cases an editor or two will be appointed by the TC; they have the responsibility for taking the decisions made in the meetings and incorporating them into a Working Draft. In other cases the Chair may act as the editor, and in yet other cases the 'pen' is passed from Member to Member, each adding their own contributions in turn.

Templates are provided for specifications on the Standards Track and for several document types on the Non-Standards Track; the working draft templates are specially designed to facilitate quality checks and the automated generation of approved documents.

Working Drafts are numbered consecutively—Working Draft 01, Working Draft 02, etc. Each time a new version of the document is saved, the number is incremented. Of course a Working Draft (and any of its successors) may incorporate a set of related files—schemas, dtds, wsdls, code libraries, etc.—which all follow along the same track.

Committee Drafts

The first milestone to be reached is Committee Draft. At this point the TC will formally decide whether the Working Draft should proceed on the Standards Track or the Non-Standards Track and conduct a full-majority vote to approve it as either a Committee Note Draft or Committee Specification Draft. Approval of the Working Draft at this point signals that the TC Members are in agreement as to its content. They may be ready to move on to the next step, or they may create further Working Drafts, periodically approving them as Committee Note Drafts or Committee Specification Drafts. These documents are numbered in the same manner as Working Drafts—Committee Note Draft 01, Committee Note Draft 02, etc. Formal preparation of these approved documents is handled by the OASIS TC Administration team.

Public Review Drafts

Any Committee Draft may be approved as a Public Review Draft and submitted for a (minimum) 30-day public review. Again, the TC agrees by a full majority vote to notify the public that the TC is looking for feedback on the work produced.

All OASIS Members are notified, as well as any other interested parties identified by the TC. The notice includes instructions for submitting comments—anyone is not a member of the TC (whether an OASIS member or not) must provide feedback via the comment list. Each of these comments is then logged. The TC decides how to handle each comment and notes the disposition in the log, which is publicly available.

If the TC decides to make further changes to the Work Product (by editing the Working Draft and assigning it a new number) another Public Review is required. Subsequent reviews may be for as little as 15 days, although the TC can always request a longer review period.

Before a Work Product can be advanced to a Committee Specification or Committee Note, it must have completed at least one 30-day public review. No changes can have been made to the Work Product since the last Public Review.

Non-Standards Track Committee Notes

This is the end of the line for Non-Standards Track work products. Once a document has completed at least one public review without further changes being made, the TC can agree to hold a special majority ballot to approve the work product as a Committee Note. In OASIS terms, this is now a Final Deliverable.

Standards Track Committee Specifications

A Committee Specification may be the end of the line, but for many it sets the wheels in motion for implementations to be built and tested, ensuring that the specification is not ambiguous or defective in any way before proceeding on the path to OASIS Standard. OASIS Organizational Members may submit "statements of use"—certifying that they have implemented the specification and attesting to its fitness for use.

The approval process is the same as for Committee Notes—once the document has gone through at least one public review without further changes being made, the TC may agree to hold a special majority ballot to approve the work product as a Committee Specification.

Candidate OASIS Standards

Once the Technical Committee has garnered at least three "statements of use", it may then hold a special majority ballot to approve the specification as a Candidate OASIS Standard. This signals the beginning of another public review cycle, this time for (a minimum of) 60 days. At the end of the review period, if no comments were received or, if the TC decides to not make any changes to the specification, a member-wide ballot is scheduled. Each OASIS Organizational Member has one vote, cast by their Primary Representative or an alternate. At least 15% of the Voting Membership must cast affirmative votes for the specification to be approved as an OASIS Standard. If any negative votes are cast, and the total number of negative votes is less than 25% of the total votes cast, then the TC must decide whether to affirm the ballot or withdraw the specification for further modifications.

OASIS Standards

While the final stop at OASIS, specifications that have achieved OASIS Standard status and have successfully completed at least one qualifying interoperability event, may request to have the specification submitted to an international de jure standards body, such as ISO, JTC1, or ITU-T. OASIS maintains liaison relationships with these organizations as well as many others to facilitate the submission and approval process. In most cases the Technical Committee retains the right for further development and agrees that any future versions will also be submitted so that the work is kept in synchronization.

What's Next?

For most Technical Committees, it's time to start work on the next version, or maybe some profiles. Others may embark on a campaign to gain adoption, educating people about the specification itself, best practices for implementation, etc. and produce webinars, conference presentations, and white papers. Many do both.