

# Standards Column — Restructuring NISO's Standards Committees

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During the recent **American Library Association Midwinter** meeting in Seattle, I had the opportunity to meet with more than sixty members of our community to discuss the new directions that **NISO** is taking in the leadership of the development of standards. Certainly, this column would hardly be compelling reading if it constantly focused only on the internal structure and developments within our organization. Indeed, there are important standards developments and ongoing work that you all need to be aware of and these concerns will be the focus of future columns.

However, as **NISO** is at an important crossroads and the changes we are putting in place will have a significant, profound, and, I believe, positive impact on the how we coordinate standards development and promotion as well as the types of standards we develop, it is important that we explain in some detail how the new structure will work and what we hope to achieve. We hope that those interested in standards work and **NISO**'s directions will provide valuable input on our activities in order to further improve and smooth the process.

As background, since many of you might not be familiar with **NISO**'s structure, let me explain the oversight process that has been in place. Reporting to the Board of Directors is a **Standards Development Committee (SDC)**, whose responsibility is to both provide advice on the organization's strategic direction in areas of standards and to monitor the activities of the various working groups that generate and update **NISO**'s standards portfolio. This committee has performed a difficult job commendably, despite its small size and broad responsibilities. However, it is unrealistic to expect that a small number of people will have the breadth of knowledge, or the time to commit, to managing the work of nearly thirty active and diverse standards-setting technical groups. With a diverse portfolio of standards ranging from bibliographic formats to Web services and from metasearch to binding, no group comprised of fewer than ten people could realistically hope to keep pace with all of the underlying issues and ramifications to effectively direct it all. Those who have served on and lead the **SDC** deserve our great thanks for their energy and commitment to **NISO**'s governance and for the work that they have done in stewarding the standards process.

Among the many recommendations that were offered during the strategic planning process over the past two years, the restructuring of the **SDC** was among the top priorities. The two key responsibilities, of setting strategic

direction and of managing the working groups, would need to be split up and addressed separately in order to focus the efforts in these areas, albeit with significant communication back and forth between the groups managing these responsibilities. Furthermore, to expand the breadth of expertise and ease the management burden of diverse community needs, separate topic areas that will provide arenas for more concentrated attention on standards in those areas would need to be organized to provide a more cohesive and efficient oversight of the work underway.

To begin, we have created four separate committees to lead our standards process. The Architecture Committee will review **NISO**'s strategic vision and convene Topic Committees to manage a portfolio of standards activities.

These Topic Committees will coordinate and monitor the work of the Working Groups, which will continue to explore issues and come to consensus on standards. We are currently organizing three Topic Committees: Discovery to Delivery, Content and Collection Management, and Business Information. Although these three areas comprise the majority of

**NISO**'s activities, it is not expected that all of **NISO**'s standards will fit neatly into these three groups or that its work will be limited to these three topic areas. Realistically, there are limited resources to organize these groups and developing too many committees simultaneously risks not organizing any well enough to succeed. Over time, additional Topic Committees may form or be divided into more specific areas of focus.

The Architecture Committee will play a key role in the oversight and direction of **NISO** and in concentrating **NISO**'s limited resources on those key areas where they can be most effective. Bringing together a diverse group of experienced leadership will ensure that **NISO** is addressing issues affecting our constituency. The expectation is that this group will provide a vision of where standards need to be developed, point out areas of overlap with other standards bodies, and identify forces outside our current environment that will impact our future standards development activities. Led by **Chuck Koscher**, Technology Director at **CrossRef** and a member of **NISO**'s Board of Directors, the Committee will include representatives from each of our communities: in the library and publishing communities, from automation and other vendors, from the academy, and from other standards-setting organizations. The Architecture Committee's primary short-term goal will be the expansion of the **NISO Strategic Framework** developed in 2006, particularly

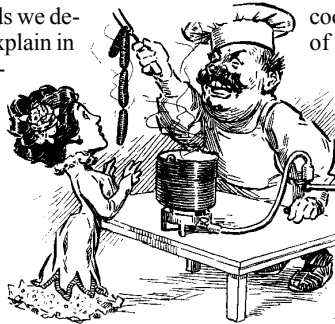
the analysis of other standards organizations' activities to discern areas of overlap and gaps in standard development. For those areas where **NISO**'s activities overlap with other areas of standards, we will look to partner with the standards organizations in those fields to find common solutions. Where there are gaps, the Committee will look at ways that **NISO** can energize activities in those areas.

Since much of the standards activity at **NISO** has focused on the important work of creating, organizing and curating information, the Content and Collection Management Committee will be the largest Topic Committee and will manage the largest portfolio of standards. Leading this important committee will be **Ted Koppel**, Verdi Product Manager at **Ex Libris**. The portfolio of this group will include management of standards such as: **Standard Address Number (Z39.43)**, **International Standard Serial Numbering - ISSN (Z39.9/ISO 3297)**, **The Dublin Core Metadata Element Set (Z39.85/ISO15836)**, and **Library Binding (Z39.78)**. With the maturation of electronic resource products and services, many aspects of this topic will develop as critical areas for standards work. Key points of friction such as licensing, resource management systems and preservation are areas the Committee will explore for standardization.

The Discovery to Delivery Topic Committee's focus will be on search, retrieval, and distribution systems and the standards that underlie and improve their performance. **Mike Teets**, Vice President, Global Product Architecture at **OCLC**, has agreed to lead this committee. Among **NISO**'s current standards that will be coordinated by this group are: **Information Retrieval: Application Service Definition & Protocol Specification (Z39.50)**, **OpenURL Framework (Z39.88)**, and the **Circulation Interchange Protocol — NCIP (Z39.83)**. Future developments involving the exchange of bibliographic information, search functionality, and semantic Web developments will make this an exciting area of growth for **NISO**.

Business Information is the third of the initial Topic Committees **NISO** is organizing. As business intelligence and data play an increasingly important role in successful operations, focusing on this area will help to improve publisher and library productivity. **Patricia Brennan**, Manager, Product Development at **Thomson Scientific**, will lead this group. Current **NISO** standards that will be managed by the Business Information Committee include: **Standardized Usage Statistics Harvesting Initiative — SUSHI (Z39.93)**, **Information Services and Use: Metrics & Statistics for Libraries and Information Providers — Data Dictionary (Z39.7)** and **Criteria for Price Indexes (Z39.20/ISO 9230)**. Other areas of exploration will include library perfor-

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mance measures, application of online usage data and organizational identifiers.

Over the past two months, **NISO** has been reaching out to solicit participation in these different committees and we have met with terrific response. Only a handful of people we have approached were unwilling or unable to participate — a sign of the importance of and interest in the work we are undertaking. It is also a sign of the significant support — individual and organizational — there is in the community for our activities. The Topic Committees are still in the process of pulling together participants and seeking volunteers. People interested in participating in these groups are encouraged to contact the **NISO** offices.

The groups **NISO** are organizing will add improved knowledge and energy to the development process. Led by ener-

getic volunteers and supported by dedicated professionals, we hope that this structure will facilitate more rapid development of standards. Also, the broader participation will help ensure the creation of standards that are highly relevant and widely adopted. Standards are meant to provide common solutions to community issues. This new structure will help bring original and timely solutions to the front of our agenda so that we can assist our community in being more productive and thereby serving our and their constituents more effectively.

It certainly is an exciting time for **NISO** and for the field of libraries and information exchange overall. With so much activity and need for standard-based approaches, it is not surprising the amount of energy and time people are willing to invest in **NISO** and the standards process. In the coming months, you will be hearing a great deal more from each of the groups outlined here. 🌱