

FGDC Policy on Recognition of Non-Federally Authored Geographic Information Standards and Specifications

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- I. **PURPOSE:** This policy establishes a mechanism for Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) recognition of non-Federally authored standards or specifications that are relevant to the missions and spatial data responsibilities of Federal agencies as set forth in Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-16.
- II. **BACKGROUND:** Geographic information standards and related standards and specifications have been, and will continue to be, authored by non-FGDC development bodies. OMB Circular A-119 (February 10, 1998) directs Federal agencies to use "voluntary consensus standards" in lieu of Federal government-unique standards except where inconsistent with law or otherwise impractical.

OMB Circular A-16 (August 19, 2002) vests in the FGDC the responsibility for establishing geographic information associated standards (Section 2.b.(5)) and the responsibility for encouraging development and implementation of such standards (Section 1). The obligation of Federal agencies to adhere to FGDC established standards is set forth in Section 2.b.(5), Section 5, Section 7, Section 8.a.(4), and Section 8.b. of OMB Circular A-16 and in section 4(d) of Executive Order (EO) 12906 (April 13, 1994) which states that "Federal agencies collecting or producing geospatial data, either directly or indirectly (e.g., through grants, partnerships, or contracts with other entities), shall ensure, prior to obligating funds for such activities, that data will be collected in a manner that meets all relevant standards adopted through the FGDC process."

Numerous standards and specifications authored by many domestic and international standards development bodies are applicable to geographic information. Although Circulars A-16 and A-119 direct the use of non-Federally developed standards when such standards are available and fulfill agency mission and program needs, neither circular expressly defines a mechanism for the identification, selection, and coordinated implementation of non-Federally developed standards, nor does EO 12906. Because efficient geographic information collection and exchange require widespread use of the same standards and specifications and because standards established by the FGDC are mandatory for Federal agency use, the FGDC identified the need for a mechanism to identify and evaluate non-Federally authored standards and specifications and, when appropriate, require their Federal use via an endorsement process. It was also determined that many useful geographic information standards and specifications would be identified that might not have widespread applicability, but would nevertheless significantly improve the efficiency of data capture and exchange in specific situations. It was therefore deemed useful for the FGDC to have a similar mechanism for recognizing such standards and specifications and encouraging their use without making Federal use of them mandatory, i.e., for their recommendation rather than their endorsement.

- III. **CATEGORIES:** For the purposes of this policy, geospatial information related standards and specifications are divided into the following defined categories:

1. Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) developed standards – standards developed wholly through the FGDC standards process.
2. Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS) – standards published by the National Institute for Standards and Technology.
3. American National Standards Institute (ANSI) endorsed standards – standards developed by a standards body recognized by the ANSI and issued as American National Standards (ANSs).
4. International Organization for Standardization (ISO) published standards – standards developed through the ISO standards process. These standards include those developed according to the ISO/IEC Joint Technical Committee 1 process.
5. Consortium developed specifications – specifications developed by consortia such as the Open GIS Consortium (OGC), World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), and the Object Management Group (OMG).
6. Other standards and specifications – standards or specifications that do not fall in the previously defined categories.

IV. LEVELS OF RECOGNITION:

This policy establishes two levels of FGDC recognition for non-Federally authored standards and specifications:

Endorsement – The non-Federally authored standard or specification has the same status as that of an FGDC developed standard, i.e., its use by Federal agencies is mandatory.

Recommendation – The non-Federally authored standard or specification is recognized as useful for geographic data capture, exchange, archiving, and/or processing but is not deemed to be of such broad applicability that its use should be made mandatory. The FGDC shall publicize it and encourage its use, but will not require its use by Federal agencies.

Note that in accordance with OMB Circular A-119 this policy does not establish a domestic versus international preference relative to the origin of a candidate voluntary consensus standard or specification.

- #### **V. STEPS TO ENDORSEMENT OR RECOMMENDATION:**
- Any Federal agency or other organization (for example, an FGDC Subcommittee or Working Group) that is an FGDC member may propose any non-Federally authored standard or specification for FGDC endorsement or recommendation. However, if a non-Federal organization is the source of the proposal, then an FGDC member Federal agency must agree to act as the proposal's sponsor.

Because a non-Federally authored standard or specification proposed for consideration under this policy must already be fully developed and approved/endorsed through a standards process, steps one through nine of the FGDC standards development process (FGDC Standards Reference Model, Section 4) are moot and are waived. All proposed non-Federally authored standards or specifications (other than those covered by Section VI below) shall complete the following steps to consider for endorsement or recommendation by the FGDC:

1. The sponsoring FGDC member agency or agencies shall submit to the FGDC Standards Working Group (SWG) Chairperson both a hardcopy and an electronic copy (if available) of the proposed standard or specification accompanied by a report that provides the following information:
 - a. The category of the standard or specification (per Section III above).
 - b. The proposed level of FGDC recognition (per Section IV above).
 - c. A discussion of the applicability of the proposed standard or specification in Federal geospatial activities, including discussion of the conditions where it should be employed and any where it should not be, i.e., provide the scope of Federal geospatial applicability of the standard or specification.
 - d. The specific reason(s) that the standard or specification would be of value to the Federal government and, if applicable, to other members of the FGDC. These should include, but not be limited to, identification of the specific FGDC subcommittee(s) and/or working group(s) whose members support the submission of the standard or specification and how it benefits its/their responsibilities.
 - e. Any restrictions, limitations, or other constraints that may affect promulgation and/or adoption and/or implementation of the standard or specification, e.g., copyright, license fees, restriction of applicability to a specific technology, and the like. The FGDC staff will negotiate with standards organizations to make an attempt to acquire free standards documents for FGDC members.
 - f. The name and business addresses of a point-of-contact (POC) in the proposing or sponsoring FGDC member agency and, if applicable, the name and business addresses of a POC in the proposing non-Federal body.
 - g. Identification and/or explanation of the process by which the proposed standard or specification was developed and reviewed. This information will support FGDC determination as to whether the process meets the criteria for a voluntary consensus standards process as defined in OMB Circular A-119. When accredited standards development bodies such as ISO, ANSI/INCITS, and NIST are the authors only their identity need be supplied. Otherwise, a description of the development and review process and a list of participants must be included.
2. The SWG Chairperson will list the standard as a candidate or nominated standard on the FGDC standards web site.

3. The SWG Chairperson will circulate the proposed standard or specification and the accompanying report to the SWG members and FGDC Subcommittee and Working Group chairs for a review/comment period of not less than thirty (30) calendar days.¹ In this review, the SWG will review the standard for overlap and conflict with the existing suite of FGDC/NSDI standards.
4. Based on comments received from SWG members and FGDC Subcommittee and Working Group chairs, the SWG Chairperson will then prepare a report and provide it and a recommendation to the FGDC Coordination Group within twenty-one calendar (21) days.
5. The FGDC Coordination Group will publicize the SWG report and recommendation, make the standard or specification available to the FGDC membership, and provide a member review/comment period of not less than twenty-one (21) calendar days.
6. The SWG Chairperson will then consolidate the final report and recognition recommendation and forward them to the Coordination Group members at least fourteen (14) calendar days in advance of the next scheduled Coordination Group meeting.
7. The FGDC Coordination Group will vote to approve or disapprove the recommendation on recognition.
8. Upon approval by the FGDC Coordination Group the recommendation on recognition will be forwarded to the FGDC Steering Committee for final approval.
9. If approved by the FGDC Steering Committee for:
 - a. *endorsement*, the SWG will assign a “cover” type FGDC standard identification number² and include it on the FGDC list of approved standards and specifications as if it were an FGDC developed standard or specification.
 - b. *recommendation*, the SWG will include it on the FGDC list of approved standards and specifications, but NOT provide a “cover” type FGDC standard identification number.

VI. EXCEPTIONS: Some non-Federally authored standards or specifications will have been developed through a process that has already provided the FGDC membership with sufficient time and/or reason to review them. For such standards, taking all of the above listed steps and/or adhering to some or all of the prescribed review durations might be

¹ The review and comment is of both the proposed standard and the proposal to endorse / recommend. The purpose of the comments is to determine if any technical reason exists for not endorsing / recommending the standard, not to effect change to the standard since it is already an established standard.

² A “cover” type standard consists of a regular FGDC standard cover page and a page that (1) endorses the standard as an FGDC standard, (2) describes the reason the standard is being endorsed, i.e., the value to the government, and (3) fully identifies the standard being endorsed. The identification number assigned to the cover standard is a regular FGDC standard number. However, no part of the standard is reproduced, nor does this endorsement imply that copies are in the public domain.

unduly inefficient. Excluding the absolute requirements for Steps 1-3 above, exceptions to the prescribed step structure and step duration may therefore be made on a case-by-case basis subject to affirmative vote of the SWG. Also, in lieu of the SWG, the whole FGDC may in rare instances exercise its right to act as the sponsor of a standard, e.g., the FGDC metadata standard.

VII. LIMITATION: Nothing in this policy shall be construed as superseding the authority or obligation of an agency or organization to use a particular standard or specification due to treaty, agreement, or other policy.

VIII CHANGES TO THIS POLICY: This policy may be altered or withdrawn by the FGDC Steering Committee at any time. Either the FGDC Standards Working Group or the FGDC Coordination Group may also recommend that it be altered or withdrawn, in which case the FGDC Coordination Group membership shall be notified of the intent to do so and will vote on the recommendation following a review period of not less than forty-five days.