



# NISO Strategic Planning Update

April 2011

## Executive Summary

The 2005 NISO Strategic Plan addressed fundamental changes needed to sustain the organization in view of its drastically changed constituent environment, a somewhat unfocused and sluggish standards process, and a weakened financial condition. Opportunities were identified to:

- a) set NISO on a new course to serve its redefined constituents;
- b) remedy shortcomings in procedural compliance through automation support;
- c) reinvigorate standards development and utilization through restructured committee governance, policy revisions focused on efficiency and program breadth,
- d) increase NISO's focus on community education;
- e) prioritize standards efforts through governance reorganization; and
- f) utilize the leadership and management strengths of a new managing director.

The 2005 Plan has been well executed. NISO has gained in community recognition and support as evidenced by membership growth both in number and in underrepresented areas. The procedural compliance shortcomings cited in the 2008 ANSI audit have been satisfied. The Topical Committees are active and engaged in areas of interest and service across more of NISO's constituent groups than ever before; in addition, their activities are broadened to include different types of consensus output such as whitepapers and recommended practices. NISO's education and outreach efforts have grown substantially. And, the resulting financial condition of NISO has improved significantly despite an otherwise challenging financial environment.

Clearly, the Board's deep planning efforts in 2004-2005, which involved member surveys and a Blue Ribbon Panel to assess challenges and opportunities have benefited the organization greatly. The Panel and the 2004-2005 Board of Directors are highly commended for their crucial contributions.

The planning process in 2010-2011 reaffirms the mission, operating principles, and values of the earlier plan. And because NISO has just come through a phase of fundamental change, the strategic focus at this time is aimed at maintaining the momentum of the current course while applying some new energy toward achieving balance, adding value, and enhancing outreach.

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## Mission

NISO fosters the development and maintenance of standards that facilitate the creation, persistent management, and effective interchange of information so that it can be trusted for use in research and learning.

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## Operating Principles

To fulfill its mission, NISO is guided by the following principles.

**1. NISO works with intersecting communities of interest**

NISO understands that its work cannot be limited to a single type of institution. Information services cross-institutional and international boundaries, and NISO will work with all participating communities in its efforts, and will actively engage those communities and any representative standards organizations to achieve its goals.

**2. NISO works across the entire life cycle of an information standard**

NISO's standards work will range from identifying needs for a new standard or recommended practices to maintaining mature ones. In this regard, NISO will:

- act as a standards incubator helping to identify and articulate the need for new information standards, and selecting the most promising for further development
- identify nascent standards or best practices developed internally or elsewhere and provide the support necessary to grow them into fully mature standards that are widely implemented
- provide maintenance support that allows standards to change in concert with evolving need
- provide support for communities that wish to develop and maintain their own standards in a manner that ensures their quality, integrity, reliability, and use

Work at each of these stages will include education and support activities as necessary for effective and inclusive standards development and use.

**3. NISO will ensure that its standards efforts are economically and organizationally sustainable**

NISO understands that the resource commitment for standards increases as they move through the lifecycle. NISO reviews standards at critical points in the life cycle to determine if the expected benefit from the standard warrants continued investment. NISO exits standards activities that provide insufficient benefit no matter the stage of the lifecycle. This means that not every NISO initiative will result in the development of a standard and that NISO may withdraw its effort or seek an alternate venue for a standard that reaches a point of diminishing returns.

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## Values

The values that underpin NISO's work include:

**Quality** - NISO standards and recommended practices are proven, reliable, useful, and effective

**Collaboration** - NISO encourages participation of all stakeholders in its standards processes which are themselves conducted in a manner that is fair, open, and transparent

**Agility and Vision** - NISO moves quickly and imaginatively to identify, define, and address standards challenges and standards needs

**Integrity** - NISO earns trust through honesty and fairness.

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## Current Conditions

Tight economics, globalization, and fast-paced technology development contribute to a complex set of stressors (and opportunities) for the information industry in 2010. Of particular note are the severity of economic pressure on the entire library community, and the rapid transition toward electronic information distribution.

The impacts of these stressors on NISO as observed by the Board in 2010 include:

- declines in the library standards alliance memberships (driven by budget cuts)
- strong webinar participation (inexpensive training opportunity)
- weak onsite seminar attendance (fewer funds for travel)
- waning subscription revenue for ISQ
- split focus among those interested in standards on technology versus application level standards

NISO has improved in stature and recognition in the past few years. The growing breadth of work has allowed NISO to successfully recruit new publisher members, a major source of revenue for the organization. Best practices and white papers have contributed to the broader scope of coverage and have served to engage constituents in new ways. The busy educational calendar has dramatically increased the amount of contact between NISO and its constituent communities. E-newsletters have provided regular contact with a large base of information professionals.

Operationally, NISO is experiencing solid work from its Topic Committees and Working Groups; the educational programs are strong and well attended; publications are editorially solid and continually improving; and NISO's financial health is projected to be strong enough in 2011 to anticipate a modest contribution to reserves.

Given the above external and internal environments, the 2010 Strategic Planning Update will focus on sustaining NISO's current direction with an eye on increased effectiveness by **achieving balance, adding value, and enhancing outreach.**

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## Achieving Balance

### *A. Retain and Gain LSA Members*

NISO seeks to serve three primary constituent communities: libraries, publishers, and systems suppliers or other intermediaries. Historically, the library community has been a backbone for NISO. Library volunteers have been among the most engaged in creating NISO's agenda. However, recent economic pressures are causing a contraction in library standards alliance (LSA) membership as well as library-organizational voting memberships, and this is viewed as a serious imbalance for NISO. A focus on retaining and gaining LSA members and voting participation is an important strategic direction.

Reconnecting with libraries may be achieved best using a multi-faceted approach. There are librarians and technical services staff engaged at the grass roots level, contributing “sweat equity” to the standards process. But there are also higher-level administrators controlling the funds, setting organizational priorities, allowing the participation of their staffs, and making membership decisions. A dual communications approach might include an executive level presentations about NISO, the value of standards/recommended practices, as well as a message directed to the working level staff about staying engaged and exercising their voice in important standards matters.

### ***B. Address Underserved Communities***

In addition to its three primary constituent groups, NISO’s activities could or should have relevance to several underserved or missed communities in the scholarly communications and information areas:

- rightsholders (other than publishers)
- public libraries
- museums
- media publishers and producers
- technology companies engaged in work relating to scholarly content
- university presses

NISO’s everyday activities can be adjusted to begin touching these communities more directly. For example, topic committee discussions, new work areas, educational program content and outreach, e-newsletter distribution, membership recruitment, and presentations at relevant annual meetings can include special awareness of these underserved groups. Assertively paying attention to being more inclusive of underserved communities over time will add breadth to NISO and strengthen its role in the information industry. This is especially true of the work NISO is responsible for at the ISO level. In many ways it already overlaps with the broader media and technology communities. Partnering with other organizations to address topics of mutual interest would help to extend NISO’s reach without overtaxing NISO’s infrastructure.

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## **Adding Value**

NISO’s value is measured in a few basic ways: a) its tangible products in the form of standards, whitepapers, and recommended practices; b) its level playing field for engaging various parties to explore solutions to standards-type problems; c) the support it provides its members and working groups in coming to consensus; d) its help and support in understanding how to apply standards or recommended practices.

### ***A. Find Friction Points and Interfaces***

NISO’s staff, committees, and working groups only have so much time and bandwidth. They need to be working on standards or issues that have the most significant impact, thus greatest value, to NISO’s communities. Identifying the “right” issues to work on is an extremely important function.

A strategic roadmap, as suggested in the 2004-2005 NISO Strategic Plan, turned out to be too complex. Instead, a more practical approach suggested here is to look for friction points and interfaces as pointers to stimulating new work ideas for NISO.

Points of friction are often situations of great inefficiency and sources of conflict. They are also points where people complain about inaction, inactivity or waste. Can NISO help foster discussions that lead to

a group process to solve a nagging problem or pain point, aka friction point? Can we use friction point thinking to identify new work areas? Further, can we identify friction points for our out-of-balance communities – libraries and underserved groups – to add value specifically (and strategically) for these groups?

Another approach is to look closely at the interfaces between disparate groups, as this is where process tensions can be found in the form of hand-offs, transactions, interchanges, and information flow. Identifying the interfaces can lead to discovering areas of opportunity in terms of important and relevant problems in need of a solution – perhaps a standards or best practices solution.

Friction point and interface analyses may help ensure NISO’s agenda in the near term remains compelling and relevant to its varied constituents and underserved communities. Addressing these issues is the bulls-eye of value.

### ***B. Start the Conversations: Hot Topics Meeting Series***

Our environment of rapid technology change, as mentioned earlier, is both a stressor and an opportunity. Emerging technologies pertinent to our information industry are talked about regularly at our industry meetings and tend to draw large audiences.

NISO could sponsor exploratory meetings to “start the conversation” about new standards, whitepapers, or recommended practices as related to these emerging technologies. Such meetings can serve as a fertile ground for initiating community-driven, bottom-up work processes.

The Board suggests a regular series of meetings – perhaps the NISO Hot Topics Series. To illustrate the concept, some current hot topics include: mobile delivery, ebooks, and discovery services.

Not only will NISO Hot Topic Meetings seed new work ideas, they will also help drive future buy-in and work group engagement from the participants. In the current economic climate where some interested parties, particularly librarians, may be unable to travel it will be important to allow virtual participation in Hot Topic Meetings. Finally, in order to engage underserved communities better, some of the hot topics can be pegged to their interests.

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## **Enhancing Outreach**

NISO’s outreach activities have grown dramatically in recent years, and the impacts have been so positive that the Board wishes to see the outreach expanded and enhanced. All of NISO’s outreach channels should be tuned to the message of *value*. Two other themes of importance are the fast-paced processes that NISO now employs and the fact that NISO produces more than standards, namely recommended practices and whitepapers, too.

### ***A. Engage in Social Media***

NISO needs to communicate its message of value more broadly. One element of a modern communication strategy should include a social media component. The benefits of this are multi-fold. First, it is highly desirable to connect NISO’s audience with experts on particular standards, communicate about new work or progress on work, and post educational materials and an educational calendar. Second, the importance of a two-way (or even multi-directional) conversation is that ideas are developing in a range of spaces outside of NISO’s core constituency. Finally, recognizing that NISO itself is

generally not the source of pain point identification, by creating a space where conversations about information creation, distribution, organization and preservation take place, NISO will be better positioned to act quickly when valuable new ideas or expressions of pain points are identified. To take advantage of this, NISO can utilize various existing social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, as well as develop its own vehicles, such as expanding on the NISO blog or wiki functionality.

***B. Plan a Value Message for Each Standard, Best Practice, Whitepaper***

While each standards activity currently includes a education and outreach plan, several groups and the Topic Committees have pointed out the need for a more detailed communications and marketing plan as well. This marketing plan can focus on value as it relates to the work item (be it a standard or best practice or whitepaper), its audiences and use, and the information industry as a whole. If the work item is relevant to libraries or NISO's underserved communities, then value message can be deliberately written to speak to those strategically important groups. The TCs have identified the need to provide support to Working Groups to develop these documents at the outset of a project proposal or WGs work. In addition, a focus of the value of the project, in simple terms, should also be included so that there are understandable applicability and value statements.