

NISO Strategic Direction

**Approved by the
NISO
Board of Directors
June 30, 2005**

NISO Strategic Direction

1 Executive Summary

NISO is at a critical watershed in its history. The world in which it has operated to develop and support the use of information standards has changed as dramatically as the standards needs of the constituencies – libraries and their vendors – that it has traditionally served. Historically, NISO's work has focused on the needs of libraries and the organizations that provide them with content and services, such as publishers, data aggregators, and library systems vendors. Today, the boundaries that define libraries have become indistinct as libraries interact and exchange resources with a broader information infrastructure. The role once played by a single institution now is played across a variety of intersecting services. This new environment requires a high level of coordination and cooperation through standards and standards-like agreements. In keeping with the pace of technology development, players in the information space must be able to act quickly and embrace a rapid pace of change.

To remain an effective and vital organization that provides its members with real and tangible value, the NISO Board agreed in 2004 to undertake a full, fundamental, and far-reaching strategic planning process designed to review and where necessary redefine:

- what fundamentally, it seeks to achieve through its work, developing, maintaining, and promoting the adoption of information standards;
- where to focus its efforts in conducting this work;
- what constituencies it will and should serve;
- what inter-relationships it needs to have with other standards bodies and consortia (both formal and informal) that work on proximate parts of the information landscape;
- what if any leadership it supplies its members and the broader information community in surfacing and articulating needs and defining requirements for new standards;
- what organizational structures, business processes, and leadership NISO will need to achieve its aims.

The NISO Board views strategic planning as a continuous process, with the strategic framework discussed below as an evolving tool for identifying the gaps in the information landscape that impede interoperability. The strategic framework therefore provides NISO with opportunities to accomplish its stated mission.

This strategic planning process has naturally been an inclusive one. It has benefited extensively from the input of NISO members collected formally through a survey conducted in 2004, and of course informally through countless discussions. It has also benefited substantially from the work of a Blue Ribbon Panel (BRP) convened by the Board in order independently to assess NISO's challenges and opportunities. It is impossible to over-emphasize the importance of the Panel's work on NISO's behalf.

The Panel's report, and the Board's response to it are both on the NISO web site at <http://www.niso.org/members/secure/StrategicPlan.html>.

The results of the strategic planning process are in the sections that follow.

Section 2 clarifies NISO's mission, and the operating principles and values that guide and govern its work. The section emphasizes a number of new qualities for NISO such as leadership (in setting the standards agenda), responsiveness (to the rapidly evolving information environment as well as to members' needs and interests), and organizational agility.

Section 3 sets out organizational and financial considerations that will ensure that NISO's work is effectively supported across an appropriate range of activities, and that its value is appropriately communicated to and understood by the members on whose contributions NISO fundamentally relies.

Although the strategic directions identified in these two sections build extensively on NISO's existing strengths (its deep understanding of standards processes, its effectiveness in supplying a safe and neutral space where parties with very different interests can come together to agree mechanisms that they require in common), they promise to take the organization to new places.

Section 4 presents the Board's broad analysis of the changing information environment and provides an underpinning rationale for the changes we anticipate and sets out the outcomes desired from implementing them.

Section 5 delineates clearly and unambiguously the "products" that NISO offers to members (real and potential), how work on those products will be supported and contribute to NISO's revenues.

A separate document outlining a phased transition plan that implements this strategic direction will be distributed by the NISO Board.

2 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.

2.1 Operating Principles

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

2.1.1 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 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

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

NISO's standards work will range from identifying need for a new standard to maintaining a mature one. 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 developed 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 to effective and inclusive standards development and use.

2.1.3 NISO will focus and prioritize its efforts in relation to a strategic map.

To do this NISO will maintain a strategic map of the information landscape that pinpoints features of the landscape most critical for the creation, persistent management and exchange of trusted information in support of research and learning. Decisions about which standards initiatives to invest in will be made with reference to this strategic map, and with a view of NISO's mission, its members' interests, and an awareness of those areas where NISO brings a unique perspective to the problem area. NISO will be guided by its mission and the strategic map while moving into new areas of activity and when making life cycle decisions about standards the organization may want to divest itself of.

2.1.4 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.

2.2 Values

The values that underpin NISO's work include:

Quality – NISO standards 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.

3 Organizational and Financial Considerations

NISO is a membership-based organization that is supported by membership fees and through other means.

3.1 Membership fees

Membership fees are fundamental. These support NISO's core planning and administrative infrastructure. This core includes a small number of staff, and enables relatively small, short-term investments in efforts that are selected for their strategic or catalytic value. In this regard, membership fees provide a pool of venture capital that enables NISO to work for those who share its concern with the creation, persistence, and interchange of trusted information that supports research and learning.

NISO membership returns tangible benefits. NISO members:

- stake a credible claim to being a world leader and investor in the development and maintenance of vital information standards;
- shape a key part of the information landscape (e.g. by exercising the right to vote on standards in which they have a vital stake);
- are informed about key technologies and standards in their environment
- meet with their competitors to collaborate in a unique neutral space
- influence the governance and strategic direction of NISO by voting and participation

3.2 Revenues from other sources

Membership fees alone are insufficient to sustain NISO's work. The cost of standards activities over and above those that can be met on the basis of membership fees will be supported by other means. Here, NISO will seek additional revenue from those who benefit directly from its standards activities, using models such as co-investment, fee-for-service, and grant funding. Examples of these are:

Co-investment. NISO perceives a need in a particular community to incubate, develop, and/or maintain essential information standards. Here, NISO might follow the precedent already established in its work on Metasearch and Electronic Resource Management standards where members of a community interested in moving a standards activity forward agrees to share the costs of the activity. The funding may include support for meeting expenses and any NISO staff support. It works with leadership organizations and associations within that community to develop a costed plan for this effort. Community members agree to underwrite the costs of the effort over and above those that can be born by NISO's basic planning and administrative infrastructure. Standards activities that are required to support and develop digital libraries are an example of those that may be funded through co-investment of leading libraries and/or library associations

Fee-for-service. NISO identifies an opportunity to incubate standards in an increasingly important but underdeveloped area. It works with opinion leaders and investors to plan the activities necessary to understand that part of the information landscape, as well as the stakeholders that have an interest, and the standards that are required. NISO supports its efforts on a fee-for-service basis. Opportunities for standards activities conducted on a fee-for-service basis exist in the following areas:

- Digital preservation. Here NISO might work closely with the Library of Congress, other national libraries, and funding agencies (e.g. the UK's Higher Education Funding Councils' Joint Information Systems Committee – JISC) that have an interest in catalyzing practical effort in this area, focusing in key places where the absence of standards is an impediment to progress (e.g. definitions of a trusted digital repository and practical means of verification).
- Various protocol maintenance activities. Here, NISO could work with a third-party service provider (e.g. OCLC) to define and agree on functional and technical specifications for registries and other application services that are required in support effective use of key information protocols (OpenURL, OAI, DOI, ARK, etc). NISO's role would be as a broker rather than as a service provider. This role should be sufficient to recover NISO's costs and to lend credibility to the service provider.

3.3 Planning to sustain NISO's standards activities

To ensure that standards activities are appropriately supported, all will be carefully planned. Plans for standards activities will identify their full costs (including how and where they will be incurred); benefits (including how and to whom they will be distributed); revenues (including how and from whom they will be derived); and likely developmental trajectory (including contingency plans for activities that NISO

anticipates withdrawing from at some point). Plans will also include timelines and milestones and recommend evaluation mechanisms and criteria so that NISO can continuously review ongoing activities in an informed way.

4 Desired Outcomes and Rationale for Change

The last decade has been one of great change for standards development. Nowhere has this change been more fundamental than in the area of traditional concern to NISO – the creation, management, and interchange of information that can be trusted for use in research and learning. The impacts are far-reaching for NISO in a variety of ways that force fundamental review of its mission, values, and organizational, financial, and operating practices.

Key reasons for change are enumerated briefly below. They echo the principal realignments that the NISO Board seeks to affect in this strategic plan notably, the development of an organization that

- is capable of operating in an ever-changing environment, with a community that welcomes a variety of institutions and organizations whose work is relevant to the NISO mission;
- bases its efforts on continuous assessment and reassessment of the rapidly evolving information landscape and the need for standards that ensure the effective creation and interchange of persistent information within it;
- is nimble and can develop and deploy standards in a timely fashion;
- is focused on standards that support key functions;
- is proactive;
- is well integrated with appropriate standards bodies and standards communities;
- is capable of prioritizing its efforts and of economically and organizationally sustaining them; and
- is financially sustainable.

4.1 Rapid development and deployment of information standards

This change forces fundamental reconsideration of the very deliberate process of standards creation that worked so well for NISO and its members in the past. NISO must emerge as a nimble organization able quickly and effectively to identify, define, and support adoption of key information standards. In the past, Standard Development Organizations (SDO) were chartered at the national level and worked through well-defined processes to progress standards from national to an international level. NISO is very much a traditional SDO. The standards world of today is populated by a growing variety of non-traditional organizations like specialized standard setting consortia, ad hoc groups that spring up to create a single standard, and other groups like open source consortia. The increasing range of standards organizations is matched by an increasing array of standards formats and processes.

4.2 Fundamental focus on functionality

In the largely static print world, libraries were the primary providers of access to the information used in research and learning. In focusing its standards development

around libraries and the tightly knit community of information and service providers who supported them, NISO had a logical and cost-effective means of developing useful information standards. In the increasingly chaotic digital world, researchers and learners acquire information from a wide variety of providers – only some of which are libraries. Libraries themselves are increasingly managers of a wide variety of information much of which they do not own in the way that they own their traditional print collections. To continue to fulfill its historic mission, NISO must focus on standards that support the greatest use and reuse of digital information and that allow users to trust the authenticity of that information – regardless of who creates or owns it. A focus on functionality calls for NISO to provide leadership in addressing the fundamental issues of providing access to trusted information in today's environment, both to its dues-paying membership and to the wider community that engages with NISO on selected projects. NISO must shape a view of the information landscape and facilitate discussion amongst all the stake holders, members and the wider community in order to build the support necessary to ensure that the standards it helps to develop and maintain are adopted and implemented effectively by the broadest possible community.

4.3 Review relations with other standards bodies

The production, management, and exchange of trusted research and learning information with which NISO is centrally concerned is itself dependent upon the deployment of standards in other parts of the information landscape that are governed by other agencies, for example, by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), or the IMS Global Learning Consortium.

The evolving complexity of the information landscape and the extent and variety of stakeholders acting upon it also requires that NISO be able to work across the entire standards life cycle, though not necessarily with every standard. Communities of information providers are increasingly emerging to define, create, or maintain standards that are specifically relevant to their constituents. NISO needs to work with these communities, leveraging distinctive strengths and applying respective efforts in ways that are complementary and mutually beneficial. In many cases, NISO is likely to find itself maturing or maintaining standards developed by others, and/or locating responsibility for maintaining standards developed by NISO in third-party organizations.

4.4 Determine its priorities and engage with standards activities that advance the core mission

In a relatively static print-based world with few information providers of any real significance, NISO could make decisions early in the standards cycle to see a few standards through to their completion and ongoing maintenance. In a rapidly evolving world with many information providers of significance, NISO must evaluate each standards activity against the needs of the changing landscape. When a standard no longer serves NISO's mission, NISO will act as a bridge and find a more appropriate organization to maintain it and to extend it if appropriate.

5 Products and Services

NISO supports the development of standards. In so doing, it works across the standard life-cycle drawing upon a full arsenal of tools that are appropriate in identifying and defining standards needs, and standards development and maintenance. It also maintains a variety of essential outreach and educational services. Crucially, NISO maintains a variety of standard processes from the very formal one that results in the production of ANSI-approved standard that carries the internationally recognized Z39 designation, to other, more lightweight processes that are appropriate for gaining basic agreements in a timely fashion.

Many of the tools that NISO uses to support its standards work have value beyond the contribution they make to the standards development process. For example, white papers are crucial in documenting the need for a new standard or defining for a particular community, how an existing standard may be adopted to advantage. This supplemental value is leveraged strategically by NISO as a means of building its membership and sustaining the organization financially.

NISO's tools are described briefly below along with comments about the value they add beyond their essential contributions to the standards processes, and the manner in which NISO leverages them in the interest of business continuity.

Key: \$ = Included in membership, part of value proposition for membership.
 \$\$= Discounted to members. Non-members are charge at least a cost plus modest profit. \$\$\$= Free to members, part of value proposition for membership. Non-members are charged a premium for use of this product or service.

5.1 Replicable Standards Development Process

For any of the products/processes above pertaining to standards development, this document would be designed to help another organization, wishing to feed their potential standard or guideline to NISO for certification/trial-use/maintenance to understand the steps to be taken to facilitate that process. These documents would be designed to provide a roadway by which any organization, group of interested individuals or other standard developing group, could understand how to develop the product/process to ensure that no substantial barrier is created that would prevent the work from migrating to NISO. These documents are designed to be used by Product Managers and software and standards developers.

Revenue Generation: \$\$\$

5.2 Z39 Standards

Standards that are added to the Z39 series are developed through a formal standards process and are accorded the status of ANSI/NISO standards. The process includes the issuance of Draft Standards for Trial Use and a trial period of testing and analysis. Formal standards are reviewed every five years and either renewed, modified or retired. NISO standards in the Z39 series are available without charge on the NISO web site.

Revenue Generation: \$, \$\$\$ Free to members and non-members in electronic form. Nonmembers pay for printed versions.

5.3 Standards Maintenance

A variety of maintenance activities may be required for the ongoing use of a standard. This can include the registration of profiles, shared services, discussion lists, and other features needed by the community using the standard. Although NISO may outsource any of these features, it oversees the maintenance function over key products.

Revenue Generation: \$, \$\$\$.

5.4 Certification Program

Some standards organizations have the capability to certify that technology meets the needs of a particular set of standards. The information community has some certification programs, and NISO may contract with agencies that wish to create certification for NISO standards.

Revenue Generation: \$\$\$

5.5 Strategic Map

The Strategic Map is one of the most essential and important products of NISO. Developed from the recommendation of the Blue Ribbon Panel for a "synthesizing framework" to guide NISO's decision-making, it is a publication used both internally to the organization and externally by the membership to understand the information landscape and how products/solutions interface and interoperate and where standards exist and/or are needed to facilitate the interoperability of products. This document is designed to be used by all levels of members' staff, from the CEO/President to the software engineers. It provides a context and understanding of what exists, what doesn't and where opportunities exist for both products and standards. The document would be the result of NISO convening key, leading thinkers both from within the NISO membership and outside, to serve on a development/review committee. This document would likely be reviewed and/or revised quarterly, minimally every six months.

Revenue Generation: \$, \$\$\$

5.6 White Papers

NISO White Papers are contributed or solicited papers that address an issue that has implications for standards development. White Papers can be viewed as a pre-

standardization activity. A NISO White Paper might define and explore some of the questions that come into play before formal standardization work is started. Or a NISO White Paper might identify areas that are opportunities for standards development and suggest possible approaches. All White Papers are posted on the NISO website and published in hardcopy by NISO Press.

Revenue Generation: \$

5.7 Best Practices

NISO Best Practices are utilized in scenarios where librarians, publishers, product managers and developers are seeking an understanding of the most appropriate way to utilize a standard or conduct a process within the context of the market in which they function. Specifically, a Product Manager uses a best practices document when faced with a variety of options within a standard, and seeks to know and/or understand under a specific set of circumstances dictated by the market, or users requires implementation of the options in select configurations. A best practices document may also pertain to a process, and as such, may consist of recommendations concerning how to conduct a process, write a proposal or other similar activities.

Revenue Generation: \$\$

5.8 Profiles

A profile is used when an organization developing a product that is written to comply with a standard, but the standard contains sufficient complexity and/or vagaries so as to make the final working compliance of the product uncertain if, for instance, valid but incompatible parameters are selected. In these cases a “profile” is established to outline a particular set of configuration options to ensure that products interfacing via the standard perform as expected. These documents are typically going to be used by programmers, product managers, and potentially customer service staff, all who are involved in configuring a product for testing and/or use by customers. It provides substantial value in that it enables the product to be moved to a demonstrable production status quickly with minimum delays in testing and/or configuration.

Revenue Generation: \$, \$\$\$.

5.9 Technical Reports and/or Guidelines

Technical Reports and/or Guidelines are documents designed to provide useful information for those trying to achieve a specific technical task. These can cover a broad range of topics, for example the content, organization, and presentation of indexes. The document will go into extensive detail about the subject, including areas that need to be thought about and functionality that should be planned and/or included. The document will provide enough detail for the user to be able to proceed in developing or enhancing the applicable product.

Revenue Generation. \$, \$\$\$

5.10 Education Programs (Pre and Post Standardization)

Educational Programs are designed for all types of people functioning within the markets served by NISO and their primary purpose is sub-categorized depending upon if it is a pre or post standardization program.

- Pre-Standardization. In this phase the focus of an educational program centers on the objective of bringing together key players that face a problem that could be solved through standardization, and, in a neutral forum, to scope what that standardization process would need to encompass to provide a solution.
- Post-Standardization. Once a standard is released, a critical component of the standard being accepted and used is to educate the marketplace about the availability of the standard, the means of implementation, and the resources available to help in those areas.
- General Presentations to Organizations. As part of the NISO Educational Programs, NISO will also arrange for general educational presentations to organizations for a fee on any of the products and services produced. It is generally expected that this type of training would be done on a sub-contracting basis with qualified personnel recruited on the topic of the presentation.

Revenue Generation: \$\$

5.11 Advocacy

Advocacy consists of representing the cause and/or need for standards where such representation furthers the cause of NISO and its membership. NISO advocates for standards in a wide variety of venues, including professional conferences, meetings related to standards, and funding arenas. Examples of advocacy activities are:

- Working with and or becoming a member of other standards organizations.
- Speaking with or before legislative agencies.
- Lobbying NISO membership to support standards seen as critical to the future success of NISO.
- Speaking at conferences to promote an understanding of the work of NISO and, when required, specific standards held under the NISO umbrella.

Revenue Generation: \$

5.12 Intelligence; Scan Of Environment and Explanation to Members

Intelligence scans are a service provided to the entire NISO membership, most importantly to those who are Presidents, CEO's, or Directors of member organizations. The scan provides an overview and summary of what is happening in specific market segments of technology. In particular it would focus on new product developments and announcements, conference topics of interest, new and emerging areas where NISO might play a key role. This scan would likely take the form of a monthly or quarterly e-document, not longer than 5 pages, done in an attractive graphic format to make for quick scanning.

Revenue Generation: \$\$\$.

5.13 Organizational Reach of Products and Services

Organizational Reach of Products and Services						
	Presidents/CEO	Mngmnt	Marketing/Sales	Product Management	Technical	Programming
White Papers		X		X	X	X
Best Practices				X	X	X
Ed Programs		X	X	X	X	X
Advocacy	X	X	X	X		
Profiles				X	X	X
Specs & Stds				X	X	X
Tech Reports				X	X	X
Certification				X	X	X
Framework	X	X	X	X	X	
Replicable						
Stds						
Process		X		X	X	
Intelligence	X	X	X	X		

6 Transition/Implementation plan

To be distributed separately.