

Beyond Volunteers Background

The API Standards Viability Business Plan noted in the context of volunteer resources to participate on standards developing committees, that:

Many standards developers have been grappling with similar issues as the U.S. voluntary standards developing community experiences reduced support due to financial constraints, loss of expertise due to retirements, demographics, company mergers and acquisitions, restrictions on travel and higher priority business considerations.

As a result, in 2006 API established budget line items in each of its major standards subject where funds for “contracted experts” would be utilized to provide a wide range of services to standards developing committees formerly provided by volunteers. Concurrently, the Standards Department established a standards priority ranking system to assure that the highest priority standards based on an established and agreed-upon set of criteria would be supported when the need arose for revisions and that the necessary resources would be available to initiate a new standard when justified and approved by the committee of jurisdiction.

Historically, API has used contracted experts in the past to provide various standards-related services on a limited basis; however, given the increased amount of funding allocated to these services along with the additional emphasis on outsourcing these activities, the Viability Plan includes several recommendations relating to the program’s uniform management and oversight. This includes the development of a process guide that addresses expectations, criteria and individual qualifications.

Another consideration in planning for the use of contracted experts in standards development is related to the current practice of funding research projects to support new standards or revisions to existing standards. From both the project and financial management perspectives, it is preferred to separate the research program from the standards writing activity. These functions usually require difference skill sets, and combined projects often become dysfunctional because the research component tends to overtake the standards writing activity. It is best to complete the research, determine the general direction of the standard, and then proceed with the document preparation, using research experts and contractors with standards writing expertise respectively.

The Viability Plan proposes that information regarding the increased usage of contracted experts be communicated to API staff and committee management to provide an awareness of this growing trend and advise them of the expectation of additional funding for future endeavors as part of their strategic and financial planning process.

Finally, internal contract management procedures must be established and followed in order to maintain the integrity of the various API program fund budgets in accordance with good business and accounting practices.