

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
January 13, 2021
Virtual Meeting**

**Proposed Revisions of *Procedures for Review and Approval of an SAA-Developed Standard*
(Prepared by Standards Committee Co-Chairs Kira Dietz and Lindsay Wittwer)**

BACKGROUND

In 2013, the SAA Council approved section V.E., Ongoing Review of the Standard, in the [*Procedures for Review and Approval of an SAA-Developed Standard*](#), which allowed technical subcommittees to address changes and updates to the standards they maintain on a rolling basis instead of being required to wait for their next revision cycle. These procedures were adopted by the technical subcommittees for DACS (TS-DACS) and Encoded Archival Standards (TS-EAS). As they began implementing the ongoing review procedures, both groups asked the Standards Committee for clarification on how to handle revisions to the standards that they considered “minor,” such as typos, broken links, or bugs. (At this time a “minor” change was not yet clearly defined.) According to the ongoing review procedures, these small changes would require community feedback and approval from the Standards Committee and Council, which would delay the fixes to the standards and potentially be detrimental to the functionality of the standard, thus affecting archives around the world.

Between 2017 and 2019, Standards Committee Co-chairs John Bence (2017-2019), Rebecca Weiderhold (2018-2020), and Lindsay Wittwer (2019-2021) and the Standards Committee liaisons to TS-DACS and TS-EAS (Kira Dietz and Lindsay Wittwer, respectively), in consultation with TS-DACS and TS-EAS and the full Standards Committees, worked to address the issue of what constituted a “major” versus a “minor” change and how the technical subcommittees might handle each type of change within the ongoing review procedures. The result of these efforts is a proposed revision of section V.E., Ongoing Review of the Standard, that provides specific guidance on how to handle major and minor changes. This proposed revision has been reviewed and endorsed by TS-DACS, TS-EAS, and the Standards Committee and is now put forward for Council approval.

DISCUSSION

In drafting the revisions to section V.E., Ongoing Review of the Standard, in the *Procedures for Review and Approval of an SAA-Developed Standard*, the Standards Committee seeks to define “major” and “minor” changes and to delineate clear workflows for each that are more reflective of the needs and impact of each type of change.

All SAA-developed standards are on a set revision cycle, typically of 3 to 5 years. Recognizing that, particularly with technical standards, updates need to be made more frequently, procedures for ongoing review were developed and approved in 2013. These procedures allow technical subcommittees to propose individual changes for approval without being required to go through the full multi-step major revision procedures, while still incorporating the key checks and balances—such as community feedback—into the workflow. The implementation of this type of revision cycle is necessary to address and improve the standards to meet the needs of users and to maintain them, but the impact of the ongoing review procedures has revealed several interrelated issues, including how to approach different types of changes and the impact of incremental changes to a standard on publications and education. It is important to note that standards approved for the ongoing review procedures still periodically undergo a major revision, which is the full-scale, top-to-bottom review of the standard and its documentation that may result in many changes. These procedures are laid out in section V.D. Cyclical Review of the Standard.

The technical subcommittees noted that when addressing small changes that either are time sensitive (e.g., bugs) or so small that they do not seem to warrant feedback and several levels of approval (e.g., typos or broken links), the current review procedures do not make sense. According to these procedures, implementation of even small revisions requires: Submission of a formal proposal to the technical subcommittee, documented consultation with external organizations and affected SAA sections, documented community feedback, approval by the Standards Committee, and approval by the Council. In the case of a bug or typo, this workflow would greatly delay necessary fixes. The technical subcommittees thus requested that the Standards Committee make a distinction in how it handles minor changes versus major changes to the standards in ongoing review.

But what constitutes a major change versus a minor change? Since 2017, the Standards Committee and the technical subcommittees have grappled with this issue. At the 2018 Annual Meeting, the Standards Committee convened a discussion of the multifaceted impact of ongoing review and major and minor changes that included key representatives from the Publications Board, Committee on Education, TS-DACS, TS-EAS, and the Standards Committee. Key takeaways from this meeting included the need to clearly define major versus minor changes and to determine workflows to ensure that SAA Publications and Education programs are aware of changes that may have an impact on what is being published and taught by SAA.

During 2018-2019, the technical subcommittees worked internally to define workflows for their standards that addressed the issues brought up at the 2018 meeting. Because both groups use [GitHub](#) as a home for their documentation, there are some built in mechanisms to both receive revision requests and facilitate some community feedback. Also in 2018-2019, Standards Committee Co-chair John Bence drafted definitions of major and minor changes, drawing from Semantic Versioning (<https://semver.org/>), which provides criteria for how software can identify the version numbering it uses. In addition, the Standards Committee requested examples of major and minor changes according to these definitions from each technical subcommittee to get a sense of what everyone meant when they interpreted these definitions. Bence conducted research into the history of the procedures and documentation from 2013, which he shared with the Standards Committee and the technical subcommittees to stop the mission drift that had begun to occur as new people got involved with this issue. At this point, the Standards Committee and the technical

subcommittees identified the major/minor issue as a distinct issue separate from the impact on publications and education, which the technical subcommittees work out separately with those groups.

At the 2019 Annual Meeting, the Standards Committee shared the definitions of “major” and “minor” with the examples for feedback from the technical subcommittees. Out of that meeting, the groups determined that the best way forward was to incorporate the major and minor change definitions, with concrete examples from the technical subcommittees and workflows, into section V.E. of the *Procedures*. Wittwer and Dietz (both of whom had long histories with this issue) drafted the revised section in November 2019, which then went through three rounds of comments and revision by the Standards Committee (including *ex officio* members and the leaders of the technical subcommittees) between November 2019 and February 2020.

Through these reviews the definitions and examples were debated and the procedures picked apart in the context of the respective standards. Through the several iterations of the draft, the technical subcommittees and Standards Committee finalized a draft that provided guidelines on which all the leaders could agree. We are submitting them now for the Council’s approval. Throughout these revisions, and in response to a majority of the comments, the Standards Committee maintained that these procedures are guidelines and pushed back on requests to incorporate detailed workflows that are specific to a system (like GitHub) or to a specific standard or technical subcommittee. Detailed workflows for ongoing review of a standard have been developed and should be maintained by the technical subcommittees, so long as they align with the Standards procedures. We acknowledge that, in the future, this change cycle could affect standards other than DACS and EAS.

The Proposed Revisions

The updated section V.E. (Appendix A) incorporates changes to the submission process that better reflect the reality of how changes are submitted to technical subcommittees and makes a distinction between the procedures to get a major change versus a minor change approved. Of note for changes to the submission process: The revised procedures move the evaluation of the expected effect/impact on individuals, institutions, and supporting systems and known related standards affected by the proposed change from the submitting party to the technical subcommittee.

The procedures for major changes remain unchanged and still require the same comprehensive review, feedback, and levels of approval. The significant update we are proposing addresses the addition of a new minor changes workflow. (See also the proposed Minor Change Request Form at Appendix B). Minor changes are defined as *changes that do not affect the application or interpretation of the standard and would not result in a user’s current application of the standard being non-compliant.* This is accompanied by examples of minor changes to facilitate interpretation of the definition. The new workflow would require the technical subcommittee to submit a form to the Standards Committee that defines the change and why it should be made and that outlines the potential impact on individuals, institutions, and supporting systems, on publication of the standard, on education, and on any related standards. This will allow the Standards Committee to determine if the proposed change should be considered minor or if it should be sent back to the technical subcommittee to go through the major change workflow.

Minor changes would be approved by the Standards Committee and reported to the Council so that they can be acted upon quickly, with the option for the Council to rescind approval or request more information.

The goal here is to reduce the time and effort required to make small changes that can have a profound impact on the standard but that can and should be easily resolved (e.g., bugs, typos, or broken links). This procedural change will improve the quality of the standards by allowing the technical subcommittees to resolve small issues more quickly and easily and focus their efforts on undertaking the larger and more time-consuming tasks of working toward major changes or major revisions of the standards. Responsiveness to small issues will also build more trust in the standards and potentially facilitate greater community involvement in the improvement of the standards.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the revisions proposed by the Standards Committee to Section V.E., Ongoing Review of a Standard, in *Procedures for Review and Approval of an SAA-Developed Standard*, be approved. (See Appendix A, in which additions are underlined and deletions are struck through.)

Support Statement: The revisions to Section V.E., Ongoing Review of a Standard, provide clear guidance when proposing both minor and major changes in SAA-developed standards, which will facilitate higher-quality maintenance of the standards.

Impact on Strategic Priorities: Approval of the proposed revisions will have direct impact on Goal 3 (Advancing the Field), particularly 3.1 and 3.3., as they will facilitate the continuing development, maintenance, and improvement of key SAA-developed standards. The revisions will also assist in achieving Goal 4 (Meeting Members' Needs), particularly 4.1 and 4.4, because these updates are in direct response to requests from technical subcommittees and, if approved, will provide clearer and more transparent procedural guidelines that will allow for more timely responses to change requests.

Fiscal Impact: Fiscal impact is minimal, but this change in procedural documentation does require one (1) hour of SAA staff time to update the webpage for the SAA Standards Committee's *Procedures for Review and Approval of an SAA-Developed Standard*. Current standards approved for ongoing review are maintained digitally by the technical subcommittees, so no additional staff support will be required to keep the standards documentation updated with any approved major or minor changes.

Proposed Revisions in Section V.E., Ongoing Review of the Standard

NOTE: The proposed changes to the Standards Committee's *Procedures for Review and Approval of an SAA-Developed Standard*, which were made to distinguish workflows for major vs. minor changes, affect only section V.E. of the procedures, listed below. To access the full procedures: <https://www2.archivists.org/governance/handbook/section7/groups/Standards/Procedures-Review-Approval-SAA-Developed-Standard>

[Additions are underlined; deletions are struck through.]

V.E. Ongoing review of the standard.

Proposed revisions to a standard approved for ongoing review are reviewed and addressed as they are received by the assigned technical subcommittee. Ongoing review is particularly conducive to standards that are published electronically and thus are easy to update. Major or minor proposed changes can be submitted at any time. In order to respond adequately and in a timely manner to proposals for change, the following actions should be taken.

V.E.1. Proposal for changes received.

Proposals may be submitted by SAA component groups (i.e., sections, ~~roundtables~~, committees, task forces, or working groups), by interested external organizations (e.g., the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section), or by individuals, or may be generated by the technical subcommittee itself. Proposals should include the following elements:

- Name of the individual or sponsoring group;
- Identification of the component of the standard to be changed;
- Brief description of the proposed change, and justification;
- ~~Expected effect/impact on individuals, institutions, and supporting systems;~~
- ~~Known related standards affected by the proposed change.~~

All proposals should be submitted to the ~~chair of the~~ technical subcommittee responsible for the maintenance of the standard.

V.E.2. Technical subcommittee reviews proposals.

Upon receiving a proposal, ~~the chair of the~~ technical subcommittee responsible shall:

- Conduct a preliminary review of the proposed change request ~~the document~~ to ensure that it is complete. Incomplete proposals will be returned to the submitting body. If there are

no ~~missing elements~~ ~~problems~~ to the documentation ~~with the document~~, the technical subcommittee chair will acknowledge receipt to the proposer processing body.

- Evaluate if the proposed change should be considered a major or minor change.¹
 - A **minor change** is one that does not affect the application or interpretation of the standard and would not result in a user's current application of the standard being non-compliant.
Examples may include:
 - Updating links in an appendix or standard
 - Updating crosswalks based on changes to adjacent/companion standards
 - Making typographical or grammatical corrections
 - Bug fixes
 - Patches
 - Making suggestions for use/providing use case examples
 - A **major change**² is one significant enough that it needs or would benefit from community and expert feedback. A general rule of thumb is that the change alters the application or interpretation of the standard either to the point of making the previously compliant use of the standard suddenly non-compliant or significantly altering the way in which the standard is implemented or taught.
Examples may include:
 - Adding a new element (required or optional)
 - Deleting a required element
 - Making significant alterations to how an element is used (going from required to optional or optional to required) or how an element is defined to the point at which it would affect practical use
 - Creating a new appendix
 - Significant revision to preambles, principles, appendices
- Distribute copies of the proposal to the other members of the technical subcommittee for their review and comment.
- Determine the extent to which the proposal should be distributed for public comment.
- Identify and add to the proposal:
 - Expected effect/impact on individuals, institutions, and supporting systems;
 - Known related standards affected by the proposed change.

V.E.3. Consultation with other SAA subgroups and external organizations.

¹ These definitions were inspired by Semantic Versioning, but do not completely align with the versioning guidelines put forth by it.

² In this context, a major change is a single significant change to the standard. This is distinct from a major revision, which is a revision to the standard as a whole or several major changes. Major revision requires utilizing the cyclical revision procedures (see V.E.7 for major revisions to continuous revision standards).

For proposals classified as major changes, external groups, particularly those directly affected by a proposal, must be consulted during the review process. This should include informing the Standards Committee co-chairs of the proposal submission. Consultation should be pursued through several means, which may include:

- Publication of the proposal on the technical subcommittee's SAA microsite.
- Letters sent to heads of organizations or organizations, or to individuals, inside and outside of SAA, known to have an interest in the standard under revision, inviting their comments on a particular proposal.
- Publication of notices about the proposed changes in the newsletters or on the websites of these organizations.
- Publication of the proposal in appropriate SAA media.
- Publication of the proposal in external publications.
- Joint meetings with interested organizations to discuss the proposal.
- Open forums or hearings at the SAA Annual Meeting.

For proposals classified as minor changes, consultation with external groups is optional.

V.E.4. Recommendation to revise the standard.

Based on comments received from the community, the technical subcommittee may either reject the proposal or develop a recommendation for changes ~~revisions~~ to the standard. The draft changes ~~revisions~~ may be based on both the original proposal and amendments developed during the review process. Change ~~Revisions~~ proposals should document changes in the standard in relation to the current text. Significant changes in the initial proposal by the technical subcommittee may require an additional period of consultation. The review and consultation process should be completed within six months of the submission of a proposal.

For major changes, once the draft changes have been finalized, the proposal packet should be forwarded to the Standards Committee together with documentation of the submission and consultation process. For minor changes, complete and submit to the Standards Committee the Minor Changes Form. ~~Once the draft revisions have been finalized, it should be forwarded to the Standards Committee together with documentation of the submission and consultation process.~~

V.E.5. Standards Committee review of recommended changes.

For proposals submitted as major changes, ~~T~~the Standards Committee will review the package to ensure that it is complete and that adequate consultation and review have taken place. It may return the package to the development and review team if significant elements are missing.

For proposals submitted as minor changes, the Standards Committee will review the package to ensure it is complete and meets the qualifications for a minor change. It may return the package to the development and review team if significant elements are missing or if it identifies the change as constituting a major change, in which case the technical subcommittee must follow procedures for revising a major change.

The SAA Council authorizes the Standards Committee to accept minor changes to official standards of the Society of American Archivists. Decisions must be reported in a timely manner to the SAA Council, which reserves the right to roll back the change.

V.E.6. Recommendation to the SAA Council.

For proposed major changes, ~~The~~ Standards Committee will send to the SAA Council a report on the process and a recommendation. This may be either a recommendation to consider implementation of the draft ~~changes~~ revisions, or a recommendation against adoption. The decision to accept major changes to official standards of the Society of American Archivists may be made only by the SAA Council.

When the draft ~~changes~~ revisions documentation is deemed complete, the Standards Committee will publish a notice in the appropriate SAA media announcing that the draft changes have ~~revisions has~~ been forwarded to the Council.

V.E.6. Promulgation of revised standard.

If a major draft ~~change~~ revisions is accepted by the SAA Council, or a minor change is accepted by the Standards Committee, the Standards Committee will publish a notice of the approval of the changes in the appropriate SAA media.

V.E.7. Major revisions or rescinding the standard.

In addition to managing proposals for revision, the technical subcommittee may also determine that the standard is no longer relevant or has been superseded, and may recommend that the standard be considered for major revisions or rescinded. The guidelines for cyclical review should be followed in developing such recommendations (see section V.D.). The SAA Council may also establish a deadline for reviewing the applicability and maintenance of standards at its discretion.

Minor Change Request Form

Technical Subcommittees with standards approved for ongoing review may submit minor changes to those standards to the Standards Committee for review and approval. Please complete and submit this form to the Standards Committee chairs. The chairs will review the form to ensure that it is complete and meets the qualifications for a minor change, and will then take a vote of the Standards Committee.

A **minor change** is one that does not affect the application or interpretation of the standard and would not result in a user's current application of the standard being non-compliant. Examples may include:

- Updating links in an appendix or standard
- Updating crosswalks based on changes to adjacent/companion standards
- Making grammatical corrections
- Bug fixes
- Patches
- Making suggestions for use/providing use case examples

Standard:

Date submitted:

Primary contact person:

Is this high priority?¹

Component of the standard to be changed (including the rule or designation used by the standard and the name or title):

Brief description of the proposed change and justification for it--or include a link to the issue²:

Expected effect/impact on (if applicable, as not all changes will affect all areas):

- **Individuals**
- **Institutions**
- **Supporting systems**
- **Publications**
- **Education**

Known related standard(s) (SAA and external) affected by the proposed change:

¹ High priority is a change that affects the functionality and requires immediate approval, such as a patch or bug fix.

² Information via link should cover the remaining questions on form: description, justification and, as applicable, expected effects/impacts and known related standards affected by the proposed change.