

Government of India
Ministry of Communications & Information Technology
Department of Information Technology

Title of Policy : **Policy on Open Standards for e-Governance**

Effective Date : This Policy is effective from the date of notification

Preamble

Government of India (GoI) aims to make all Government services accessible to the common man in his locality and ensure efficiency, transparency & reliability of such services at affordable costs; in addition to this, GoI endeavours to provide services to all other stakeholders like public agencies and their employees and business communities. To meet this objective, there is a need to cooperate, collaborate and integrate information across different departments. Government systems characterized by islands of legacy systems using heterogeneous platforms and technologies and spread across diverse geographical locations, in varying state of automation, make this task very challenging.

There is a need to identify Open Standards for the consistent, standardized and reliable implementation of e-Governance solutions which meet laid down objectives of the Policy. While selecting Open Standards due consideration will be given to functional and technical requirements and maturity of the standard.

The “Policy on Open Standards for e-Governance” (here after referred to as “Policy”) provides a set of guidelines for identifying such Open Standards.

1. Objective

The Policy provides a framework for the selection of Standards to facilitate interoperability between systems developed by multiple agencies. It provides organizations the flexibility to select different hardware and software for implementing cost-effective e-Governance solutions. It, therefore, promotes technology choice, and avoids vendor lock-in. It aims for reliable long-term accessibility to public documents and information in Indian context.

2. Definitions

Refer Annexure – I

3. Applicability

The Open Standards for e-governance will be adopted /evolved based on this Policy

- 3.1 They shall be applicable at interface and data archival level of all systems used for e-Governance.
- 3.2 They shall be applicable to all prospective e-Governance systems including businesses (G2G, G2B, G2E and G2C) from the date they come into effect.
- 3.3 In case of legacy and existing systems :
 - 3.3.1 It will be the responsibility of the application owner to ensure that interfaces of legacy and existing systems adhere to Open Standards when interacting with other systems.
 - 3.3.2 New versions of the legacy and existing systems shall adhere to the Open Standards.

4. Policy Statement

Govt shall adopt Single and Royalty-Free (RF) Open Standard progressively for a “specific purpose within a domain” (herein after referred to as “Area”), to meet the laid down objectives of the Policy.

The Open Standard shall have the following characteristics:

4.1 Mandatory Characteristics

An Identified Standard will qualify as an “Open Standard”, if it meets the following criteria:

- 4.1.1 Specification document of the Identified Standard shall be available with or without a nominal fee.
- 4.1.2 The Patent claims necessary to implement the Identified Standard shall be made available on a Royalty-Free basis for the life time of the Standard.
- 4.1.3 Identified Standard shall be adopted and maintained by a not-for-profit organization, wherein all stakeholders can opt to participate in a transparent, collaborative and consensual manner.
- 4.1.4 Identified Standard shall be recursively open as far as possible.
- 4.1.5 Identified Standard shall have technology-neutral specification.
- 4.1.6 Identified Standard shall be capable of localization support, where applicable, for all Indian official Languages for all applicable domains.

4.2 Desirable Characteristics

In case multiple Standards get qualified as Open Standards then the selection of a Single Open Standard shall be endeavoured by further narrowing down based on maximal desirable characteristics given below.

4.2.1 Open Standard having multiple implementations from different agencies.

4.2.2 Open Standard widely used in India for which technical expertise and support exists in India.

4.2.3 Open Standard that has Extensions and / or Subsets meeting mandatory characteristics of section 4.1.

4.3 Non-availability of Open Standard which meets all Mandatory Characteristics

In cases, where a standard for an Area meeting all the mandatory characteristics of the Policy is not available, an alternate standard may be temporarily adopted (here after referred to as Interim Standard). This Interim standard shall be identified by relaxing the mandatory characteristics in the order given below until the standard becomes eligible. Due consideration will be given to functional and technical requirements and maturity of the standard.

- a) First the characteristic 4.1.2 shall be relaxed to consider standards with Fair, Reasonable and Non Discriminatory terms and conditions (FRAND) or Reasonable and Non Discriminatory terms and conditions (RAND) and with no royalty payment.
- b) Second the characteristic 4.1.3 shall be relaxed.
- c) Next, the characteristic 4.1.2 shall be relaxed completely to allow Standards with RAND/FRAND terms with royalty payments.
- d) Subsequently the other characteristics shall be relaxed one by one, on a case to case basis.

4.4 Non-availability of Standards which meets functional requirements

In cases, where no standard is available for an Area meeting the essential functional requirements, GoI shall adopt the most appropriate option, in the following order of preference, as an Interim Standard. Due consideration will be given to functional and technical requirements and maturity.

- o Specifications as per mature Open source reference implementation(s), where applicable.
- o Published proprietary specifications as per mature implementation(s).
- o Development of a new standard by the Designated Body.

5. Exceptions for Selecting One or More Additional Open Standard in an Area

Govt shall endeavour to adopt Single and Royalty-Free (RF) Open Standard for an Area. However, in view of the sufficient technical justification and in the wider public interest, additional Open Standard(s) in the same Area may be considered by Govt based on the recommendations of the Designated Body. Such standard shall be compatible and bi-directionally interoperable with the already existing selected Open Standard.

6. Review of the Policy

The Government has the right to revise the Policy as and when required.

7. Point of Contact

All queries or comments related to this Policy shall be directed to JS (e-Governance), DIT (jsegov@mit.gov.in) and DG(NIC) (dg@nic.in)

8. Implementation Manual

“Manual on the Implementation of Policy on Open Standards for e-Governance” can be referred for implementation of this Policy through guidelines, FAQ and rationale.

Annexure – I

1. **Data Archival** Data Archival is the long-term storage of data which is less frequently used or no longer in active use; the archived data should be retrievable for subsequent usage/reference whenever it is needed.
2. **Designated Body** An agency appointed by GOI to (i) consider and recommend the selection of additional Open Standard in an Area (ii) give recommendations if multiple Open Standards are available in an Area with equal score on desirable characteristic and (iii) to review Interim Standards to check if it qualifies for adoption as Open Standards or for replacement with alternate Open Standards in that Area (iii) initiate action for formulation of Interim Standard in a situation where no standards are available to meet functional requirements for an Area.
3. **Domain** A sub-category under an Information Technology field is Domain; specific purpose within a “Domain” is known as “Area”. For example, “Document type for Web publishing content” is one Area under the “Presentation” domain.
4. **e-Governance** A procedural approach in which the Government and its citizens, businesses, and other arms of government are able to transact all their activities or at least majority of activities using Information and Communication Technology tools.
5. **Essential Claims** All claims in a patent that are necessary for implementation of the Recommendation
6. **FRAND/RAND** An abbreviation for (Fair) Reasonable And Non-Discriminatory, is a phrase that defines a basic set of minimal terms that a patent holder is obliged to offer (such as granting a license that is world-wide, non-exclusive, perpetual, reasonable, and non-discriminatory, etc.) and leaves all other non-specified terms to negotiations between the patent holder and the implementer seeking a license
7. **Functional Requirement** A function is described as a set of inputs, the behavior, and outputs in a specific Area. A functional requirement describes the functionality that the system is expected to execute; it may be calculations, technical details, data manipulation, processing, any other specific functionality supposed to be accomplished in the specific Area. For example, “Loss-less compression raster image” is an Area under “Presentation Domain” whose Functional Requirement is an image format with compression but without any loss of quality while doing repeated editing. Whereas “Lossy compression raster image” is another Area under “Presentation Domain”, whose Functional Requirement is an image format with high compression and small size by compromising on quality

8. **G2B** A set of services exchanged between government and the business community.
9. **G2C** A set of services exchanged between government and the citizen.
10. **G2E** A set of services exchanged between government and government employees.
11. **G2G** A set of services exchanged between government agencies.
12. **Interim Standard** A standard temporarily adopted as per the process defined in any one of the sections “Non-availability of Open Standard which meets all Mandatory Characteristics” and “Non-availability of Standards which meets functional requirements” of the Policy on Open Standards.

The Interim Standards would be reviewed regularly by Designated body to check if any of the Interim Standard (i) qualifies to be adopted as an Open Standard or (ii) Any other Standard has been identified as an Open Standard to replace this Interim standard in the Area.

13. **Identified Standard** A standard which meets maximal essential functional requirements for an Area of e-Governance systems.
14. **Interface** A boundary across which two independent systems meet and act on or communicate with each other.
15. **Legacy System** An old method, technology, computer system, or application program that continues to be used, typically because it still functions for the users' needs, even though newer technology or more efficient methods of performing a task are now available.
16. **Maturity** A Standard is considered mature if different implementations, proprietary/open, are available widely adopted and have been stable for some time
17. **New version of Legacy System** The legacy system which has undergone a major version change due to re-engineering like functional changes, architectural changes, technology changes, change in storage mechanism, design implementation changes.
18. **Not-for-profit** Not-for-profit organisations include major internationally recognized Standards bodies such as the [IETF](#), [ISO](#), [IEC](#), W3C, OASIS

including any agency recognized or designated by the GoI as such for the purpose of Open Standards.

19. **Open Standard** A standard which meets all mandatory characteristics laid down in the Policy.
20. **Royalty** A stream of payments for use of a certain type of asset/technology, most typically an Intellectual Property Right (IPR).
21. **Royalty-Free (RF)** A Royalty Free (RF) Standard is a Standard whose license is not conditioned on any payment of royalties, fees and other monetary considerations on its use in an implementation. The RF License is also subject to the following conditions:
 - a. It shall be available worldwide on non-exclusive basis for the life time of the standard.
 - b. It shall extend to all Essential Claims owned or controlled by the participating patent holders (i.e., those developing the standard).
 - c. It could be conditioned on a grant of a reciprocal RF license.
 - d. It shall not impose any further conditions or restrictions on the use of any technology, intellectual property rights, or other restrictions on behaviour of the licensee, but may include reasonable, customary terms like relating to operation or maintenance of the license relationship such as the following: choice of law and dispute resolution.
22. **Specifications document** A document that consists of a set of concise statements of requirements for a system.
23. **Standard** A specification, method, process or practice for a system that is both widely used and accepted or is sanctioned by a Standards Organization.
24. **System** A group of interacting, interrelated, or interdependent elements forming a complex whole. Information System is a combination of people, hardware, software, communication devices, network and data resources that processes (can be storing, retrieving, transforming information) data and information for a specific purpose.