SIF Infrastructure Specification Development, Review, Approval and Versioning Processes

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**Specification Process Overview**

I. **The SIF Specification**

The SIF Specification is THE technical blueprint for data interoperability in the educational marketplace. Over the past 15 years the Specification, both data model and infrastructures, have been maturing in order to meet the demands of the educational community. As demands constantly change in the world of educational data identification, management, movement and utilization, the blueprint has changed as well. All of the current Specifications can be found at [http://www.a4l.org/page/SIFSpecifications](http://www.a4l.org/page/SIFSpecifications)

The Access 4 Learning (A4L) Community ‘powered by SIF’ Specifications, is made up of three different locales – Australia, North America and the United Kingdom. SIF Infrastructure Specifications consist of a common marketplace technology enabled Infrastructure and refers to an extensive educational Data Model. The global A4L Community has stewardship and ownership of the Infrastructure while the three local communities retain stewardship and ownership of their locale-specific Data Model. This structure allows for “thinking globally but acting locally addressing specific marketplace needs”.

The most important aspect of the SIF Specification is its collaborative development by the entire membership and educational marketplace as a whole. This requires that the Staff and technical leadership have access to those pain points that YOU, *the reader of this document*, have in the management and usage of educational data. This Process draft is for both the “SIF-savvy” and “SIF-newbies” to understand the current development process and how to get organizational needs inserted and addressed. The Specification development process is collaborative by nature – but the process is only as good as the input supplied by people like YOU!

II. **Role of the Submitter**

There are various “input” opportunities to have additional data, functionality and features inserted into subsequent Specification releases – but they follow a very similar path. Any A4L Community member, or group of members, who feel the standard needs to address a new area can initiate the change process to:
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Modification</th>
<th>Procedures</th>
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<tr>
<td>Add additional features and functionalities to the SIF Infrastructure</td>
<td>Utilize the Infrastructure Proposal Template (Appendix B) to clearly defining the Business/Use Cases.</td>
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### III. Role of the Staff

The A4L Staff supports the needs of the Community and is the first step in getting identified needs into marketplace products via SIF Specification development. The Staff helps to identify where the “rubber meets the road” when it comes to standardizing a desired functionality extension or new feature needed by schools, states or other educational organizations. The Staff is the resource for the crafting of the various Templates and then passes them onto either the Local Technical Group or International Technical Board to continue the approval process.

### IV. Role of the International Technical Board

The International Technical Board of Directors is made up of Technical Group leadership from all three A4L Communities (Australia, North America, and United Kingdom). They collect and review the Infrastructure features and functionality changes from submittals from the Staff in the SIF Specification review process. The International Technical Board provides both a quality control mechanism and a resource to be used to guide requests through the object approval process. Their approval of a draft means that the draft goes to the Association Board of Directors to continue the approval process and the draft is posted on the Community Site for member access.

### V. Role of the Association Board of Directors

The Association Board of Directors reviews the proposal from the International Technical Board for changes or additions to the Infrastructure functionalities to the currently approved Specification. The Association Board of Directors provides both a quality control mechanism and a resource to be used to guide requests through the approval process. Their approval of a draft means that it goes to the Membership to continue the approval process.
VI. Role of the A4L Community Members

Community members play a critical role at both ends of the Specification Development Process, including: the initial requests that start the process and the final review, approval and publishing of the draft Specification.
How Do You Get “Stuff” In the Pipeline?

I. Submission

So you have a feature, functionality or even a specific object that you want to propose for inclusion in an upcoming version of the Specification? What exactly do you need to do?

II. Process

The process is relatively straightforward.

- Create a copy of the one of the identified Proposal Templates
- Complete Template sections 1 (Identification), 2 (Rationale/Business Case) and 3 (Use cases).
- Submit the partially completed Proposal Template to the Staff for Review
- Be available for any required follow up information on your proposal

Once the proposal contains all the required information, the Staff will present it to the International Technical Board and/or Association Board for a first review on overall concept. If they (the Technical Group) deem the proposal worthy, the Staff will work with you to complete the detailed design. From that point forward, you are only required to make yourself available to provide any follow up information regarding your proposal, although you should certainly be monitoring the work to ensure that the final design provides a viable solution for the needs you identified and expressed in the original business case.

III. Timelines

Each A4L Community may release an updated version of the Specification every 6-9 months. The timeline for the next release of the SIF Specifications is updated by Staff, and members can find relevant information on the Specification Development workgroup site(s).

That release timeline may look rather complex because it contains the necessary review cycles to maintain the existing quality of the SIF standard. It should also be remembered that the current process is designed to shield almost all of that complexity from the Submitter.
IV. Acknowledgement

The entire A4L Community appreciates your commitment to education and we want to ensure that a clear and open process exists for factoring your inputs and concerns into the SIF standard. We want to make sure that proposed changes are acknowledged and celebrated within the community – that means you!
Proposal Submission Development and Approval Process

Proposal: The proposer completes the first three (3) sections of the Infrastructure Template and submits that to the A4L Staff. The submissions are stressed to be Use and Business Case driven.

Staff Support: The Staff works with the proposer to prepare the draft for successful Technical Leadership review. The first step in the process is the Staff utilizes an agreed-upon rubric to continue to next steps, require edits, or deem the submission not ready at this time with available resources.

Initial Tech Board Review (2 weeks): The International Technical Board reviews and discusses the value of the Business/Use Cases outlined in the Template. If the overarching concept is approved, the draft is sent to the Staff for completion including technical development.

Proposal Finalization: The Staff works with the proposer and other technical experts in the Community to compete the technical aspects of the proposal. The goal is to prepare a draft for the Technical Leadership to approve for inclusion in the next Specification release.

Final Tech Leadership Review (2 weeks): The International Technical Board reviews and discusses the technical work done to support the originally approved Business/Use Cases. If approved, the draft will be incorporated into the next Specification release.

If successful at each phase and the timing matches, the proposal will be included in the next release of the Implementation Specification. If the proposal is rejected, the A4L Staff will work with proposers on possible revisions for future submissions.
**Specification Development and Approval Process**

![Diagram of the approval process]

**Tech Leadership Review** (approx. 2 weeks): The International Technical Board reviews and discusses the technical work done in a proposed Implementation Specification release. If approved, a “delta” draft from the previously approved Specification release shall be passed to the Association Board of Directors.

**Management Leadership Review** (approx. 1 week): The Association Board receives a “delta” draft from the previously approved Specification release. Board members have access to the full draft if interested but will base their vote around the high level recommendations of the Technical leadership.

**Community Review** (approx. 2 weeks): The global Community is notified that a Community Review is underway of the current draft.

**Approval/Edits/Release** (Staff Support – approx. 1 week): After a formal Community review and vote, and if approved, the draft is edited as necessary using the feedback and edits submitted by Community Members during review.

**Tech Leadership approval/recommendation** (approx. 1 week max): The International Technical Board reviews and discusses feedback and edits received during the Membership Review. If approved, a ‘recommendation for release’ is passed to the Association Board of Directors.
Management Leadership approval (approx. 1 week max): The Association Board receives a “delta” draft and recommendation from the International Technical Board regarding the Specification release. Board members will base their vote around the high level recommendations of the Technical leadership. If approved, the Specification is posted on the A4L website for the Community and the marketplace.

Should a Specification release be rejected, Staff will work with the International Technical Board to address any issues raised. Once this is completed, it can be submitted again for the full review process.
## Appendix A: Infrastructure Proposal Template

A detailed form encapsulating the information submitters need to effect change in the SIF Standard and the proposal approval milestones which must be accomplished.

A downloadable template is available from the A4L Community Site, Global page (on the Shared Documents group page) here: [http://www.a4l.org/group/Global](http://www.a4l.org/group/Global)

### SIF Infrastructure Specification Extension Proposal Template

This template should be used by individuals or Project Teams to submit (and later track the progress of) proposed extensions to the SIF Infrastructure Specification. These extensions can either be new data objects or revisions to the schema defining elements and/or attributes in existing ones.

It is designed to be a “living document” and contains two “status tracking” sections which should be maintained and updated as the change approval process for this extension evolves.

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