

ISO/IEC JTC 1 "Information technology"

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SC 34 Business Plan 2025

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Description

This document is circulated for review and consideration at the November 2025 JTC 1 Plenary.

BUSINESS PLAN FOR JTC 1/SC 34

PERIOD COVERED: September 2024 to September 2025

SUBMITTED BY: Francis Cave, SC 34 Chair

1.0 Executive Summary

SC 34 Document description and processing languages is concerned with the specification of standards for the representation and processing of editable documents, most of which are built on a foundation of XML. SC 34 was created in 1998 with the transfer of a programme of work that JTC 1, on its creation, had inherited from ISO TC 97/SC 18/WG 8. A detailed history of SC 34 can be found in JTC 1 Standing Document 2 at <https://jtc1info.org/sd-2-history/jtc1-subcommittees/sc-34/>.

The standards for which SC 34 is responsible broadly fall into one of two categories:

Editable document file format standards include two globally-important office file format standards:

- ISO/IEC 26300 OpenDocument Format (ODF), developed by OASIS and maintained jointly by OASIS and SC 34 under an agreement with JTC 1
- ISO/IEC 29500 Office Open XML File Format (OOXML), developed by Microsoft for Ecma International and maintained by SC 34.

XML document schema languages include several languages that are widely used in XML document data modelling and quality control, including: ISO/IEC 19757-2 RELAX NG, ISO/IEC 19757-3 Schematron and ISO/IEC 19757-7 NVDL.

Other standards for which SC 34 is responsible include standards used in the preparation of digital publications and archives, principally in the EPUB e-book format.

The main markets for SC 34 standards are among software developers. SC 34's standards are crucial to ensuring the interoperability of software implementations, creating pro-competitive markets in which consumers can be confident that editable documents can be shared between different implementations of the same standards.

SC 34 works closely with other standards development organizations, with some more successfully than others. SC 34 has a good working relationship with OASIS and Ecma International on standards maintenance but has found it difficult to establish a stable relationship with some other SDOs, such as W3C.

The complexity of the editable document file format standards means that there is still a need for maintenance, principally corrections and clarifications, but the market is mature and it is difficult to identify a demand for new features and standards in this domain. It is a serious challenge to find experts willing to put significant time into maintenance work when there is little genuinely new work to be done.

2.0 Environment

The technologies for representing editable documents, using XML and data compression techniques, are well-established and mature. The demand for new features to be standardized remains weak. The main focus of this category of SC 34's work has therefore continued to be on maintenance of the existing large and complex multi-part standards. It had been hoped that the increasing use of online collaborative document editing tools would by now have led to a demand for standards in this area, but so far such demand has not materialized.

Work in SC 34/JWG 7 and SC 34/WG 9 has identified some areas where innovation is occurring, such as in the use of documents as data in AI applications, and new digital publishing formats, but work on identifying the standards requirements in these areas has been slow.

Nevertheless, the demand for innovation remains strong in some areas, as exemplified by continuing work on revision of ISO/IEC 19757-3 Schematron, and the current work on development of ISO/IEC 22424 as a standard for long-term preservation of EPUB documents has attracted an encouraging level of interest from across the international publishing and library communities.

3.0 Achievements and benefits

The Project Editor, with the assistance of SC 34/WG 4 experts, has completed the substantial work of the first major revision of ISO/IEC 29500-1 and 29500-4 in ten years. The overwhelming majority of defects identified by implementers and users have been resolved. As well as a significant number of corrections and clarifications, the text is now much more concise (although still substantial), better organized, and conforms much more closely to the requirements of the ISO/IEC Directives Part 2. Following a successful CD review of both drafts earlier in the period, DIS ballots are in progress and final texts for publication will be submitted early in 2026.

The Project Editor and SC 34/JWG 7 have successfully completed a review of ISO/IEC CD 22424, and a text for DIS ballot is being initiated.

SC 34/WG 9 has been considering a new draft of AWI TR 5812 from the Project Editor, and it is hoped that this project can progress to completion in the next period.

The Project Editor and SC 34/WG 10 have completed technical work on the latest revision of ISO/IEC 19757-3 Schematron. With the recent conclusion of an FDIS ballot, it is expected that a final text for publication will be ready soon. The Project Editor has successfully engaged with the implementer and end-user community, by using Github to enable collaborative informal discussion of ways to improve the Schematron language in future revisions.

By developing and maintaining high-quality standards for document description and processing, SC 34 is contributing most directly to the following United Nations **Sustainable Development Goals: 4: Quality education; 9: Industry, innovation, technology and infrastructure**. SC 34's standards have **global applicability**, consistent with ISO's current strategic goals.

4.0 Participation and cooperation/collaboration.

The number of current P-member National Bodies is 13 and O-member National Bodies is 39. Changes since the last plan was published are highlighted in **red**.

P-member National Bodies **(13)**: Armenia, China, Czech Republic, India, Italy, Japan, Korea Republic of, Lebanon, Russian Federation, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States

O-member National Bodies **(389)**:

Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Chile, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China, Hungary, Indonesia, Iran Islamic Republic of, Ireland, ~~Israel~~, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Thailand, Türkiye

SC 34 currently holds a single annual plenary meeting in September. 19 delegates from 5 NBs and 1 liaison member participated in the 2025 Plenary meeting in Redmond WA, USA. 23 delegates from seven NBs and one liaison member participated in the 2024 Plenary meeting in Prague, CZ.

SC 34 has the following liaisons.

Internal liaisons		
<i>Label</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Liaison comments</i>
JTC 1/SC 2	Coded character sets	Applications of character sets in XML and document file formats
JTC 1/SC 29	Coding of audio, picture, multimedia and hypermedia information	Applications of image and font standards in office file format standards
JTC 1/SC 36	Information technology for learning, education and training	Common interest in standards based upon EPUB
JTC 1/SC 42	Artificial intelligence	Common interest in the use of office documents in machine learning applications
ISO/TC 46 and ISO/TC 46/SC 4	Information and documentation / Technical interoperability	Joint Working Group 7: EPUB
ISO/TC 171 and ISO/TC 171/SC 2	Document management applications / Document file formats, EDMS systems and authenticity of information	Common interest in standards based upon EPUB

External liaisons (Category A)	
<i>Title</i>	<i>Liaison comments</i>
Ecma International	SC 34 is grateful to Ecma International for providing SC 34/WG 4 with administrative support, a Project Editor and expert participation for maintenance of ISO/IEC 29500 OOXML.
Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards (OASIS)	By agreement between OASIS and JTC 1, responsibility for maintenance of ISO/IEC 26300 OpenDocument Format (ODF) is shared between OASIS and SC 34, with technical lead being provided by the OASIS ODF Technical Committee, and SC 34 expert input provided through SC 34/WG 6.
PDF Association	Collaboration on the development and promotion of document file format standards within the scope of SC 34 and their relationships with the on-going development of the PDF specification ISO 32000

External liaisons (Category C)	
<i>Title</i>	<i>Liaison comments</i>
European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI) (TC on Electronic Signatures and Infrastructures)	WG 4 , especially use of digital signatures in OOXML
Radium Foundation	JWG 7 , especially contribution of Radium LCP encryption technology for the development of ISO/IEC 23078. AHG 1 , contributing to consideration of development of a standard for continuously-scrollable comics
World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)	WG 6 JWG 7 , especially standardization of EPUB.

5.0 Objectives and strategies to achieve them

SC 34 expects to continue its current programme of work, as described for each Working Group in section 7.0.

SC 34 needs to determine the opportunities for future standardization within the existing scope of document description and processing languages and what these opportunities might be. Plans for consultations among SC 34's members and more widely were outlined in last year's business plan, but progress has been slower than hoped due to limited resources.

Initial consultations have taken place among SC 34's members with the aims of determining a list of potentially fruitful topics for wider consultation, and identifying the groups, internal to ISO and IEC and external, where wider consultation could take place.

Key questions being considered include:

- Which groups, internal and external, should SC 34 be engaging with now and possibly on a regular basis?
- What topics are of interest to these groups?
- What standards development processes are appropriate?
 - o Development within SC 34?
 - o Development by external or national SDOs, using the PAS or Fast Track procedure for standardization by JTC 1 where appropriate?
 - o Other processes?

The answers to these questions will enable SC 34 to:

- Review and as necessary revise our scope and title to include new topics
- Propose additional liaisons and collaborations, both internal and external, to pursue new topics
- Develop promotional material for communicating more effectively about existing and new work, making use of JTC 1, ISO, IEC and other appropriate channels of communication, including online and social media

- If appropriate, recommend new activities to SC 34 members.

6.0 Factors affecting completion and adoption of the work program

There continues to be a low level of participation by P-members in SC 34 Working Groups. We are obviously concerned that the number of P-members continues to be low.

We have difficulty in persuading market leaders among implementers to contribute their significant investment in new ideas to a common cause of standardization. While innovation continues in some quarters, such as in the continuing development of ISO/IEC 19757-3 Schematron and the interest shown in developing a standard format for continuously-scrollable comics, interest in extending the functionality of office file format standards seems limited.

We continue to experience difficulty in engaging with implementers in the Open Source community. The ISO/IEC standards development processes are perceived to be closed and are not seen as compatible with the Open Source ethos, which deters expert participation from that community.

7.0 Structure, current projects, and publications

SC 34 has five Working Groups and one Ad Hoc Group:

SC 34/WG 4 is concerned with the development and maintenance of the ISO/IEC 29500 Office Open XML File Format (OOXML) series of standards, and other projects that relate specifically to OOXML. Although there have been no new projects assigned to this Working Group since the publication of ISO/IEC 30114-2 in 2018, maintenance of all Parts of ISO/IEC 29500 continues to demand a high level of expert resources, with a large proportion of the work being shouldered by the Project Editor and WG 4 Convenor. The major achievement this year has been the completion of the DIS texts for the revisions of ISO/IEC 29500-1 and ISO/IEC 29500-4, with DIS balloting due to close during the JTC 1 November 2025 Plenary. These new editions will be significantly improved over the current ones: shorter, better organized, with clearer and more consistent language, and fixing many technical defects, all promoting improved quality and interoperability of implementations.

SC 34/WG 6 is involved in the maintenance of the ISO/IEC 26300 OpenDocument Format (ODF) series of standards, a task shared with OASIS, which periodically submits new editions of ODF for PAS transposition. The DIS ballot on the PAS transposition of ODF 1.3, having originally been submitted in December 2023, eventually began in July 2025 and is due to close in mid-October. Assuming that JTC 1 requests SC 34 to convene a CRM, WG 6 experts are keen to participate.

SC 34/JWG 7 is concerned with the development and maintenance of international standards based upon and supporting the use of the EPUB digital publications format. Current work is focused on developing EPUB/A, an application profile of EPUB for long-term preservation of EPUB documents, to replace ISO/IEC TS 22424. The demand for a standard archive version of EPUB is particularly strong in the library and information science community worldwide, but its availability will also benefit publishers and authors. Review of a Committee Draft was completed in June 2025, a Comment Disposition Meeting was recently concluded and a DIS ballot has been initiated.

SC 34/WG 9 has concluded the Committee Draft (CD) consultation for CD TR 5812, Semantic Metadata Support in Office Documents, and is scheduled to hold a Comment Resolution Meeting (CRM) during the plenary session on September 9, 2025. The finalization of this Technical Report will

provide guidance for future enhancements and extensions to existing office file format standards, ensuring they continue to meet evolving business requirements while preserving interoperability.

SC 34/WG 10 has been assisting the Project Editor on the latest revision of ISO/IEC 19757-3 Schematron, a widely-used language for expressing pattern-based constraints on XML documents of all kinds, performing a vital quality control function in many XML-based business workflows. The revision has been driven by the requirements of both software implementers and end-users for improved functionality and will help to keep this important standard relevant to the needs of businesses in many sectors globally. An FDIS ballot was successfully completed at the end of August 2025 and the final text is being forwarded for publication. Informal engagement with the implementer and end-user community, using Github to determine requirements for new and improved features, has already shown significant benefits in ensuring that the current revision meets genuine implementer/user needs. With no sign that the demand for new and improved features has been fully satisfied, further revisions of ISO/IEC 19757-3 are confidently anticipated.

Ad Hoc Group 1 met twice in 2025 to discuss ideas for preparing a standard format for continuously-scrollable comics. At the SC 34 Plenary meeting in September 2025 it was decided to renew AHG 1 for a further year, to gather wider stakeholder support and it is hoped to develop a NWIP.