National Institute of Standards and Technology Seeking Comments on Development of Artificial Intelligence Standards

On May 1, 2019, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) will officially publish in the Federal Register a Request for Information (Docket Number: 190312229-9229-01) seeking comments on development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Standards. Pursuant to the Executive Order on Maintaining American Leadership in Artificial Intelligence (signed on February 11, 2019), NIST was directed to create a plan for "federal engagement in the development of technical standards and related tools in support of reliable, robust, and trustworthy systems that use AI technologies." In order to fulfill this directive, NIST seeks to consult with will consult with federal agencies, the private sector, academia, non-governmental entities, and other stakeholders with interest in and expertise relating to AI.

Specifically, NIST seeks to understand the:

1. Current status and plans regarding the availability, use, and development of AI technical standards and tools in support of reliable, robust, and trustworthy systems that use AI technologies;

2. Needs and challenges regarding the existence, availability, use, and development of AI standards and tools; and

3. The current and potential future role of federal agencies regarding the existence, availability, use, and development of AI technical standards and tools in order to meet the nation's needs.

NIST also lists three specific categories with subtopics in the notice covering the major areas on which the department is seeking information; however, these categories are not intended to limit the topics addressed by those who submit comments to the notice.

AI Technical Standards and Related Tools Development: Status and Plans

1. AI technical standards and tools that have been developed, and the developing organization, including the aspects of AI these standards and tools address, and whether they address sector-specific needs or are cross-sector in nature;

2. Reliable sources of information about the availability and use of AI technical standards and tools;

3. The needs for AI technical standards and related tools. How those needs should be determined, and challenges in identifying and developing those standards and tools;

4. AI technical standards and related tools that are being developed, and the developing organization, including the aspects of AI these standards and tools address, and whether they address sector-specific needs or are cross sector in nature;

5. Any supporting roadmaps or similar documents about plans for developing AI technical standards and tools;

6. Whether the need for AI technical standards and related tools is being met in a timely way by organizations;

7. Whether sector-specific AI technical standards needs are being addressed by sector-specific organizations, or whether those who need AI standards will rely on cross-sector standards which are intended to be useful across multiple sectors; Technical standards and guidance that are needed to establish and advance trustworthy aspects (e.g., accuracy, transparency, security, privacy, and robustness) of AI technologies.

Defining and Achieving U.S. AI Technical Standards Leadership

1. The urgency of the U.S. need for AI technical standards and related tools, and what U.S. effectiveness and leadership in AI technical standards development should look like;

2. Where the U.S. currently is effective and/or leads in AI technical standards development, and where it is lagging;

3. Specific opportunities for, and challenges to, U.S. effectiveness and leadership in standardization related to AI technologies; and

4. How the U.S. can achieve and maintain effectiveness and leadership in AI technical standards development.

Prioritizing Federal Government Engagement in AI Standardization

1. The unique needs of the federal government and individual agencies for AI technical standards and related tools, and whether they are important for broader portions of the U.S. economy and society, or strictly for federal applications;

2. The type and degree of federal agencies' current and needed involvement in AI technical standards to address the needs of the federal government;

3. How the federal government should prioritize its engagement in the development of AI technical standards and tools that have broad, cross-sectoral application versus sector- or application-specific standards and tools;

4. The adequacy of the federal government's current approach for government engagement in standards development, which emphasizes private sector leadership, and, more specifically, the appropriate role and activities for the federal government to ensure the desired and timely development of AI standards for federal and non-governmental uses;

5. Examples of federal involvement in the standards arena (e.g., via its role in communications, participation, and use) that could serve as models for the Plan, and why they are appropriate approaches; and

6. What actions, if any, the federal government should take to help ensure that desired AI technical standards are useful and incorporated into practice.

The deadlines for the submission of comments will be released on May 1st, with the official publication of the notice.

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