Technology Corner: The NENA Standards Process

By S. Robert Miller, NENA Technical Issues Director

NENA is the premiere public safety industry organization for defining 9-1-1 technical issues and recommending solutions for technology service providers, equipment manufacturers and industry-related standard setting bodies. NENA has established itself as an industry leader in recommending technical solutions through its Technical Committees.

These standards enable compatibility of 9-1-1 technologies, minimize costs involved in provisioning and maintaining public safety communications, increase the effectiveness of 9-1-1 call handling and emergency response, and promote teamwork among industry providers of public safety products and services.

NENA has established this process for defining and solving complex technology issues related to the provision of emergency services. Such technology is inclusive of the hardware, software, private and public safety networks, data and Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) apparatus used for emergency communications.

The roles and responsibilities of individuals and committees involved in the development, review and approval process for creation of the standards are well defined in NENA Standard 01-001.

At a minimum, each NENA Recommendation for a Standard offered by the Technical Committees must contain a subsection addressing the purpose, reason to implement, acronyms/abbreviations used, benefits, and when to implement. Approved NENA recommended standards are re-evaluated each year by the authoring Technical Committee to ensure they are still applicable.

Committee Structure and Appointments

The NENA Technical Committees include industry experts from both the public and private sectors. Each year, the incumbent NENA president consults with the NENA executive director and the NENA technical issues director, and nominates a technical liaison subject to approval by the NENA Executive Board.

The NENA technical issues director appoints committee members to serve on the NENA Technical Advisory Board. The Technical Advisory Board consists of both industry and jurisdictional NENA members who have a keen overall knowledge of industry trends and public safety needs.

The NENA technical liaison appoints technical committee chairpersons to focus on select segments of the public safety industry. Current knowledge requirements and technology complexities have resulted in the establishment of the following Committees: Network, Data, PSAP/Customer Premise Equipment, and ALEC/Private Switch.

Each technical committee chair selects subject matter experts from the NENA membership to serve on the appropriate problem-solving team. They may also create special study groups to focus on unique issues that may have a significant technological impact on emergency communications services. Although each member of a Technical Committee must be a NENA member, it is recognized that study groups may need to include individuals who have specialized technological expertise and only limited public safety involvement. In such instances, NENA membership is not necessary.

Technical Issues Director
The technical issues director is responsible for the overall direction and coordination of all technical issues. The technical issues director works closely with the technical liaison and the Technical Committee chairs to help develop the NENA standards.

The technical issues director also represents NENA at meetings, hearings and other proceedings of a technical nature as requested by the executive director and interacts with NENA's attorneys in developing positions to be taken by the Association on technical issues.

Technical Liaison
The technical liaison coordinates and ensures continuity of technical problem solving efforts and aids in steering technical issues to the proper Technical Committee for action.

The technical liaison is responsible for administering the NENA Standards Process and coordinating technical issues for resolution among the technical committees.

The technical liaison also: recruits technically competent individuals to serve as committee chairs, coordinates technical issues and the overall direction between technical committees to insure strategic alignment, assists the technical issues director in coordinating technical issues between NENA Technical Committees and industry standard-setting bodies, and assists in establishing and planning the Technical Development Conference and Critical Issues Forums.

Technical Chairs
The NENA technical chairs are standing members of the NENA Technical Advisory Board. The Committee chairs appoint NENA members to serve on their respective committees and coordinate team efforts to: evaluate public safety technology issues; create specialized study groups, as warranted; provide recommendations for technical standards and solutions; work closely with standard-setting bodies, when required; provide assistance and leadership in the Technical Development Conference and Critical Issues Forums.

The current Technical Committee chairs are undisputed leaders in the 9-1-1 industry and are nationally recognized experts in their fields. Billy Ragsdale chairs the PSAP/Customer Premise Equipment Committee and also serves as the NENA technical liaison. Bob Gojanovich chairs the Network Technical Committee; Barbara Thornburg chairs the Data Technical Committee; and Roger Hixson chairs the ALEC/Private Switch Technical Committee. It is much to the credit of these individuals and their assistants, including Study Group Chairs and countless NENA members (and some non-NENA members), that the 9-1-1 industry is where it is today and is positioning for tomorrow.

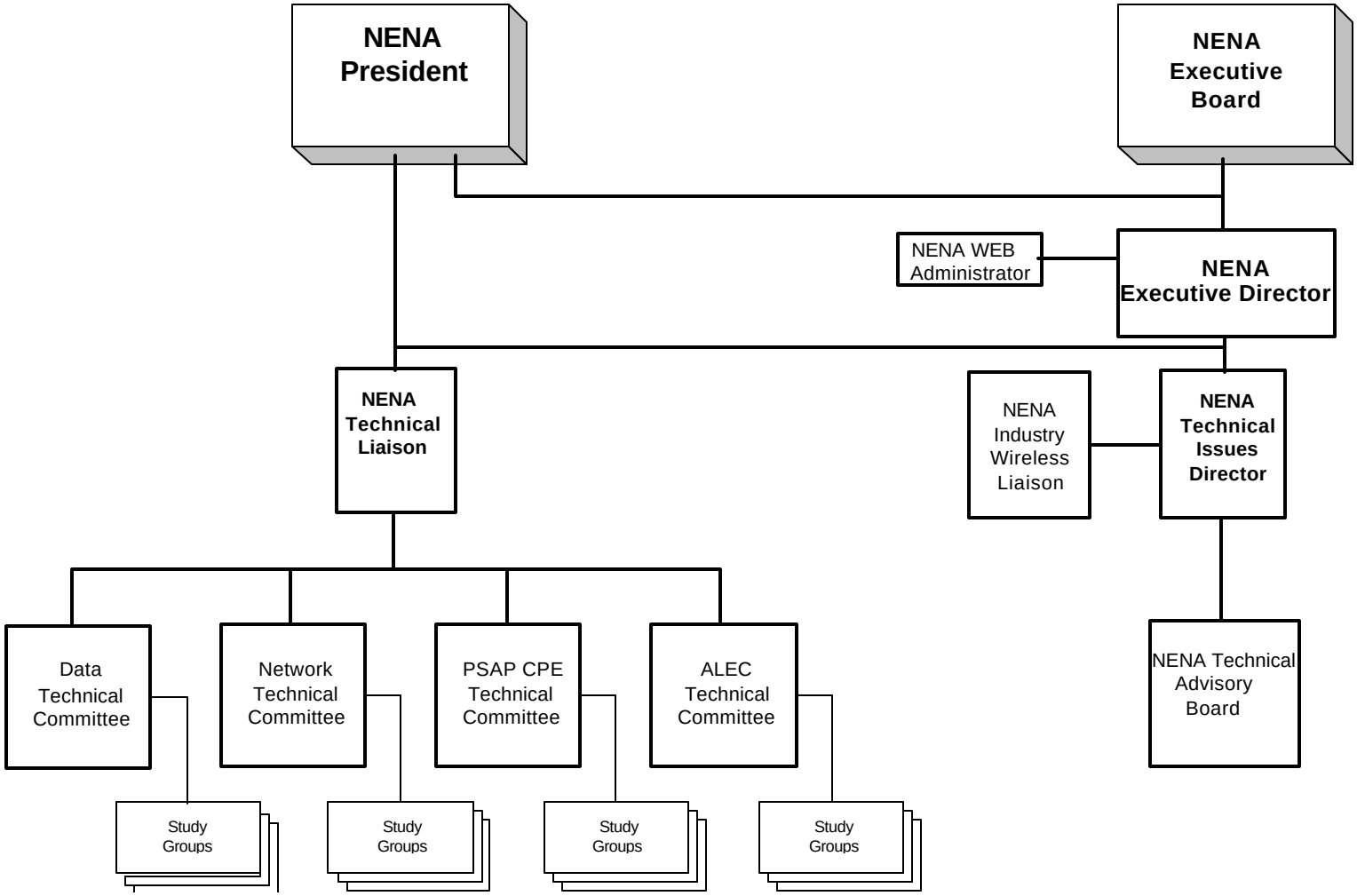
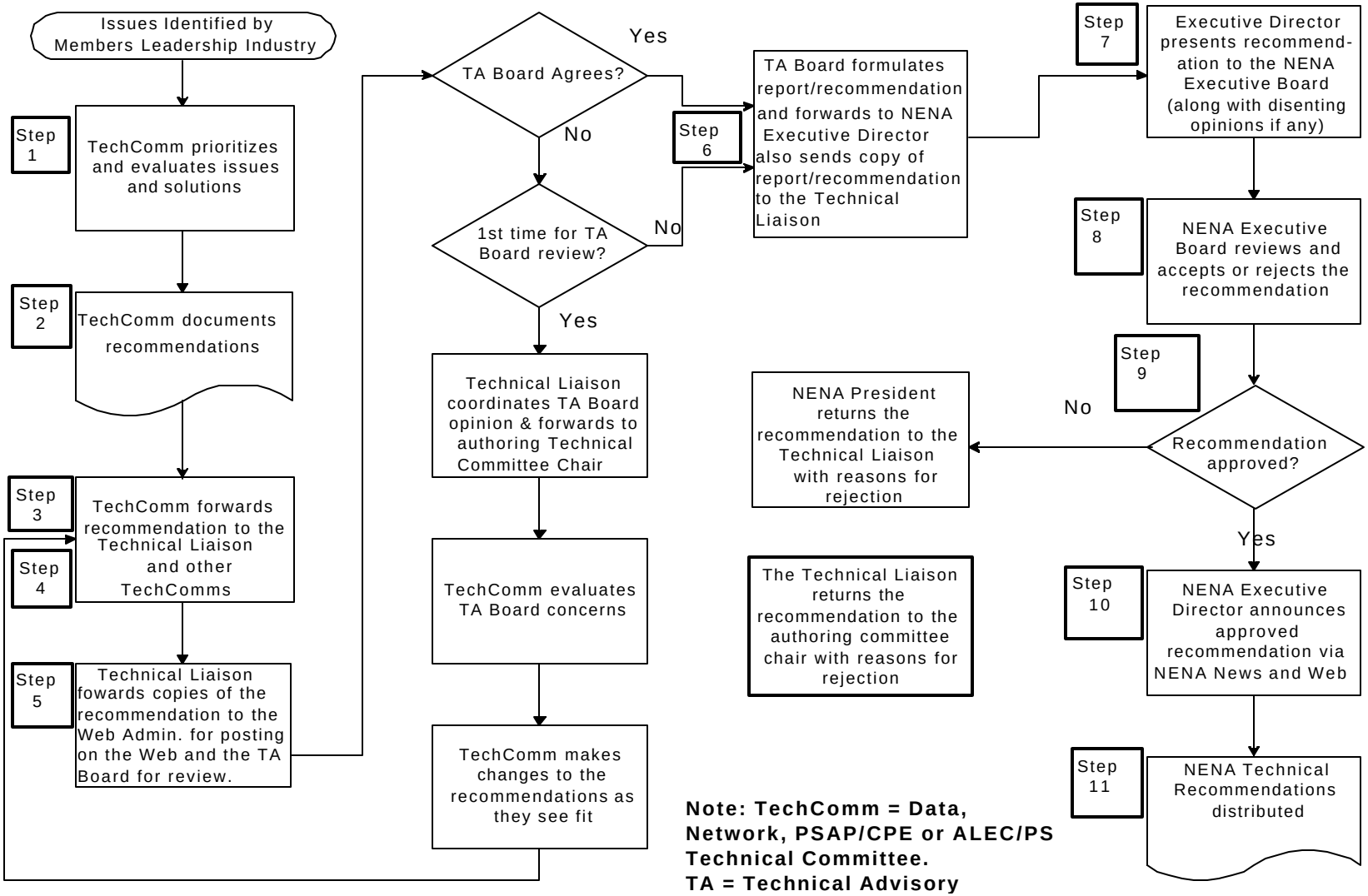
Web Administrator
The NENA executive director appoints the web administrator to oversee all aspects of the National NENA Internet web site. The web administrator posts Technical Committee recommendations as instructed by the NENA technical liaison and approved by the technical issues director soliciting comments from NENA members for 30 days.

As Technical Committee recommendations are posted, the web administrator notifies the Technical Advisory Board chair and the technical liaison of such postings. During the 30-day comment period, comments shall be addressed to the Technical Advisory Board chair.

Technical Issues Board
The technical issues director chairs the Technical Advisory Board and appoints NENA members to the Board in addition to the standing members. The Technical Advisory Board reviews all proposed NENA Standards and recommends action to the NENA Executive Board.

The process of establishing NENA Technical Standards is an open process and I would invite anyone desiring to participate to watch the NENA web site for postings and to contact the technical issues director, the technical liaison, or any of the Technical Committee chairs for additional information. Email addresses are posted on the NENA web site at www.nena.org.

NENA Technical Committee Organization



NENA Recommendation for Standard Process