July 19, 2019

National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)
U.S. Department of Commerce
Ai_standards@nist.gov

Re: "U.S. Leadership in AI: A Plan for Federal Engagement in Developing Technical Standards and Related Tools. Draft for Public Comment"

Dear Sir/Madam:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft plan for federal engagement in developing technical standards and related tools.

SIIA is the principal trade association for the software and digital information industries worldwide. The more than 800 software companies, data and analytics firms, information service providers, and digital publishers that make up our membership serve nearly every segment of society – from enterprise to government, and healthcare to everyday consumers. Our membership reflects the broad and diverse landscape of digital content; including both B2B and B2C services, small specialized providers, and large multinational industry leaders. For more information, please visit the SIIA Policy Home Page at www.siia.net.

SIIA considers the plan developed by NIST to be a very useful and comprehensive guide as to what needs to be done in this space. Given the need to ensure trust in AI systems, the development of tools for accountability and auditing (page 9) should be prioritized. It would be ideal if such tools could be applicable across sectors as appropriate, while also focused on the specific risks and impacts associated with particular sectors and applications (page 13). Perhaps the most important thing in this context is for NIST to develop tools that can be used to audit AI systems that are used in decisions that are particularly consequential to people such as, for instance, credit scoring and employment recruitment systems. Once a few tools have been developed, it would be helpful for NIST to convene regulators, industry, and civil society for a discussion on the utility of those tools with a view to facilitating the replication of those standards and tools for other AI applications.

With respect to testing methodologies, it makes sense to develop standards for comparing AI systems with human performance (page 9).   Again, it would be helpful to prioritize systems that are involved with particularly consequential decisions for people and to invite relevant stakeholders to discuss the utility of those standards.

SIIA concurs with the following positions on page 11.

- The degree to which ethical considerations might be incorporated into standards should be tied tightly to the degree of risk to humans, and

- Privacy considerations should be included in any standards governing the collection, processing, sharing, storage, and disposal of personal information.

With respect to data discoverability and access to Federal government data (page 17), SIIA considers that it would be helpful for the Federal government to conduct in depth analysis of confirmed identity theft that agencies such as the Internal Revenue Service might possess. SIIA also supports all forms of collaborative models for standards development, including open source and Federal open data. At the same time, it is important to ensure respect for private sector proprietary data and models and intellectual property rights, including in the context of developing data standards (as referenced on pages 9-10). For more information on the contribution that private sector developed data and public-private partnerships can make, please see the attached July 2, 2019 SIIA letter to the Department of Commerce re: Docket No: USBC-2019-0001-0001: Request for Comments on the Cross-Agency Priority Goal: Leveraging Data as a Strategic Asset: Phase 3."

Sincerely,

Carl Schonander
Senior Vice President of Global Public Policy
Software & Information Industry Association