

Germany

In Germany, the federal government is implementing more and more administration processes electronically. Standards are deemed necessary to enable these many different applications for the future and accessible for all. The Standards and Architectures for eGovernment Applications (SAGA) publication prescribe these standards and their relationships and dependencies in the context of an architectural framework. The standards and guidelines described in SAGA apply to all eGovernment initiatives to “ensure efficient information exchange between the federal government, citizens, businesses and partners at the federal level.” The first version of SAGA was published as part of the BundOnline initiative in 2002.

Although the scope of SAGA is the federal government, it is owned and managed by the Bund CIO under the Ministry of the Interior. As such, adoption and mandating of the standards and guidelines differs from ministry to ministry. Most ministries “cherry pick,” and especially the adoption of technical standards show significant deviation, for instance when the SAGA recommended IT platform (Java 2 Enterprise Edition is recommended over Microsoft .NET) does not match existing IT platform investments in a certain area.

Governance is also centrally assigned to the Bund CIO. A cross-governmental Working Group (Expertenkreis) exists, that provides input and forms opinions on standards, however final say (through the publication of standards white, gray and black lists) lies with Bund CIO.

There are currently discussions taking place to change the mandating policy with the release of the next SAGA version (5.0) to fully mandate it across all ministries. In that case, it is anticipated that the governance process will be changed as well.

From an interoperability agreements perspective, SAGA has a strong focus on the technical layer. The technical standards are described from several viewpoints. The Computational viewpoint focuses on architectural styles and guidelines, the Engineering viewpoint focuses on processes for establishing infrastructure, and the Technology viewpoint focuses on technical standards supporting the various architectural components.

At a higher level of abstraction, SAGA also mentions the legal and organizational aspects of interoperability, referring to other initiatives, such as the German “Legal frame of reference for eGovernment” that covers law adjustments enabling eGovernment. Several organizational guidelines and considerations are mentioned, mainly targeting the specific de-central nature of the German government system. However, no implementation suggestions are made in SAGA itself.

The semantic layer is out of scope for SAGA and is mostly covered by a separate initiative, Deutschland Online (DOL). DOL has a larger political span as it includes countries and municipalities. One of the DOL initiatives, XÖV-Standardisierung, focuses on XML message standardisation.

There is a central XÖV coordination team (XÖV-Koordination) that governs standardisation to ensure reuse of XÖV standard (XML) components and alignment with international standards such as UN/CEFACT and the Dublic Core Metadata Initiative. The standardisation efforts are requirements-based and initiation of the process is done by projects under DOL. Core components are made available by the XÖV coordination team. Semantic alignment with international standards is governed centrally by that team. Accepted message components are published in the X-Repository.