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USPTO to launch SPARK Pilot Program to strengthen U.S. standards development leadership

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ALEXANDRIA, VA — Further to the United States Patent and Trademark Office's (USPTO) December 29, 2025 launch of its Standard-Essential Patent (SEP) Working Group, America's Innovation Agency today announced the design of a new pilot program to incentivize meaningful participation by U.S. small and medium-sized businesses, universities, and non-profits in standards development organizations (SDOs).

Technical standards are a key component of the innovation ecosystem — from telecommunications and artificial intelligence to manufacturing and cybersecurity. However, resource constraints often prevent smaller U.S. entities from participating meaningfully in SDOs, where standards are developed that can determine market access and shape the competitive landscape.

The forthcoming Standards Participation and Representation Kudos (SPARK) Pilot Program will address this challenge by offering a limited number of acceleration certificates to eligible U.S. entities that make technical contributions to or otherwise meaningfully participate in SDO activities. These certificates will be redeemable at the USPTO to expedite examination of patent applications or appeals to the Patent Trial and Appeal Board (PTAB), providing tangible value that helps offset the time and resources invested in standards development.

"American leadership in standards development is essential to innovation, competitiveness, and national security," said John A. Squires, Under Secretary of Commerce for Intellectual Property and Director of the USPTO. "The SPARK program recognizes that small and medium-sized businesses, universities, and non-profits bring critical expertise and innovative thinking to standards development, but often lack the resources of larger enterprises to sustain participation. By offering meaningful incentives here at the USPTO, we're continuing to invest in broader and more robust U.S. representation in the very forums where tomorrow's technologies are taking shape today."

SPARK is the first initiative of the USPTO's SEP Working Group, announced just last month. Director Squires established the SEP Working Group to redouble the USPTO's commitment to strengthening the U.S. patent system, fuel economic growth, and spur innovation that advances American freedoms. Through SPARK and other forthcoming initiatives, the Working Group seeks to fulfill its core objectives of facilitating meaningful participation in standards development by a wide range of American inventors and businesses and providing a new channel to promote transparency and access to the innovation ecosystem.

Detailed eligibility requirements, application procedures, and terms and conditions will be announced when the pilot launches.

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