

Standards Body · Foundational source, public edition · Released July 17, 2026

Canonical record: <https://standardsbody.ai/library/foundational-source/foundations/>

Standards Body is an independent research and institutional-design project. It is not currently a regulator, accreditation body, certification body, or governmental authority. This document is research; it is not an adopted standard.

FOUNDATIONS.md

The Foundations of Frontier AI Evaluation Infrastructure

Status: Canonical Overview White Paper (Foundational Source)

Executive Summary

Artificial intelligence is advancing faster than the institutions responsible for understanding, evaluating, and governing it.

Standards Body begins from a simple observation: before society can responsibly make decisions about increasingly capable AI systems, it needs stronger foundations for understanding what those systems can do, how they should be evaluated, and how trustworthy evidence should be produced.

This document introduces the conceptual foundations that underpin the entire Standards Body project.

It is not a technical standard.

It is not a regulatory proposal.

It is not an implementation guide.

It is a framework describing the foundational infrastructure that should exist before society attempts to make increasingly consequential decisions about frontier AI.

These foundations are intended to evolve as evidence improves.

Why Foundations Matter

History repeatedly shows that durable institutions are rarely built by beginning with enforcement.

They begin by creating shared language, shared measurements, shared evidence, shared processes, and shared expectations.

Medicine required clinical methods before licensing systems.

Engineering required measurement before building codes.

Aviation required investigation before regulation.

Cybersecurity required vulnerability disclosure before coordinated defense.

Likewise, frontier AI requires evaluation infrastructure before reliable governance.

Without foundations:

- Measurements become inconsistent.
- Claims become difficult to compare.
- Institutions lose legitimacy.
- Incentives drift toward marketing rather than evidence.
- Public trust erodes.
- Decision-makers lack reliable information.

Standards Body therefore prioritizes foundational infrastructure before institutional authority.

Why Evaluation Comes Before Governance

Governance answers:

What should be done?

Evaluation answers:

What is actually true?

Governance without reliable evaluation risks making decisions based on incomplete or misleading information.

Evaluation without governance leaves important decisions unsupported.

The relationship is complementary rather than competitive.

The project's emphasis on evaluation reflects the belief that trustworthy evidence is one of the strongest long-term public goods that can be created for frontier AI.

Why Infrastructure Matters More Than Individual Models

Individual frontier models will change.

Organizations will change.

Benchmarks will change.

The need for trustworthy evaluation infrastructure is likely to remain.

Standards Body is intentionally designed around durable infrastructure rather than temporary product cycles.

Infrastructure compounds.

Good infrastructure continues creating value even as technology evolves.

The Characteristics of a Strong Foundation

For an idea to qualify as a foundational pillar, it should satisfy several tests.

A foundation should:

- Improve decision quality.
- Increase institutional legitimacy.
- Scale internationally.
- Encourage scientific rigor.
- Remain adaptable as capabilities change.
- Create positive incentives.
- Support independent verification.
- Reduce ambiguity.
- Encourage collaboration.
- Be revisable when evidence changes.

If a proposal cannot satisfy these qualities, it is more appropriately treated as a policy recommendation rather than a foundation.

The Eight Foundations

The current framework consists of eight mutually reinforcing foundations.

These are not presented as immutable truths.

They are the project's current best understanding of the infrastructure needed for frontier AI evaluation.

Foundation 1

Dynamic Evaluation Protocols

Static benchmarks inevitably lose relevance as models improve.

Evaluation systems should evolve alongside capability growth through continuously updated methodologies, adaptive testing, and ongoing validation.

Future canonical document:

Foundation 2

Held-Out Evaluations

High-consequence evaluations require mechanisms that reduce benchmark leakage and gaming while preserving scientific validity.

Secure, independently managed evaluation resources become increasingly important as capabilities grow.

Future canonical document:

FOUNDATION_02_HELD_OUT_EVALUATIONS.md

Foundation 3

High-Stakes Capability Evaluation

Some capabilities warrant greater scrutiny because of their potential societal impact.

Evaluation infrastructure should distinguish between ordinary capabilities and domains where evidence quality must be substantially stronger.

Future canonical document:

FOUNDATION_03_HIGH_STAKES_CAPABILITY_EVALUATION.md

Foundation 4

Independent Expert Review

Trust increases when evaluation incorporates diverse, technically qualified, independent expertise.

Independent review strengthens credibility while reducing institutional blind spots and conflicts of interest.

Future canonical document:

FOUNDATION_04_INDEPENDENT_EXPERT_REVIEW.md

Foundation 5

Third-Party Auditor Ecosystem

Long-term evaluation capacity is unlikely to scale through developers alone.

An ecosystem of qualified, accountable, independent evaluators can improve resilience, specialization, and public confidence.

Future canonical document:

FOUNDATION_05_THIRD_PARTY_AUDITOR_ECOSYSTEM.md

Foundation 6

Progressive Standards and Requirements

Institutional expectations rarely emerge all at once.

Voluntary practices may gradually mature into industry norms, procurement expectations, insurance requirements, certification mechanisms, or other structured forms over time.

Future canonical document:

FOUNDATION_06_PROGRESSIVE_STANDARDS_AND_REQUIREMENTS.md

Foundation 7

Incentives and Prestige

Organizations respond to incentives.

Recognition, credibility, reputation, transparency, and demonstrated excellence should increasingly reward participation in rigorous evaluation rather than mere claims.

Future canonical document:

FOUNDATION_07_INCENTIVES_AND_PRESTIGE.md

Foundation 8

Global Interoperability

Frontier AI development is international.

Evaluation infrastructure should strive for compatibility across jurisdictions while respecting regional differences and encouraging collaboration instead of fragmentation.

Future canonical document:

FOUNDATION_08_GLOBAL_INTEROPERABILITY.md

How the Foundations Reinforce One Another

None of the eight foundations stands alone.

Dynamic evaluations require independent expertise.

Independent experts require accreditation.

Accreditation benefits from transparent standards.

Standards require trustworthy evidence.

Evidence depends on robust evaluation.

International interoperability depends upon shared terminology, shared processes, and comparable evidence.

The framework should therefore be viewed as an interconnected system rather than eight isolated ideas.

Are These the Final Foundations?

No.

One of the project's core principles is that foundational ideas themselves should remain open to revision.

Future research may justify:

- Splitting a foundation into multiple domains.
- Merging overlapping concepts.
- Introducing additional foundations.
- Retiring obsolete approaches.
- Reordering priorities.

Foundations should earn permanence through evidence rather than assumption.

Relationship to the Rest of Standards Body

These foundations are only one layer of the broader institutional architecture.

They connect directly to:

- PROJECT_MANIFESTO.md
- FIRST_PRINCIPLES.md
- CORE_THESES.md
- OPEN_QUESTIONS.md
- RESEARCH_AGENDA.md
- EVALUATION_PHILOSOPHY.md
- INSTITUTION_DESIGN.md

Together they form the conceptual bridge between philosophy and implementation.

Long-Term Vision

If successful, these foundations will support:

- Better evaluation science.
- Better institutional coordination.
- Better technical standards.
- Better public understanding.
- Better research priorities.
- Better international collaboration.
- Better long-term governance decisions.

Their purpose is not to slow progress.

Their purpose is to help progress become more measurable, more understandable, and more trustworthy.

Closing Perspective

The future of frontier AI will not be shaped by capability alone.

It will also be shaped by the quality of the evidence we generate, the institutions we build, the incentives we create, and the standards we choose to develop.

Standards Body begins from the belief that durable infrastructure should precede durable authority.

Before society can confidently answer increasingly difficult questions about advanced AI, it must first strengthen the foundations upon which those answers will rest.

This overview introduces those foundations.

The eight accompanying foundation papers develop each one in depth.