

# When Is It Time to Start a New Standards Project?

Philip Olson, Director, MPMA Technical Services

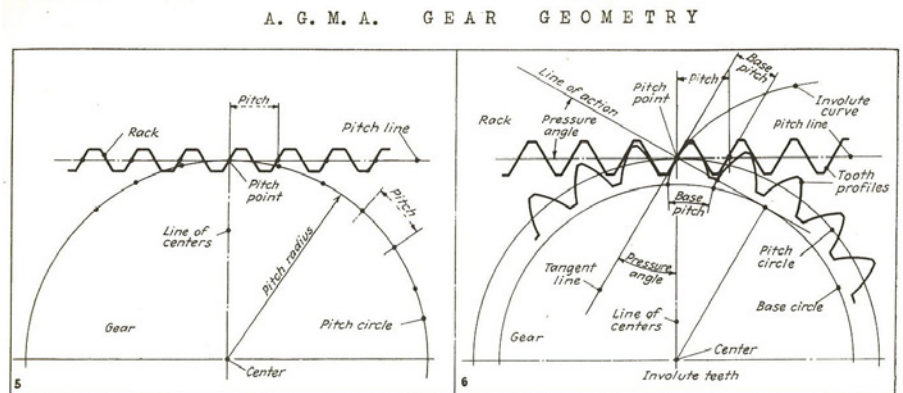
Deciding to launch a new standards project is not a decision taken lightly here at the Motion Power Manufacturers Alliance (MPMA). If things go according to plan, a new project can take four years to reach publication over roughly 24 two-hour-long working group meetings. This is a significant commitment of time from both volunteers and staff. Additional time outside of meetings is often needed for reviewing drafts, responding to comments, and preparing materials, so careful thought goes into every new initiative before work begins.

## Standards vs. Information Sheets

AGMA and ABMA publications fall into two categories. Standards provide requirements, specifications, definitions, and terminology that help ensure materials, products, and processes are fit for their purpose. Information Sheets cover topics that are still being tested or have not yet reached full industry consensus—including recommendations that are not yet ready to carry the weight of a formal standard. Because of this, most completely new projects begin life as an Information Sheet, allowing the industry to explore a subject before committing to standardized requirements.

## What Triggers a New Project?

A new project may be warranted for several reasons. Sometimes, a common practice already exists in the field, and the standard or information sheet is simply about writing it down so that everyone is working from the same playbook. Other times, competing definitions or methods create confusion, and establishing an agreed-upon standard helps align the industry. In the case of information sheets, there can be significant value in capturing the institutional knowledge and practical recommendations



Figs. 5 and 6—Some basic gear elements

A figure from “Gear Geometry—Terms and Definitions” adopted by the AGMA as a recommended practice in April 1936. (Image: MPMA)

that longtime members have developed through years of experience in the field. Projects also arise when new technology or emerging consensus makes a revision to an existing standard necessary. In all cases, a standard establishes a baseline that companies can build upon—and go above and beyond—as they see fit.

## How the Process Begins

New projects originate within MPMA’s committee structure. Committees are asked to think at a high level before recommending a project, considering questions such as: Has this subject already been addressed in an existing publication, and if so, why is a new document needed? Are there enough qualified volunteers to carry the work forward? Who is the target audience of the published document? And at a high level, what’s the scope of the project? To help answer these questions, MPMA has sometimes discussed potential projects across multiple meetings or surveyed the membership to gauge interest and help define scope.

A critical factor in evaluating any new project is ensuring a diverse mix of perspectives from manufacturers, users, and general interest, to make sure no single

group drives the outcome. This balance of viewpoints leads to broader buy-in when the final document is published.

## From Committee Approval to Working Group

Once a committee recommends a project, it requires approval from the Technical Division Executive Committee (TDEC) before a working group is formally established. The working group then digs into the details: designating a project leader, finalizing the title and scope, identifying any existing documents that may reference or be affected by the new document or revision, confirming the roster of participants—including subject matter experts who may not already be on the committee—and setting a realistic timeline. A final TDEC approval closes the loop before active development begins.

The standards that shape our industry are only as strong as the people who write them. Bring your expertise to the table and help build the documents that will guide the industry for years to come. Contact us to find out how to get involved: [tech@motionpower.org](mailto:tech@motionpower.org)

