



News Release

DATE: July 21, 2011
CONTACT: Jeff Close, The SPARK Institute
860-658-5058

THE SPARK INSTITUTE CREATES DATA STANDARDS FOR RETIREMENT PLAN PARTICIPANT DISCLOSURES, SEEKS PUBLIC COMMENT

SIMSBURY, CT, July 21 -- The SPARK Institute has released a draft of data standards for investment product providers and record keepers to electronically share investment related information that retirement plan sponsors must disclose to participants under the Department of Labor participant disclosure regulations, said Larry Goldbrum, General Counsel. The standards were developed primarily for use by non-registered investment product providers (e.g., bank collective investment funds, non-registered “fund of funds”, separately managed accounts and annuities) because no standards or mechanism currently exist for investment providers to transmit the required information to plan sponsors and their record keepers. “Our members who are record keepers recognized that plan sponsors will need significant help in collecting and reporting the data on potentially thousands of non-registered investment options and that gathering the information must be done electronically in order to be reliable, timely and cost effective,” Goldbrum said.

Although developed primarily for sharing information on non-registered funds, the data standards can, to a limited extent, accommodate certain registered investment products (i.e., mutual funds), but are not intended to be the primary means for sharing information for such funds, Goldbrum said. The document, “Data Layouts for Investment Related Retirement Plan Participant Disclosures,” is posted on The SPARK Institute website at <http://www.sparkinstitute.org/comments-and-materials.php>.

“We are requesting comments and feedback from everyone in the retirement plan community, including non-registered investment product providers, record keepers and plan sponsors so that the final version of the data standards meets the needs of as many affected parties as possible,” Goldbrum said. “Commenters do not have to be SPARK Institute members; in fact we encourage comments from all interested parties in an effort to encourage wide-spread adoption of the layouts when they become available,” he added. Comments are due by August 4th and should be submitted to participant_disclosure_questions@sparkinstitute.org. Once the standards are finalized, they will be posted on The SPARK Institute website and will be available at no charge for use by anyone.

The SPARK Institute represents the interests of a broad based cross section of retirement plan service providers and investment managers, including banks, mutual fund companies, insurance companies, third party administrators, trade clearing firms and benefits consultants. Through the combined expertise of its member companies, the Institute provides research, education, testimony and comments on pending legislative and regulatory issues to members of Congress and relevant government agency officials. Collectively, its members serve approximately 70 million participants in 401(k) and other defined contribution plans.

###