UK NACO funnel : progress, obstacles, and solutions - a quick update

Martin Kelleher, University of Liverpool

Abstract

This Lightning Talk will provide a quick update on latest progress with the now established UK NACO (Name Authority Control Programme) Funnel, which allows participating institutions to contribute to Library of Congress / PCC (Program for Cooperative Cataloguing) authority control. The presentation will include a brief summary of the purpose of the funnel, details of latest expansion, problems and solutions with data submission software, and further plans and collaborations.

Introduction

This is just a quick update on the progress, problems, and solutions to problems we've had with the still nascent UK NACO Funnel, after reporting it established in the CILIP MDG Autumn Seminars in 2022.

Progress – building the funnel

For those who don't know what a NACO funnel is, a NACO Funnel is an administrative arrangement by which multiple institutions can contribute to and edit name authority records in the Library of Congress (LoC) Name Authority File (NAF). Contribution can be managed on an individual institutional basis, but this requires a commitment to a level of authority record production many UK institutions would struggle to justify or accommodate, so access through a funnel is a highly attractive alternative, allowing contribution without problematic quota requirements.

The NACO Funnel was established in 2022, based around 4 institutions, which were the University of Liverpool, Sheffield Hallam University, University of Leeds and Aberystwyth University. It is the first UK NACO funnel to have been successfully established. Since the initial establishment of the funnel, it has continued to grow, and now there are 7 institutions (ish!) who have NACO trained cataloguers, the original 4 institutions being joined by Cardiff University, University of Leicester and Solent University. I'll explain the "ish" later….

We've got a JISC email list to manage communications within the funnel, which has grown to having 22 subscribers, between member institutions and some other institutions looking to join the funnel.

OCLC – to have or have not

It's not been plain sailing, however, and there have been a few issues we've had relating to the funnel. Already something of a concern while the funnel was being developed, the issue of OCLC membership had been something that had affected many since the falling-through of the JISC deal that had been in the process of being established, in July 2022.

There had already been a significant price rise for many as part of the establishment of this arrangement as OCLC adjusted their prices according to JISC banding for the previous renewal, so to see no ensuing national agreement accompanying this price rise led to a reassessment of OCLC subscriptions at many institutions, resulting in some institutions not renewing their subscriptions for this period, including a number of institutions who were members of the funnel. OCLCs subscription-based applications represent the main tools for contributing to the LoC NAF, so losing access to OCLC subscriptions resulted in many institutions losing the ability to contribute records, or not acquiring the standard tools for contribution, in the case of new joiners during this period.

I'd already enquired regarding a possible solution to this, since some institutions looking to join the funnel had not had OCLC subscriptions, and had been hoping for the JISC agreement to provide more attractively priced access, and I'd been told that alternative arrangements were possible. However, when the need for alternative access became a reality, I enquired further and discovered that the standard approach for alternative provision was for authority records and amendments by those without OCLC access was to have their contributions loaded by other institutions in the funnel.

Looking to the sky

We felt this to be a less than desirable solution, so decided to seek alternative approaches.

We considered various solutions, but the most obvious choice was the other primary application, Innovative's Skyriver, which was already established as an alternative tool for contribution to the NAF.

We'd already initiated the process for establishing access via Skyriver for NACO locally at the University of Liverpool, but before we fully established access we switched systems from Innovative's Sierra to Ex Libris's Alma, and by doing so lost access to Skyriver. However, Ex Libris and Innovative were both part of the Clarivate group, the Funnel was populated by Alma users, and I'd already attended a webinar indicating that Skyriver were looking to expand to be a more generic tool beyond Innovative products.

Negotiation and contract

Amy Staniforth from Aberystwyth enquired on the PCC list about Skyriver NACO experience which received little indication of widespread usage, and Helen Garner from Sheffield Hallam University and myself contacted Innovative, leading to an online meeting in which we discussed setting up a funnel-based access, which we discovered was not a widely established practice (only used by a funnel in Brazil as I recall?). We discussed attempting a more integrated approach involving Alma, which all those involved in the meeting used, and negotiated trial access to establish effective funnel management overall. There was some delay waiting for the contract, further delay while the various institutions spent time considering the contract (which I admit we at the University of Liverpool spent particularly long ruminating over) but eventually most of the funnel signed up.

Still looking to the sky

Not all the funnel were planning on signing up to Skyriver, however, some retaining OCLC subscriptions and being happy using their utilities for NACO access. This resulted in further delay, since Skyriver were of the understanding that all funnel institutions were going to sign up, and there were more institutions joining the funnel, some wanting access Skyriver, so there was further delay regarding sign up and co-ordination for training.

However, we've now got to a point where a date is set, and that date is quite soon (September 20th) which is just a little too late to report on for this conference, but nonetheless it's good to actually have the next step in place.

Furthermore, the University of Liverpool is more fully engaged with access via Skyriver, having had problems with the online version of OCLCs Connexion. We've been advised to use other utilities by OCLC, since online Connexion is being phased out, but since we've already planned on trying out Skyriver, we decided the timing was right to try out Skyriver as our primary tool for NACO access.

The funnel continues to expand

Meanwhile, while we've been resolving access issues, the funnel has continued to expand. Solent University are training and joining in the January 2023 intake, Open University are joining with a member who was already trained, now just awaiting Skyriver access and more staff to be trained in the September wave this year, where they will be joined by Durham University, who are also joining. Also hoping to join are University College London.

Race to train

Organizing the training for September was something of a challenge this year, however. On 7 July, there was an email on the PCC mailing list indicating that this next training wave would be open for both new trainees and refreshers, as a result of requests by many already trained cataloguers to have refreshers to take in recent RDA changes. When I saw it I immediately emailed all current enquirers to encourage signing up ASAP to beat the rush. Additional Open University staff signed up, as did Durham University. UCL were also enquiring about funnel membership, however, and were still considering at this unexpected crunch point, so are likely to join in the January 2024 wave of training.

Places were filled within a matter of hours, so it was something of a relief that we got everyone who was planning on undertaking training in the September wave signed up, enabling more institutions to make use of what continues to represent a great opportunity to empower and expand metadata operations for organizations, and to be effectively involved in the wider world of metadata management.

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