

RDA implementation in Canada and the United States

progress and possibilities

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ABSTRACT

This article provides an overview of the activities undertaken in Canada and the USA to implement Official RDA.

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The North American RDA Committee (NARDAC) is the entity responsible for representing the North American region and its interests on the RDA Steering Committee (RSC). One of NARDAC's primary responsibilities is to facilitate communication among constituents in its region, the international cataloguing community, and the RSC. In this article, we hope to meet this obligation by examining the current challenges, initiatives, and collaborative efforts undertaken by North American-based institutions and individuals as we work toward full implementation of Official RDA by May 2027.

Language-Specific Training in Canada

Because Canadian cataloguing communities operate in English and/or French, Official RDA training initiatives across the country are organised to meet the linguistic needs of their users. Training activities in English- and French-speaking communities have developed along parallel but distinct paths.

For English-speaking cataloguers, a group of metadata specialists formed the RDA Training in Canada Working Group¹ to coordinate national training efforts. This grassroots initiative follows the model of the pan-Canadian RDA training project undertaken in 2012-2013. Despite its broad representation, the group does not operate under a formal association or institutional mandate. Since 2023, this group has offered in-person training sessions² at the Ontario Library Association Super Conference.

Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ), Québec's national library, is responsible for the French-language implementation of Official RDA within the province. Unlike the original RDA Toolkit, whose French translation was produced collaboratively, the translation of the Official RDA Toolkit was carried out solely by BAnQ between spring 2022 and winter 2025 and published in the February 2025 Toolkit release. Examples were translated or adapted when necessary to better suit the needs of French-speaking users. BAnQ also published its community resources in French, including guidance on capitalisation; abbreviations and symbols; ordinal numbers; initial articles; access points for persons in certain categories; and terms of rank, honour, or function.

BAnQ plans to begin offering French-language Official RDA training in early 2027 for both its own staff and the broader Québec cataloguing community. Concurrently, BAnQ will be working to address the backlog of RDA update translations.

The Program for Cooperative Cataloging

In the United States, the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC) is leading the way in sponsoring and enabling institutions' implementation of Official RDA. The clearinghouse for all of PCC's documentation and training in support of RDA implementation is its RDA Implementation Task Group. With representatives from the Library of Congress (LC), the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) RDA Editorial Group, and ten PCC committees and working groups, the RDA Implementation Task Group develops recommendations for PCC's RDA implementation based on work completed by PCC's committees and working groups.

LC-PCC Documentation

The PCC and LC are continuing years of work on documentation to support Official RDA. In 2020, the Policy, Training, and Cooperative Programs division (PTCP) at the Library of Congress began its project to update the LC-PCC policy statements in the Official RDA Toolkit, laying the groundwork for an ongoing, iterative, and collaborative process. Initially, their goal was to transfer existing policy statements into the RDA Toolkit to maintain cataloguing practice. Later, PTCP incorporated feedback received

¹ <https://sites.google.com/view/rdatrainingincanada/home> (English), <https://sites.google.com/view/formation-rda-au-canada/accueil> (French)

² <https://ocats.ca/rda-resource-description-access/>

during PCC's 2023 Test of the Official RDA Toolkit into the policy statements. Currently, there are thousands of LC-PCC policy statements in the RDA Toolkit, nearly one for every option. Responsibility for updating and maintaining the policy statements is now shared between PTCP and the PCC RDA Communications Committee.

The LC-PCC implementation of RDA in the MARC and BIBFRAME formats is recorded in the metadata guidance documents (MGDs) that are available through links in the LC-PCC policy statements in the RDA Toolkit, by subscription to LC's Classification Web, or directly from LC's web site³. Recently published MGDs on string encoding schemes describe, for example, how to punctuate and order data elements to create consistent authorized access points. PTCP is working with the PCC's MGD Subgroup to coordinate future revisions to MGDs.

PCC groups are working on metadata application profiles (MAPs) to support training and implementation of Official RDA. New MAPs for monographs and serials will replace the existing models for bibliographic description sets – the BSR for participants in the Monographic Bibliographic Record Program (BIBCO) and the CSR for those in the Cooperative Online Serials Program (CONSER). New MAPs are also in development for authority description sets. The MAPs list elements that are core and recommended for PCC-compliant cataloguing, direct cataloguers to related guidance in the RDA toolkit and LC-PCC documentation, and provide analogous MARC encoding. Currently, the draft BSR includes provisional mapping to BIBFRAME encoding as well. It is anticipated that these metadata application profiles will be finalised in summer 2026.

PCC Training and Implementation

Also in summer 2026, the PCC plans to release separate courses on cataloguing monographs and creating name authority records in Official RDA. New training for participants in PCC's Name Authority Cooperative Program (NACO) will replace the current course based on original RDA. The monographs cataloguing course is designed to be flexible and modular. For example, individual cataloguers can attend the webinars when they are produced by the PCC, or an institution with a robust training program can adapt the PCC materials to their local audience. CONSER training is also being planned.

Until this practical training is released, the PCC RDA Implementation Task Group recommends that cataloguers and institutions interested in implementing Official RDA begin familiarising themselves with the IFLA Library Reference Model and with the RDA Toolkit by accessing materials available from the Catalogers Learning Workshop⁴. Other learning opportunities include reviewing materials from past PCC-NARDAC ALA preconference workshops or from the RSC. Perhaps most importantly, cataloguers can begin evaluating their institutional descriptive cataloguing practices, so they are prepared to incorporate new guidance into local procedures.

³ <https://www.loc.gov/aba/rda/mgd/>

⁴ <https://www.loc.gov/catworkshop/>

Library and Archives Canada

As the national library, Library and Archives Canada (LAC) is subject to the Official Languages Act (1969) to provide services in both English and French. This bilingual mandate directly shapes LAC's approach to implementing RDA. In order to develop policy statements, application profiles, supporting documentation, and training materials in both languages, LAC depends on the availability and readiness of the French translation of the Official RDA Toolkit.

LAC currently maintains membership in two cooperative programs for authorities: NACO for English-language authorities since December 2016, and the Programme francophone des autorités de noms (PFAN) for French-language Canadiana authorities since 2020. As a relatively new program, PFAN needs to develop its own policy statements, but LAC is not directly involved in this work.

LAC's Metadata Sharing team began reviewing the LAC RDA policy statements in 2021, and they were soon supported by the RDA PS Review Working Group, which was charged with reviewing and updating the policy statements related to manifestation elements. This collaborative effort led to the publication of the first bilingual set of LAC policy statements: LAC PS (English) and ÉP de BAC (French) in the January 2024 RDA Toolkit release, becoming the first bilingual policy statements to appear in the official Toolkit.

LAC has continued expanding the policy statements to cover additional RDA entities. As of the September 2025 release, the initial iteration of the LAC bilingual policy statements for all entities has been added to the Toolkit. LAC's policy statements writer is also working closely with ALA to improve how bilingual policy statements are presented and managed within the Toolkit's content management system.

Looking ahead, LAC plans to focus on developing metadata application profiles in 2026. At the same time, LAC will refine its implementation timeline. LAC has also formally requested that ALA make the original RDA Toolkit available in French as well as English to support ongoing transition work.

Library of Congress

The Library of Congress operates as the *de facto* national library in the United States. It has assumed a large role, along with the PCC, in advocating for the Official RDA Toolkit and its adoption in libraries and cultural institutions. As highlighted earlier, LC, its PTCP division, and individual staffers are working with PCC to develop and maintain policy statements, metadata guidance documents, metadata application profiles, and training to support the implementation of Official RDA. LC staffers are also working in their capacity as members of NARDAC and the RSC to improve Official RDA.

LC plans to adapt the PCC's training for its local audience, incorporating LC-specific practices and requirements into tailored learning sessions for its cataloguers. LC's

training will be modular and scaffolded, combining short self-paced video lessons with hands-on group sessions. This approach will allow learners to repeat modules as desired, and it will provide materials for learners to adapt even further for themselves or for their work groups.

As of spring 2026, LC's timeline is not yet fully developed, but it intends to begin training in late 2026, in alignment with the winding down of the RDA countdown clock in May 2027.

North American organisations like the RDA Training in Canada Working Group, the PCC, and related groups are working alongside the national libraries of Canada and the United States to create and present documentation and training in support of widespread adoption of Official RDA. It is important for these organisations and institutions to remain aware of developments in the North American region and around the world so that we can learn from the experiences of our international colleagues, adapt their tools to local needs, and enjoy shared milestones. For RDA to be a success as an international standard, institutions and individuals need to reach across borders and regions to create a collaborative, cooperative cataloguing environment.