

# RDA future directions and how to keep up

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, the Chair Elect of the RDA Steering Committee shares his views on the future of the standard under his chairmanship, which begins in January 2027, and the RSC Secretary provides information on how to keep up with what is happening and get involved.

**KEYWORDS** RDA; RDA Steering Committee

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## Introduction

We end this special issue of *Catalogue & Index* not only with many thanks to editors Karen Pierce and Fran Frenzel but also with some hints and tips on how to keep up-to-date with RDA going forward. Although we have written this article together, it is important to be clear that all the statements on the future strategic direction come from Robert as incoming Chair of the RDA Steering Committee, while Anne as RSC Secretary has provided information on how to find information and get involved.

## How does the RSC decide its priorities?

It should go without saying that all of our future actions at the RSC level are subject to the RDA Board's Strategic Plan. This is updated triannually, with the current plan available on the website ([RDA Board, 2026b](#)). We are working under the RDA Strategic Plan, 2026-2028 ([RDA Board, 2026c](#)), but as a member of the RDA Board, Robert will be part of the discussions for the next plan. The RSC itself provides an annual Action Plan, which contains a list of the concrete steps that we are taking to meet the strategic aims set out by the Board. The Action Plans are published in the RDA's series of Chair Documents on the website ([RDA Steering Committee, 2026b](#)) and are annotated with the number of the Chair Document that it supersedes (and, where applicable, the Chair Document by which it is superseded). Our current Action Plan is RSC/Chair/2026/2 – Action Plan 2026-2028 ([RDA Steering Committee, 2026a](#)).

If you look at the current Action Plan ([RDA Steering Committee, 2026a](#)), you can see that Anne and current RSC Chair Renate Behrens have divided it into two sections – one for the standing tasks that we complete each year, and one for tasks with projected completion dates. These tasks relate to three of the RDA Board’s strategic areas as set out in the RDA Strategic Plan, 2023-2025 ([RDA Board, 2023](#)), which was in force at the time the RSC discussed and agreed its current Action Plan. You can see that the RDA Board is responsible for its third strategic aim, to “ensure a sustainable business model” ([RDA Board, 2023](#), p. 2), and that the RSC has projects towards its other aims as follows:

1. “Develop RDA as a responsive, flexible and dynamic standard” ([RDA Board, 2023](#)) / “Develop RDA as a responsive and dynamic standard ([RDA Steering Committee, 2026a](#))
  - a. by “support[ing] the community ... during the period the countdown clock runs”
  - b. by “monitor[ing] the use of Community Resources”
  - c. through “outreach to Toolkit users ... to make use of the Community Resources section of the Toolkit”
  - d. by “review[ing] community implementations of RDA”
  - e. by “review[ing] the concept of performance aggregates”
  - f. by “mak[ing] decisions [with community input] on the future use of soft-deprecated elements”
  - g. by monitor[ing] application profiles under development by community members”
  - h. and by “further[ing] the development of RDA concepts (in line with the IFLA LRM)” ([RDA Steering Committee, 2026a](#))
2. “Increase the internationalisation of RDA” ([RDA Board, 2023](#)) / “Increase the adoption of RDA” ([RDA Steering Committee, 2026a](#))
  - a. by “continu[ing] to support regional groups”
  - b. by “outreach to communities outside LIS”
  - c. by “explor[ing] interest among library management in the future of cataloguing”
  - d. and by “continu[ing] outreach and orientation to LIS education and training activities” ([RDA Steering Committee, 2026a](#))
3. “Provide relevant governance” (numbered “4” in the Board’s strategic aims) ([RDA Board, 2023](#) ; [RDA Steering Committee, 2026a](#)). In the *Action Plan* this is divided into six specific tasks which amount to ensuring the RSC and its Working Groups are staffed and are covering the areas of interest to the RDA cataloguing community, and working with the RDA Board and with other international information standards groups.

In our November 2026 meeting, we will begin to discuss the *Action Plan* for 2027-2029. We will align this with the slight revision to the RDA Board's *Strategic Plan, 2026-2028* ([RDA Board, 2026c](#)). Robert will also outline his views as incoming Chair on the tasks we should be prioritising, and then, following input from the rest of the RSC, he will work with Renate and Anne to prepare a draft *Action Plan 2027-2029* which will be discussed at the RSC's first meeting of 2027 and, following any agreed amendments and approval, presented to the wider community at the first Public Session of the RDA Steering Committee in 2027. Everyone is always welcome to attend Public Sessions as an observer – simply email Anne at [RSCsecretary@rdatoolkit.org](mailto:RSCsecretary@rdatoolkit.org) and ask to attend. We issue reminders of the Public Sessions along with other news and announcements at <https://www.rdatoolkit.org/rsc/news>. Public Sessions usually take place once a quarter, online.

Public Sessions are one way to not only find out about RDA but also to share in the debate of changes to the standard. The other main way in which members of the community feedback is through their regional representatives. In the UK, the UK Committee on RDA (UKCoR)<sup>1</sup> provides feedback to the European RDA Interest Group (EURIG)<sup>2</sup>, whose current RSC Representative is Ahava Cohen<sup>3</sup>. If you are reading *Catalogue & Index* outside the UK, you can find your Regional Representative here: <https://www.rdatoolkit.org/rsc/rsc-members>. It is worth noting that if you are based in Asia or Africa, your initial point of contact is our Wider Community Engagement Officer, Getaneh Alemu<sup>4</sup> as Robert highlights below.

As Renate and RDA publisher James Hennelly point out elsewhere in this issue ([Behrens and Hennelly, 2026](#)), the RSC's Working Groups are always open for new members with relevant expertise. You can find out more about them here: <https://www.rdatoolkit.org/rsc/workinggroups>. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact the relevant Working Group Chair in the first instance. For the few whose email addresses are not public, you can contact the RSC Chair (currently Renate) at [RSCchair@rdatoolkit.org](mailto:RSCchair@rdatoolkit.org).

## What's coming next?

In the rest of this article, Robert gives a very broad-brush outline of the priorities he has in his mind as he approaches January 2027, when he will take up the position of RSC Chair, with support from Renate as Past Chair for his first year in post.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/UKCoR>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rdatoolkit.org/europe>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.rdatoolkit.org/rsc/ahavacohen>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.rdatoolkit.org/rsc/getanehalemu>

## Training and outreach

The RDA Steering Committee (RSC) has always been active in outreach and training, but with the advent of widespread implementation of Official RDA the RSC will need to take an even more active role in these areas.

Official RDA has been met with skepticism and even hostility from some, particularly in North America. The RSC has attempted to respond to these reactions seriously and honestly, but needs to continue outreach and persuasion.

Another aspect of outreach that the RSC must undertake is meeting concerns about the expense of RDA Toolkit subscriptions. We need to be forthright about explaining that creation and maintenance of the Toolkit is an expensive and necessary operation and therefore access cannot be free. The RDA Board has an active subcommittee on the RSC business model which is exploring different subscription models. Current subscription options are set out at <https://www.rdatoolkit.org/subscribe> but a key message that ALA Digital Reference wants us to share is that they really do mean it when they say to contact them at [rdatoolkit@ala.org](mailto:rdatoolkit@ala.org) if you are confused about the subscription you need. The numbers on the page are for *concurrent users* and companion subscriptions are now available for those who want to have some documentation outside the Toolkit itself.

## Recognition and mitigation of the impact of AI

As with most aspects of life in the early 21st century, the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology will undoubtedly have a major impact on cataloguing practice. Our cataloguing guidelines, RDA, must take account of this development, and the RSC will need to be sensitive to it. The RDA Board asked the RSC to establish a joint Working Group. Since 2024 its members have been very active, conducting an international survey on use of AI by cataloguing departments ([Cohen et al., 2024](#)) and writing a white paper ([Cohen et al., 2025](#)). Their current activities are outlined elsewhere in this issue ([Cohen and Chou, 2026](#)). The rest of the RDA Board and RSC are very grateful to this Working Group for its expertise and continued exploration of this fast-changing field. You can find the full roster of members and keep up with their activities on their webpage at <https://www.rdatoolkit.org/rsc/rdaboard/AIworkinggroup>.

## Completing the organisation

As outlined in Renate and James's article earlier in this issue ([Behrens and Hennelly, 2026](#)), the organisational structure behind RDA has seen us change from the Joint Steering Committee for AACR (JSC) to the Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA (still the JSC) to the RDA Steering Committee (RSC). The RDA Board (which includes the three copyright holders for RDA) has consistently set internationalisation at the heart of its strategic aims ([RDA Board, 2026b](#)). For most of its history the JSC had

been composed entirely of representatives from the Anglo-American cataloguing community. The new RSC organisation called for representation through regional groups in order to cover the whole world. In addition to several position holders (RSC Chair, RSC Secretary, Technical Team Liaison Officer, Translations Team Liaison Officer, RDA Examples Editor, RSC Education and Orientation Officer and RSC Wider Community Engagement Officer) and *ex officio* members (the RDA Board Chair and the Director of ALA Digital Reference), one RSC representative is intended to be elected or appointed from each of these global regions:

- Africa
- Asia
- Europe
- Latin America and the Caribbean
- North America
- Oceania

All six regions are represented on the RDA Board, as intended ([RDA Board, 2026a](#)). For many years the only representatives to be appointed were those from Europe, North America, and Oceania. In 2005 a representative for Latin America and the Caribbean was appointed ([Welsh, 2025](#)). Despite previous efforts, still missing is representation to the RSC for Africa and Asia ([RDA Steering Committee, 2026c](#)). In the near future, the RSC needs to take action to complete its roster of representatives by preparing and receiving representation from Africa and Asia.

Our previous Wider Community Engagement Officer (WCEO), Charlene Chou, was instrumental in outreach within Asia, particularly in China and Taiwan, and there are members of the Translations Working Group from both these countries. Our current WCEO, Getaneh Alemu, has written elsewhere in this issue about his efforts to reach out to cataloguers in Africa ([Alemu, 2026](#)). We must also thank our Education and Orientation Officer, Elisa Sze, who has provided training and reached out to communities across all the existing RSC Regions, and China and Africa. If you are reading this article from Africa or Asia and would like to be more involved with RDA, please do contact Getaneh in the first instance at [getaneh@rdatoolkit.org](mailto:getaneh@rdatoolkit.org).

We know that both Asia and Africa comprise diverse cataloguing communities with different economic, cultural and linguistic traditions. As the *Strategic Plan 2026-2028* puts it, “Our goal is to make RDA an international, global standard which is as responsive and flexible as possible: a standard which any community of RDA users can adopt and implement around their own needs.” ([RDA Board, 2026c](#)) If you are based in a community without RSC Regional Representation at the moment, we are keen to hear from you.

## Ongoing development of RDA

It goes without saying that the ongoing development of RDA is an important, perhaps the most important, strategic priority for the RSC. Some immediate issues include

- final disposition of so-called soft deprecated elements
- development of guidance for recording extent that is more compliant with linked-data principles
- disposition of legacy materials removed from the main body of the text, including string encoding schemes (rules for structuring certain elements), which are now seen to be local practice and thus not eligible for inclusion in the main text
- copyright queries related to legacy materials.

The RSC welcomes community involvement in the development of RDA, and we love seeing members of the wider community attending our Public Sessions as observers and / or volunteering for Working Groups.

## Relationship with other groups

The RSC maintains liaison relationships with other international groups in charge of relevant standards in order to make sure standards develop worldwide in tandem as much as possible. Amongst others, RDA has liaison relationships with IFLA bodies related to metadata, BIBFRAME and the ISSN International Centre. You can see the current list here: <https://www.rdatoolkit.org/rsc/RSCprotocols>. We are always keen to work with others active in the international cataloguing community. Upcoming projects include a mapping between RDA and BIBFRAME, on which members of our Technical Working Group will be working with members of the Share/VDE community.

## RSC Action Plan

As mentioned at the start of this article, the RSC has a rolling three-year Action Plan ([RDA Steering Committee, 2026a](#)) which is updated annually. You can keep up-to-date with our activities there and via <https://www.rdatoolkit.org/rsc/news>.

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