

Intelligence, artificial and otherwise

governance, standards, and the Joint RDA Board/RSC Working Group on Artificial Intelligence

Ahava Cohen  0000-0002-7152-3963

RDA Steering Committee Representative for Europe

Chair of the Joint RDA Board / RSC Working Group on Artificial Intelligence

Charlene Chou  0000-0003-4736-7662

Member of the Joint RDA Board / RSC Working Group on Artificial Intelligence

Received: 19 June 2026 | Published: 22 June 2026

ABSTRACT

This article first examines the rationale behind the establishment of the Joint RDA Board/RSC Working Group on Artificial Intelligence in response to a rapidly emerging technology, positioning it as a governance body for the international metadata standard RDA. It then traces the group's development from its initial investigative work to the publication of a White Paper and its current ongoing advisory role, underscoring its commitment to metadata quality, conceptual integrity, and professional values within the international metadata community.

KEYWORDS RDA; artificial intelligence; RDA Board; RDA Steering Committee

CONTACT Ahava Cohen  ahava.cohen@rdatoolkit.org  RDA Steering Committee and RDA Board

Governance in a time of technological change

Those of us working with RDA are used to change. Over the past decade we have navigated the 3R Project, alignment with the IFLA Library Reference Model (LRM) ([International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2018](#)), the shift to entities and relationships, and the move towards linked data environments. None of these developments happened by accident. Each required sustained collaboration between the RDA Steering Committee (RSC) and the RDA Board.

The RSC has focused on conceptual coherence and the internal logic of the standard. The RDA Board has ensured sustainability, infrastructure and international engagement. Together, they have sought to protect the long-term viability of RDA while allowing it to evolve.

Various AI and machine learning (ML) tools and technologies, such as Google Translate and Annif, have existed for several years. However, when generative AI

(henceforth referred to as artificial intelligence or AI) began to be integrated into cataloguing workflows and vendor tools such as Ex Libris Alma and OCLC services, it quickly became clear that this was not simply another technical development. AI raised questions about provenance, accountability, standards compliance, metadata quality, intellectual property and professional ethics. In other words, it was — and remains — a governance issue.

In 2024, the RDA Board proposed, and the RSC agreed, to establish a Joint RDA Board and RSC Working Group on Artificial Intelligence ([RDA Steering Committee, 2024](#), item 446.5). The decision to create a joint body was deliberate. AI would not be treated as an isolated technical experiment but considered within the full governance framework of RDA.

What follows traces how that Working Group has evolved — and what that evolution means for practitioners.

The inception: asking the right questions

The Working Group's initial Terms of Reference ([Barbus and Behrens, 2024](#)) were exploratory. The group was asked to investigate potential uses of AI in producing RDA-compatible metadata and to identify possible risks. The questions at that stage were broad: who was looking at AI for metadata creation and how practitioners viewed an AI-assisted future.

As with other RDA task-and-finish groups, the Joint Working Group's term was set for two years (2024–2025). Membership was evenly divided between the RSC and the RDA Board, reinforcing that this was a shared responsibility rather than a purely technical initiative.

At this stage, many of us in practice were already experimenting — cautiously — with AI tools. The Working Group's early role was not to endorse or prohibit such experimentation, but to frame the questions properly.

The white paper: grounding AI in professional values

The group's first major output was the white paper *Considering AI in the Growth of RDA* ([Cohen et al., 2025](#)), published in January 2025.

For practitioners, the significance of the white paper lies in its tone. Rather than presenting AI as inevitable or transformative in a simplistic sense, it situates AI within our existing professional frameworks. It explicitly aligns RDA's approach with:

- the IFLA Statement on Libraries and Artificial Intelligence ([International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2020](#)),
- the IFLA Professional Codes of Ethics ([International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2012](#)),

- the ALA Code of Ethics ([American Library Association, 2021](#))

This is important. It signals that AI in RDA is not primarily about efficiency gains or cost savings. Indeed, the white paper directly addresses the persistent assumption that automation leads to staff reductions. Drawing on previous technological transitions, it argues that roles change rather than disappear. Cataloguers remain essential — as evaluators, interpreters, supervisors and innovators.

The white paper also makes a point that resonates strongly with those of us concerned with metadata quality: AI systems perform best when trained on clear, structured and machine-ingestible data. RDA-compliant datasets, when consistently structured, are not merely outputs of professional practice; they are high-value training resources.

One particularly practical proposal was the idea of making a minimal description set available in a form suitable for AI training. That suggestion reflects an important shift: clarity in standards now serves both human cataloguers and machine systems.

From reflection to operational tasks

Following the publication of the white paper, the original Terms of Reference were considered fulfilled. In April 2025, the RDA Board and RSC issued a second set of tasks ([Barbus and Behrens, 2025](#)). This marked a transition from reflection to implementation.

The focus moved towards concrete questions that practitioners will recognise:

- How do existing AI production services align (or fail to align) with RDA?
- How can AI support metadata creation while maintaining compliance?
- What constitutes a minimal entity set for RDA compliance in automatically generated datasets?
- What quality criteria must AI-generated metadata meet?
- How should AI involvement be documented in records, particularly in relation to data provenance elements?

These are not abstract issues. They go directly to day-to-day practice: record quality, accountability and transparency.

The emphasis on documentation and guidance for metadata description becomes particularly relevant, and inevitable, when metadata has been generated wholly or in part by AI, as this fact must be made transparent. Provenance matters — not just ethically, but practically.

Advisory status: recognising AI as ongoing work

By late 2025, it was clear that as AI evolves, so too would questions about its value in creating RDA-compliant metadata. In December 2025 the RDA Board approved the transition of the Working Group to Advisory status.

This is more than an administrative adjustment. It acknowledges that AI is not a temporary disruption but a continuing aspect of the metadata landscape. The work of the Joint Advisory Working Group is ongoing, focused on consecutive but responsive goals and periodic reports to the Board, the RSC, and the public.

For practitioners, this signals stability and shows that the governance bodies are committing to ongoing monitoring and guidance.

Metadata quality and entity integrity

At the heart of this work is a concern we all share: preserving the conceptual integrity of RDA.

RDA's entity-based structure depends on explicit distinctions. Generative AI systems, by contrast, operate probabilistically. They do not inherently understand conceptual boundaries.

The Working Group's emphasis on minimal entity requirements, quality criteria, and explicit documentation reflects this tension. If AI tools are used in metadata production, they must operate within clearly defined structural expectations.

At the same time, well-structured RDA data improves AI performance. The relationship is reciprocal: the clearer our standards, the more reliable AI outputs become.

International alignment

The Working Group has positioned its work within broader international frameworks, including:

- United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/78/L.49 on safe and trustworthy AI ([United Nations General Assembly, 2024](#))
- IFLA's AI Statement ([International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2020](#))
- PCC Guiding Principles for Use of AI and Machine Learning Technologies in Cataloguing and Metadata Work ([PCC Task Group on AI and Machine Learning in Cataloging and Metadata, 2025](#))

For practitioners in diverse jurisdictions, this matters. It reassures us that RDA's approach is not isolated or regionally narrow, but internationally informed. AI

adoption is not simply a question of technical feasibility; it constitutes a matter of professional responsibility, grounded in core professional values and ethics.

Vendor integration and the future of the Toolkit

The white paper also acknowledges a practical reality: AI systems may ingest RDA content outside traditional subscription environments. This raises questions about intellectual property, sustainability and equitable access — issues that fall squarely within the RDA Board's remit.

At the same time, vendor integration of AI-based cataloguing tools may support wider adoption of Official RDA and facilitate transitions from the Original Toolkit.

For those of us implementing RDA locally, this is an important development. Governance decisions made now will shape the practical tools available in our daily work.

Conclusion: steady stewardship

For many cataloguers and RDA Toolkit users, AI provokes mixed reactions and strong feelings: enthusiasm, scepticism, or uncertainty. The Joint RDA Board/RSC Working Group has sought to avoid both uncritical optimism and defensive resistance. Instead, it has focused on stewardship.

Three commitments characterise this approach:

- **Maintaining metadata quality** through defined standards and criteria for AI-generated data.
- **Preserving conceptual integrity** by safeguarding RDA's entity model in machine-assisted environments.
- **Upholding professional values** through transparency, documentation and continued human oversight.

Artificial intelligence represents a significant contextual shift. But RDA has navigated substantial change before. The current governance response suggests continuity rather than rupture: adapting to technological developments while maintaining the conceptual and ethical foundations of high-quality bibliographic control.

For practitioners, that steadiness may be the most reassuring message of all.

More information about the Joint Working Group, including its current membership, can be found on its page on the RSC website at <https://www.rdatoolkit.org/rsc/rdaboard/AIworkinggroup>.

References

- American Library Association (2021) *ALA Code of Ethics: A framework of values and ethical responsibilities for the profession of librarianship*. Available at: <https://www.ala.org/tools/ethics> [Accessed: 20 June 2026]
- Barbus, C. and Behrens, R. (2024) *RSC/Chair/2024/7 - Working Group on Artificial Intelligence*. Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11213/22549> [Accessed: 20 June 2026]
- Barbus C. and Behrens, R. (2025) *RSC/Chair/2025/10 - Working Group on Artificial Intelligence 2025*. Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11213/22923> [Accessed: 20 June 2026]
- Cohen, A. et al. (2025) *RSC/Papers/2025/1 - Considering AI in the growth of RDA*. Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11213/22898> [Accessed: 20 June 2026]
- International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (2012) *IFLA Code of Ethics for Librarians and other Information Workers (full version)*. Available at: <https://repository.ifla.org/handle/20.500.14598/1850> [Accessed: 20 June 2026]
- International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (2020) *IFLA Statement on Libraries and Artificial Intelligence*. Available at: <https://repository.ifla.org/handle/20.500.14598/1646> [Accessed: 20 June 2026]
- PCC Task Group on AI and Machine Learning in Cataloging and Metadata (2025) *Final Report*. Available at: <https://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/taskgroup/AI-and-Machine-Learning-TG-final-report.pdf> [Accessed: 20 June 2026]
- RDA Steering Committee (2026) *Joint RDA Board and RSC Working Group on Artificial Intelligence*. Available at: <https://www.rdatoolkit.org/rsc/rdaboard/AIworkinggroup> [Accessed: 20 June 2026]
- RDA Steering Committee (2024) *RSC/Minutes/444-445 - Minutes [of the] January 2024 RSC Meeting*. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/11213/21002> [Accessed: 20 June 2026]
- Riva, P., Le Bœuf, P. and Žumer, M. (2018) *IFLA Library Reference Model: A Conceptual Model for Bibliographic Information*. International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. Available at: <https://repository.ifla.org/handle/20.500.14598/40> [Accessed: 18 June 2026]
- United Nations General Assembly (2024) *Seizing the opportunities of safe, secure and trustworthy artificial intelligence systems for sustainable development: draft resolution. A/78/L.49*. Available at: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/ltd/n24/065/92/pdf/n2406592.pdf> [Accessed: 20 June 2026]