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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the June 2026 (No. 215) issue of Catalogue & Index. This special issue focuses on the forthcoming retirement of Original RDA and the transition to Official RDA. It also considers the measures already undertaken, and those planned, by the RDA Steering Committee (RSC) and the RDA Board to support this significant shift and the continued development of the standard.

We are grateful to the RSC for proposing this themed issue, which coincides with the launch of the

Countdown Clock and extend our sincere thanks to members of both the RDA Steering Committee and the RDA Board for their contributions, which collectively provide valuable insight into this period of transition. Many thanks to Renate Behrens and Anne Welsh, who coordinated the contributions.

It is a privilege to provide a platform for this collection of articles, which together offer a comprehensive and timely exploration of

developments within the RDA community. The issue presents a substantial body of material on the international adoption and reception of Official RDA, alongside accounts of the RSC's community engagement activities. It also includes discussions of the history and continuity of RDA, an overview of its governance, and reflections on teaching and learning, including links to supporting materials and how to become involved in the work of the RSC and the ongoing maintenance and development of RDA.

Karen F. Pierce and Fran Frenzel, June 2026

Making Resource Description and Access (RDA) global

introduction to the Countdown Clock special issue of *Catalogue & Index*

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ABSTRACT

This introduction provides an overview of the articles in the special issue and the context of the countdown clock to the withdrawal of the Original RDA Toolkit as a supported product in May 2027.

KEYWORDS RDA; RDA Toolkit; RDA Steering Committee

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As the countdown clock for the original RDA Toolkit begins ([Welsh, 2026](#)), an era is ending, marking a turning point in the still-young history of the RDA standard. Although only around 15 years have passed since its first publication, these have been years marked by significant activity within the user communities, alongside major changes to the standard itself. It is obvious that this presented a major challenge for everyone involved.

A standard that aims to be international must be flexible and able to adapt to the needs of very different contexts. This was a requirement that the Original Toolkit ([ALA Digital Reference, 2012-2027](#)) could not meet as wished, leading to the further development of the standard in the form of the Official Toolkit ([ALA Digital Reference, 2019-](#)). A milestone in this project was the restructuring of the responsible RDA bodies, which was decided in 2015 ([Dunsire, 2016](#)). Every region of the world now participates directly through a Regional Representative or the Wider Community Engagement Officer in the development of the standard ([Welsh, 2025](#)). Only in this way was such a significant internationalisation possible. A wide variety of experiences, traditions and approaches were brought to the fore and had to be considered.

The following articles aim to describe how these processes work. On the one hand, they cover the efforts of the regions, which are reflected in a wide variety of scenarios relating to the implementation of RDA. At the same time, they also cover the ongoing activities of the stakeholders within the RDA committees themselves, who report on

their experiences and projects. The breadth of the topics covered here illustrates just how diverse the issues and implementation options are.

The twelve months from May 2026 to May 2027 will be filled with further challenges. Through this publication and many other initiatives, the RDA Steering Committee (RSC) and the RDA Board aim to support the user communities, not only during this period but on an ongoing basis. A truly international standard can never be finished, and that is a good thing. RDA is designed to adapt to change, which is only to be expected given the ever-accelerating pace of development in the field of metadata work.

This publication aims to provide an update on the current status of the work and hopes, particularly in the run-up to the countdown clock reaching zero, to highlight a wide range of aspects and thereby offer support.

As already mentioned, cooperation from the regions is essential, and so representatives from very different parts of the world are here to present the work being done in their respective areas. Getaneh Alemu (RSC Wider Community Engagement Officer) reports on Africa, a continent where many parts are still in the early stages of implementing RDA and where there are still many unresolved issues. In contrast, Christian Aliverti (former RDA Board Member for Europe) is able to discuss an implementation in German-speaking countries that has been tried and tested in practice for several years. Also from Europe, Szabolcs Dancs writes about widespread activities with a focus on translation. Trina Soderquist and Hong Cui, as regional representatives for North America, describe the ongoing work there and consider numerous aspects, such as training, as well as the organisational conditions in this region. As a representative of a region only recently represented in the RSC, Felipe Martínez reports on the efforts in Latin America.

Some of the position holders within the RSC are responsible for specific areas without which RDA could not exist or evolve. In his article, Christopher Holden (RSC Technical Team Liaison Officer) outlines the role of the RDA Registry, which is used by many user communities as a starting point for implementation projects. Thorough and effective training is essential when working with a standard. Here, Elisa Sze (RSC Training and Education Officer) provides support to the global community with guidance materials and much more. Jessica Grzegorski (RSC Examples Officer) illustrates in her contribution that RDA is also a standard for special materials, using the DCRMR as an example. Ahava Cohen (EURIG Representative) broadens the focus with her report on the RSC Working Group on Artificial Intelligence.

Through their more general articles, Christine Oliver (RDA Board Chair), James Hennelly (Director, ALA Digital Reference) and Renate Behrens (RSC Chair) aim to provide an overarching perspective on the diverse range of topics. They emphasise collaboration with other standardisation bodies worldwide, the positioning of the RDA standard within the system of models, standards and application profiles, and its

development into a framework standard that can be used for a wide range of very different applications.

Robert Maxwell (RSC Chair-elect) and Anne Welsh (RSC Secretary) provide an outlook for the coming years. Even after the Countdown Clock expires in May 2027, the standard will continue to evolve, and the RSC and the RDA Board, as the responsible bodies, see it as their duty to support the global user communities, whether in new implementations or in the further development of their application profiles. The standard's tried-and-tested organisational structure has proven to be a stable foundation for incorporating the requirements of global communities.

As Chair of the RDA Steering Committee, I would like to express my sincere thanks to everyone involved in these processes for their openness, active participation and patience. Only through mutual understanding can a framework standard such as RDA remain vibrant and continually adapt to new circumstances. All the authors of this publication look forward to receiving feedback and hope for continued fruitful global collaboration.

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Making RDA truly global

advancing engagement, adoption and implementation in African library communities

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ABSTRACT

RDA is an international metadata standard providing structured entities, elements and guidance for creating interoperable, user-focused resource descriptions aligned with linked data models ([ALA Digital Reference, 2019-](#)); however, adoption remains uneven, as many African libraries continue to rely on AACR2 or hybrid practices due to resource limitations, infrastructure challenges, limited training and reduced participation in standards governance ([Aboyade and Eluwole, 2018](#); [Ahonsi, 2014](#); [Xaba and Shongwe, 2025](#); [Yeboah, Onyanha and Mhlongo, 2023](#)).

This article draws on three sources of evidence: a review of African empirical studies on RDA adoption, analysis of the 2026 African RDA Engagement Survey (109 respondents from 16 countries) conducted by the author as Wider Community Engagement Officer (WCEO) and field observations from professional engagement and a hybrid metadata workshop held at the UN Economic Commission for Africa Library in Addis Ababa on February 12th 2026, providing qualitative insight into conceptual understanding and cataloguing practice in contexts with limited access to the RDA Toolkit.

Survey findings show that 33.3% of institutions report using RDA, only 11.2% have subscription access to the Official RDA Toolkit, and 75% of self-reported RDA users lack Toolkit access. Despite these constraints, 82.6% of respondents express willingness to coordinate national or regional engagement. With the Original Toolkit retiring in 2027, targeted intervention is urgent. The paper positions the WCEO as an operational mediator between global governance and local implementation, aligning modular training, Train-the-Trainer pathways, viable Toolkit access models, and structured representation in RSC processes to support equitable and sustainable RDA adoption.

KEYWORDS RDA; RDA Toolkit; AACR2

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1. Introduction: a global standard with uneven reach

RDA was developed to replace AACR2 and to align bibliographic description with the IFLA Library Reference Model. Its entity-based structure, emphasis on relationships and compatibility with linked data environments make it suitable for multilingual, digital and interoperable metadata ecosystems. In principle, RDA is a global standard. In practice, its uptake remains geographically uneven.

Studies from Nigeria, South Africa and Ghana consistently indicate high awareness of RDA and generally positive professional attitudes, yet limited systematic implementation ([Aboyade and Eluwole, 2018](#); [Oguntayo and Adeleke, 2016](#); [Xaba and Shongwe, 2025](#); [Yeboah, Onyanacha and Mhlongo, 2023](#)). Across these contexts, common barriers include financial constraints, unstable ICT infrastructure, limited access to the Official RDA Toolkit, insufficient structured training and weak participation in standards governance ([Aboyade and Eluwole, 2018](#); [Ahonsi, 2014](#); [Yeboah, Onyanacha and Mhlongo, 2023](#)). Evidence from Nigeria similarly shows that, despite widespread awareness and positive perceptions, RDA adoption remains limited, underscoring the need for sustained training, institutional support and strong senior management buy-in to enable effective implementation ([Bamidele, Madukoma and Onoyeyan, 2020](#)).

The planned retirement of the Original RDA Toolkit in 2027 heightens these disparities. Institutions that have not migrated to the Official Toolkit risk marginalisation from evolving metadata ecosystems that increasingly assume RDA-aligned description. The issue is therefore not simply a technical transition but structural inclusion. This article argues that RDA adoption in Africa is fundamentally socio-technical. The central constraint is not professional resistance but systemic capacity.

2. Methodology: literature, survey and field engagement

The present article draws on three complementary forms of evidence. First, it uses a structured review of empirical studies on RDA awareness, readiness and implementation in Africa, particularly those focused on Nigeria, South Africa and Ghana, in order to identify recurring challenges and sectoral variations. This body of literature provides longitudinal context and identifies persistent structural barriers.

Second, it analyses the 2026 African RDA Engagement Survey, an online instrument that collected 109 responses from cataloguers, LIS lecturers, national libraries, public libraries and association officers across sixteen African countries. The survey explored current RDA usage, Toolkit access, training needs, willingness to coordinate national efforts and perceived obstacles. It offers more recent comparative evidence than much of the published literature and captures perspectives from countries that remain underrepresented in scholarly discussions.

Third, the article incorporates field observations from onsite engagement in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Between 29 January and 2 February 2026, I facilitated a hybrid metadata workshop at the UN Economic Commission for Africa Library. Attendees included librarians from regional universities, national institutions and UN agencies. Their questions, system demonstrations and practical discussions provided qualitative insight into systems readiness, conceptual understanding and the lived experience of cataloguers working without consistent access to the RDA Toolkit.

Taken together, these three strands produce a multi-layered view of uneven adoption and clarify why the Wider Community Engagement Officer (WCEO) role must function as an operational mediator between global governance and local implementation.

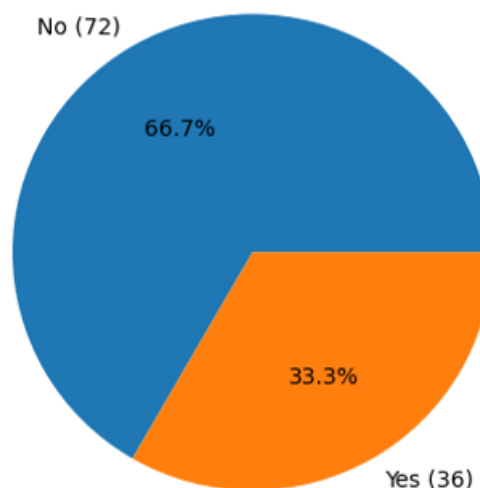
The survey is not statistically representative, as participation was based on professional networks, LinkedIn outreach, workshop attendees and association contacts, introducing potential self-selection bias and likely overrepresenting practitioners already engaged with RDA or working in comparatively well-resourced institutions such as the United Nations Library in Addis Ababa and some South African libraries. Nevertheless, the dataset's geographic reach and professional diversity provide valuable insight into patterns of adoption and implementation readiness across varied contexts.

3. Descriptive statistical findings

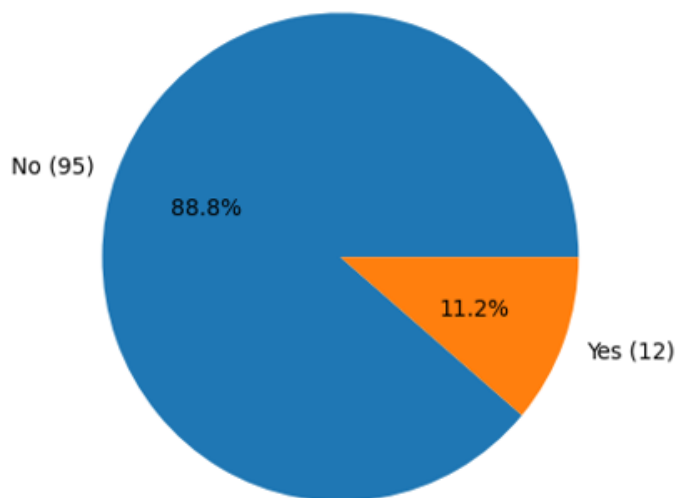
Total Responses: 109; Countries Represented: 16 African countries (Nigeria, Botswana, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Kenya, South Africa, Ghana, Egypt, Lesotho, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Eswatini, Cameroon and South Sudan).

One third of respondents, 33.3%, report that their institutions use RDA. Two-thirds do not.

RDA Usage Among Respondents (Total N=109)



RDA Toolkit Subscription Access (Total N=109)

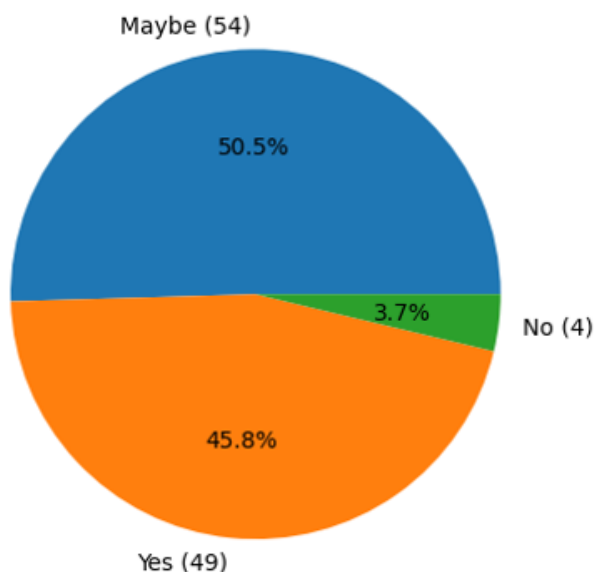


Only 11.2% report subscription access to the Official RDA Toolkit.

The cross-tabulation is particularly revealing. Of the 36 institutions reporting RDA use, 27 do not have Toolkit access. Approximately 75% of self-identified RDA users therefore operate without subscription access. This suggests hybrid implementation, partial adoption, reliance on legacy documentation or copy cataloguing rather than systematic policy realignment.

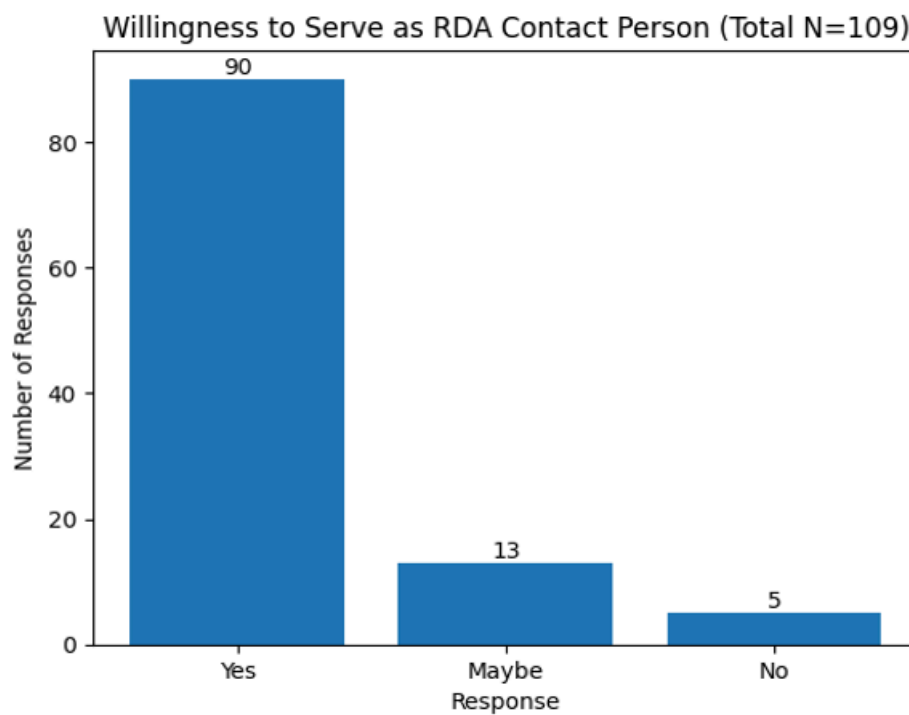
On the other hand, the pie chart below shows respondents' plans regarding subscription to the Official RDA Toolkit (N = 109):

Plans to Subscribe to Official RDA Toolkit (N = 109)



Almost half of the respondents indicate definite plans to subscribe, and just over half are considering it. Only a very small proportion explicitly reject subscription. This suggests that although current Toolkit access is low (11.2%), there is strong demand. Financial and structural constraints, rather than lack of interest, appear to be the main limiting factors.

In contrast, 82.6% of respondents indicate willingness to serve as contact persons or organisers for RDA engagement in their country or region. Professional motivation is high even where infrastructure is weak.



The pattern is therefore clear: moderate adoption, extremely low infrastructure and very high readiness.

4. RDA adoption as a socio-technical process

The literature supports this structural reading. Aboyade and Eluwole (2018) describe Nigerian cataloguers who are enthusiastic yet constrained by funding instability and ICT deficiencies. Nwachi, Ihekwaaba and Nwafor (2021) identify hybrid AACR2 and RDA workflows shaped by system limitations. Madukoma, Unegbu and Olorunkalu (2023) show that readiness often remains attitudinal rather than operational. Udoh (2025) documents extensive training needs but persistent delays due to cost and access constraints.

These findings confirm that RDA implementation depends on an ecosystem of infrastructure, management support, technical competence and sustained documentation access. Awareness alone does not generate transformation.

The survey statistics reinforce this point. Adoption at 33.3% suggests emerging diffusion, yet Toolkit access at 11.2% exposes structural fragility. Where access is absent, implementation cannot consolidate.

The limiting variable is not motivation. It is infrastructure.

5. Recommendations

The survey findings, field observations and published literature point to a coherent set of strategic recommendations. The evidence demonstrates that limited RDA adoption in Africa reflects structural constraints rather than professional reluctance. With 33.3% of respondents reporting RDA use, only 11.2% reporting Toolkit access and 82.6% expressing willingness to coordinate engagement, the central challenge is enabling capacity. The following integrated recommendations are proposed to address training, access, governance inclusion and long-term sustainability in a coordinated manner

5.1. Establish structured, modular and scalable training pathways

Informed by discussions with the RSC Education and Orientation Officer, training should be treated as the primary scalable mechanism for RDA adoption. Empirical evidence indicates a strong correlation between structured training and implementation readiness ([Udoh, 2025](#); [Xaba and Shongwe, 2025](#)). However, isolated workshops or introductory sessions are insufficient. Training programmes should be modular, iterative and practice-oriented, enabling progression from foundational metadata principles to applied competence in RDA entities, elements and recording methods.

A structured pathway should advance from conceptual understanding of RDA and the IFLA LRM to practical skills, including MARC21 mapping, authority control, relationship designators, Toolkit navigation and institutional implementation planning. Such progression must be scaffolded to support sustained skills development rather than one-off learning interventions.

Crucially, training must be integrated with continuous access to the Official RDA Toolkit. Without sustained access, knowledge consolidation and implementation remain limited. Training provision and Toolkit access should therefore be treated as mutually dependent components of a unified adoption strategy.

5.2. Implement a regional train-the-trainer model

Given the geographical scale of Africa and the strong willingness for coordinated engagement, a train-the-trainer model represents the most sustainable long-term approach. The RSC Education and Orientation Officer should lead the development of a structured programme that prepares regional trainers through advanced and

mentored instruction. Trainers should be selected from LIS educators, national libraries and professional associations to ensure institutional stability and continuity. As a strategic priority for RDA adoption, this initiative could be supported by the RDA Board, the RSC and relevant working groups.

Regional cohorts may be established from the 91 survey respondents who expressed willingness to serve as national or regional contact points. Grouping participants into West, East, Horn, Southern, and North African clusters would enable peer learning, regular online clinics and collaborative implementation pilots. Such structures would promote local ownership of RDA adoption while reducing reliance on external interventions.

5.3. Reform and expand RDA Toolkit access models

RDA Toolkit access remains the most decisive structural bottleneck. Without subscription access, institutions rely on outdated documentation and fragmented knowledge transfer. With the retirement of the Original Toolkit in 2027, exclusion risks intensify.

Engagement with the RDA Toolkit Director and the RDA Board is therefore essential to explore viable and context-sensitive access models. These may include national or regional consortium licensing, association-based subscriptions, tiered pricing structures for low-resource contexts, sponsored seats for LIS schools and time-limited licences linked to structured training programmes. Access reform should be aligned with training initiatives to ensure sustainable uptake rather than temporary exposure.

5.4. Strengthening governance participation and representation of African librarians

RDA governance remains largely concentrated in the Global North despite the linguistic and cultural diversity of African cataloguing contexts ([Ahonsi, 2014](#)). Survey results demonstrate strong professional willingness to engage, creating opportunities for increased African participation in RSC working groups, translation activities and technical committees. Regional cohort feedback mechanisms should inform RSC deliberations, while WCEO engagement can support progression towards sustained representation in governance structures.

Sustainable adoption also requires institutional and managerial commitment. Library leaders should be supported with clear briefing materials linking RDA implementation to interoperability, research visibility, metadata quality and digital transformation goals. Incorporating RDA into institutional strategies is essential for securing staff training time, Toolkit access and migration planning.

Bridging the gap between LIS education and professional practice is equally important. Collaboration between LIS schools and libraries should promote practice-

based learning using real systems and current RDA documentation, embedding competence early in professional development.

The Wider Community Engagement Officer (WCEO) functions as a critical link between global governance and regional implementation. Through coordinated training, train-the-trainer models, sustainable Toolkit access, leadership engagement and expanded governance participation supported by the RDA Board and RSC, professional readiness can be translated into lasting structural inclusion.

Evidence indicates that limited access, rather than lack of interest, constrains adoption. With the retirement of the Original Toolkit approaching, coordinated action across training, access, governance inclusion and institutional alignment is necessary to enable African and Asian professionals to move from peripheral adopters to active contributors in shaping RDA. Global standards ultimately depend on inclusive participation supported by sustained investment, local engagement and collaborative governance.

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RDA in German-speaking countries (DACH)

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ABSTRACT

This article provides an overview of the approach taken by the DACH Region (German, Austria and Switzerland) and the actions of its Committee for Library Standards (Standardisierungsausschuss). This includes using a Companion Subscription for Official RDA to enable the development of a range of resources in which RDA is not only a metadata standard for library resources but a useful standard for metadata from non-library communities. A list of useful resources is included.

KEYWORDS RDA; RDA Toolkit; Dokumentationsplattform des Standardisierungsausschusses

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Cooperation in the DACH area: The Committee for Library Standards

In 2001, libraries in Germany, Austria and Switzerland founded the Committee for Library Standards (Standardisierungsausschuss). All types of libraries are represented in the Committee: national libraries, academic libraries, special libraries, public libraries and library networks. Since then, numerous other non-library, cultural, and academic organisations and institutions have joined the Committee. The German National Library manages this work.

The Committee for Library Standards ensures the creation and use of common standards for cataloguing. These are rules for cataloguing, data formats and interfaces. Wherever possible, the standards used should be international. The Committee for Library Standards also promotes the harmonisation of cataloguing and networking with non-library communities, such as archives, museums, digital humanities, online encyclopaedias and bibliographies. The Committee for Library Standards is also responsible for the GND (Gemeinsame Normdatei/Integrated Authority File). The GND represents and describes entities of all kinds, related to

cultural and scientific collections. The GND identifier plays a key role in linking all types of data. Current topics being addressed by the Committee for Library Standards are artificial intelligence and the reliability and trustworthiness of library metadata.

RDA: the Original Toolkit

One result of this collaboration is the introduction of RDA in the DACH region. The *“Regeln für die Alphabetische Katalogisierung RAK”* (Rules for Descriptive Cataloguing), which had been in use in Germany and Austria since the 1970s, have been replaced. The introduction of RDA in the GND took place in 2014. This was followed in 2015 by the introduction of RDA in descriptive cataloguing. The Original Toolkit was translated. The DACH policy statements were also integrated into the toolkit. The creation of the DACH policy statements posed various challenges. The RDA data had to remain compatible with the existing legacy data. The Original RDA Toolkit was still strongly influenced by AACR2. The Toolkit offered good solutions for US publications, but less accurate ones for German, Austrian or Swiss issues. The dominance of English as the language of cataloguing was also problematic. The RDA Toolkit also failed to meet internationalisation requirements in other areas. Christian writings, for instance, were given greater prominence than those of non-Christian religious communities.

The Committee for Library Standards negotiated a consortium agreement with the RDA copyright holders for all three participating countries, Germany, Austria and Switzerland, to access the RDA Toolkit.

The national libraries of Germany, Austria and Switzerland also defined a common cataloguing level for national bibliographic records. This national bibliographic level makes data exchange easier and has also been adopted by other major libraries in German-speaking countries.

RDA DACH and the Official Toolkit

The renewal of RDA (Official Toolkit) also implemented some of the requirements of DACH libraries. The RDA Toolkit became more international. The Official Toolkit provides flexibility to incorporate country-, language- or culture-specific requirements into the rules using application profiles. The interoperability of data is ensured by the framework of the RDA Toolkit. The DACH region wants to continue using RDA because interoperability with data from libraries worldwide and other institutions is important. Many cataloguers also expressed that they would like to have all the rules necessary for their daily work compiled in one place. However, it was not possible to integrate the documentation of the format and rules for the GND and subject analysis into the Official Toolkit.

The Committee for Library Standards responded to this need and decided in 2020 to bring together all the rules and standards for the DACH region on one platform. This platform (*“Dokumentationsplattform des Standardisierungsausschusses”*) is the central

point of access for all standards. The following rules and guidelines are published on this platform:

- RDA DACH,
- guidelines for the GND, the data format, the rules for subject analysis and a sample collection.

RDA DACH are the cataloguing rules for German-speaking countries. The Official Toolkit is the basis for RDA DACH. The Application Profile has been directly integrated into the translated Official Toolkit text. The Application Profile has various functions. It clarifies unclear or ambiguous statements in the Official Toolkit. It fills gaps in the Official Toolkit. The Application Profile also ensures the compatibility of RDA data with data from previous rule sets (e.g. RAK). Last but not least, the Application Profile adapts the Official Toolkit, where necessary, to the specific requirements of German-speaking countries.

The Committee for Library Standards wants all types of resources to be catalogued using RDA DACH. The rules in the Official Toolkit are only rudimentary for some types of resources. They are not sufficient to describe and catalogue large collections of special materials. The Committee has set up working groups to develop application profiles for these types of resources: pictures, music (music recordings and sheet music), sounds and other audio recordings, AV media, films, manuscripts, autographs, rare books, artist's books, performing arts, maps and collections. Other working groups are responsible for specific aspects of cataloguing: GND, provenance of resources, provenance of metadata, religious texts, legal documents, documents in non-Latin scripts, documents in braille, historical corporate bodies, etc. Multilingualism is particularly important for Swiss libraries.

One successful example of cooperation with non-library institutions is the set of rules developed for literary archives. Literary archives collect all kinds of objects related to writers and literary works. These include books, handwritten letters, typewriters, personal documents, pictures, etc. The introduction of RDA in libraries encouraged literary archives in German-speaking countries to catalogue their collections in accordance with RDA. The literary archives recognised that RDA creates a framework that simplifies the exchange and linking of metadata. Within five years, an international group developed the set of rules for cataloguing literary archives, "*Ressourcenerschließung mit Normdaten in Archiven und Bibliotheken (RNAB)*". The members of the working group are literary scholars and librarians. The RNAB rules are published separately and serve as a set of rules for cataloguing literary archives. The language is kept simple so that even literary scholars without library training can work with it. In addition to the separate publication, the RNAB are also integrated into the DACH RDA platform as an application profile for literary archives. The RDA framework

guarantees interoperability with other standards that are important for literary archives, such as ISAD(G)¹ and Records in Context (RiC)².

For other types of resources, a similar procedure is used in German-speaking countries. For example, librarians work together with art historians and museologists in the working group for pictures. Simply extending the rules for monographs to other resources is not sufficient. Three aspects are important for the development of an application profile for non-books:

- a. Cataloguing is based on the specific characteristics of the resource. An example: pictures often have no title, but some have captions. Names of pictures are often constructed. This contrasts with the library cataloguing of books. Books always have a title.
- b. Existing cataloguing traditions of non-library institutions should be taken into account.
- c. The catalogue should answer users' questions.

The Committee for Library Standards wants to achieve two main goals by working with non-library institutions. The first goal is to link metadata. This should result in better service for users. The second goal is to concentrate the efforts. This saves financial resources and working time.

The Committee for Library Standards signed up for an RDA Companion Subscription for the DACH region. The Companion Subscription not only enables the publication of RDA DACH, but also gives access to the Official Toolkit. Access to the Official Toolkit remains important for the development of RDA DACH. The RDA DACH is intended to facilitate the daily work of cataloguers and should not be interpreted as decoupling German-speaking libraries from international standards.

Outlook

The Committee for Library Standards continues to promote cross-disciplinary cooperation in the field of metadata and cataloguing. The ongoing development of RDA to improve its interoperability with archival, museum and digital humanities standards should continue at regional and global levels. Another important topic is the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to cataloguing. It is necessary to define the elements that constitute RDA. New automated cataloguing methods also necessitate new definitions of the quality and reliability of library metadata.

¹ ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description (2000) 2nd ed. International Council on Archive. Available at: <https://www.ica.org/resource/isadg-general-international-standard-archival-description-second-edition/> [Accessed: 18 June 2026]

² International Council on Archives Expert Group on Archival Description (no date) Records in Contexts (RiC). Available at: <https://www.ica.org/ica-network/expert-groups/egad/records-in-contexts-ric/> [Accessed: 18 June 2026]

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Internationalisation of RDA (with a special focus on Europe)

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ABSTRACT

This article provides an overview of the implementation of RDA in Europe, focusing on the translations from English into European languages.

KEYWORDS RDA

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RDA in Europe

Europe shows a pretty heterogenous picture in terms of adopting RDA. Some countries are quite active in this regard, while others have seemed to start considering adoption of the standard only recently, and there are regions where implementation is not even subject to consideration. Nevertheless, there are parts of the continent, where translation and implementation of RDA began well before the 3R project ([RDA Steering Committee and ALA Digital Reference, 2021](#)).

For instance, in the framework of the 'DACH project', German-speaking countries (Austria, Germany and the German-speaking part of Switzerland, also known as the DACH region) introduced RDA for authority data in 2014 and for bibliographic data in 2016 ([Behrens, 2024](#)). After the conclusion of the 3R project, experts of the region launched the "3R for DACH libraries" project, carried out between March 2020 and December 2022. They developed a common cataloguing manual and in addition to that, a documentation platform has been established in order to collect the relevant documentation and make it available in a centralized Wikibase environment. It also serves as a basis for training. The project is described in detail by Renate Behrens in her article published at the Central European Library and Information Science Review, CELISR ([Behrens, 2024](#)).

Another country which has also made significant progress in translating and adopting the standard is Finland. Finnish libraries have chosen RDA as their main cataloguing standard, and the Original RDA Toolkit has been implemented by most of the libraries, and some of the archives and museums. Finnish colleagues are keen on

keeping the content on the freely available RDA Registry updated. Access to the RDA Toolkit is provided to Finnish libraries by the National Library of Finland via a national license ([Kansalliskirjasto, 2016](#)).

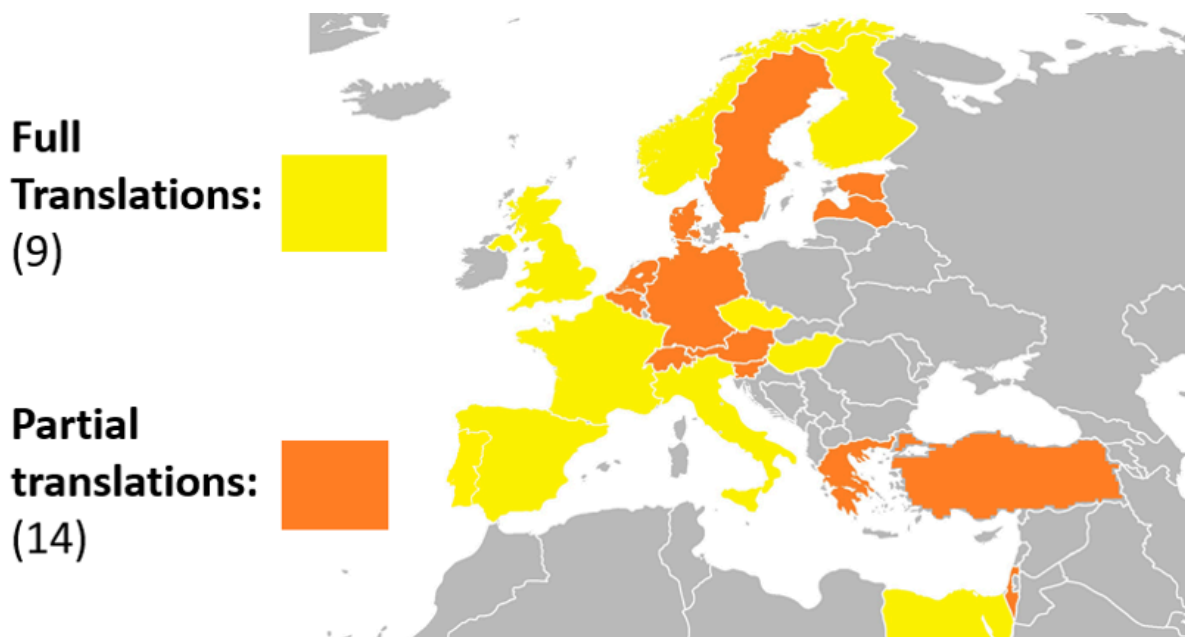


Figure 1: RDA in Europe

[Figure 1](#) shows a map of European countries with or working towards full or partial translations of RDA. (Note: the UK, which uses RDA in its original English language version is also shown). Currently a full translation is being prepared in Catalan, Finnish, French, Hungarian, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese and Spanish. It is worth noting, that in some cases (French, Portuguese and Spanish) the translation procedures are coordinated by non-European countries. Partial translation work is underway for Czech, Danish, Dutch, Estonian, German, Greek, Hebrew, Korean, Latvian, Slovenian, Swedish and Turkish. In Europe, institutions and organisations interested in the translation and adoption of RDA can join the European RDA Interest Group (EURIG) to learn about best practices and share their own experiences ([European RDA Interest Group, no date](#)).

At this point, it is worth clarifying the difference between full and partial translation. Partial translation covers the translation of RDA Reference, which “includes the labels, definitions, and scope notes of RDA entities, elements, and vocabulary encoding schemes for controlled data values. RDA Reference data are continuously maintained and are published through GitHub in coordination with Toolkit releases” ([RDA Steering Committee, 2022](#)). RDA Vocabularies and RDA Registry are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Full translations cover the translation of not only RDA Reference, but also the text of RDA Toolkit, including guidelines and instructions regarding RDA entities and elements, and their application. Translators of RDA receive a licence to use computer-

assisted translation software (TRADOS), and, of course, they can apply other AI-based tools to support their translation process as well. RSC provides help and support, including online “refresher” events on translation processes, to ease translators' work ([Dancs, 2026](#)).

We can see on the map in [Figure 1](#) that we still have much to do to reach new communities. However, some of the national institutions already made huge steps towards implementing the standard. For instance, the National Library of the Czech Republic started to create bibliographic descriptions according to RDA in 2015 ([Národní knihovna České republiky, 2015](#)). They have published detailed guidance, instructions, and examples on the library's website ([Národní knihovna České republiky, 2026](#)). Similarly, colleagues at the National Library of Slovakia compiled and published methodological documents to provide cataloguers with instructions on how to create bibliographic descriptions according to RDA ([Slovenská národná knižnica, 2025](#)). In 2017 the Slovak National Library published the print version of RDA ([Rohoňová and Valko, 2017](#)). A further step for these two countries could be the publication of the Czech and Slovak translations of RDA vocabularies through the RDA Registry. Czech experts already started to make a partial translation in 2025.

Outreach activities and internationalisation

The RSC is usually informed of national agencies considering implementation and trying to find the simplest (and most cost-effective) way to launch their translation projects. The Committee supports decision-making through outreach activities such as dedicated webinars. As well as RDA Toolkit content and the RDA Registry, RDA FAQ ([RDA Steering Committee, 2022](#)) is suggested to be translated, even before starting your own implementation project. RDA FAQ can be shared with your language committee to help clarify what RDA is about. When promoting RDA, it is worth mentioning that the standard has already been translated into more than 20 languages, including ones with large language communities, such as Chinese, French, German, and Spanish. It is also helpful to emphasise its relations to other standards, and its compatibility with ISBD consolidated edition, MARC 21 format for bibliographic and authority data. The draft of the ISBD for Manifestation (ISBDM) made it clear that it aims to be compatible with RDA, stating “ISBDM metadata is designed to be interoperable with RDA: resource description and access” ([International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2025](#)).

Some outreach events are held as a part of the regular RSC meetings, and RDA regional organisations and representatives are also keen on holding such occasions, where RSC members are active participants. Once a year, Translators' Meetings are held at the annual EURIG meetings. In February 2026, the RSC organised an online event entitled *RDA in Europe (and the world) – a webinar on RDA for beginners and advancers* with more than 200 participants, which, besides providing an overview on the adoption of RDA around the world, covered some basic information on the standard, including the benefits of its translation and implementation, how to join the

RDA community, and insights into some best practices. At this free public webinar, experts were invited directly from European language communities, where implementation of RDA is taking place or under consideration.

By reaching out to potential users, RDA could become a global standard that is reflected in its linguistically and culturally diverse, heterogeneous user community. While striving to make the standard as international as possible, developers of RDA face challenges such as multiscryptism and religious-neutrality. RSC counts on active contributions of bibliographic agencies and other community members, who can assist the development of the standard through various working groups. The broader the user community, the more feedback can be integrated into the standard.

Here you can find a list of ongoing and finished translations. Languages with other writing systems than Latin are highlighted in italic.

As you can see, five of the nine full translations have already been published in the Toolkit, and most of the partial translations are available in the Registry. The full Hungarian translation is underway and is expected to be published in 2026. The Hungarian RDA Reference, as well as the Italian one, are in the Registry.

Full translations	Partial translations
<i>Arabic</i> (in Registry)	Czech
Catalan (published)	<i>Chinese</i> (in Registry)
Finnish (published)	Danish (in Registry)
French (published)	Dutch (in Registry)
Hungarian (in Registry)	Estonian (in Registry)
Italian (in Registry)	German (in Registry)
Norwegian (published)	<i>Greek</i> (in Registry)
Portuguese	<i>Hebrew</i>
Spanish (published)	<i>Korean</i>
	Latvian (in Registry)
	Slovenian
	Swedish (in Registry)
	Turkish (in Registry)
	<i>Vietnamese</i> (in Registry)

Publication of the Spanish translation of Official RDA can be viewed as significant due to the large community of Spanish-speaking users. It was completed by a small staff at the National Library of Mexico supported by the Información Científica Internacional and the RDA Toolkit staff ([RDA Steering Committee, 2025](#)).

If you are reading this article in a community whose language is not yet represented, please do feel free to get in touch for an informal conversation. You can approach me as Translations Team Liaison Officer (transwgchair@rdatoolkit.org), or the Director of ALA Digital Reference, James Hennelly (jhennelly@rdatoolkit.org).

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RDA implementation in Canada and the United States

progress and possibilities

Hong Cui

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ABSTRACT

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

KEYWORDS 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.

Understanding and application of RDA Toolkit in Latin America and the Caribbean

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ABSTRACT

This article provides an overview of activities in the Latin America and the Caribbean Region in its progress towards implementation of Official RDA.

KEYWORDS RDA

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The Latin America and the Caribbean (ALyC) RDA Group¹ was formally established in June of 2025 ([Quiroz Ubierna, 2025](#)). However, before and throughout 2025, colleagues, institutions and countries in the Latin America and the Caribbean region successfully engaged in diverse actions to promote the understanding and application of RDA. These efforts focused on sharing experiences, research, and studies in the RDA.

From 1 April to 4 April 2025, the Grupo RDA México², together with the Instituto de Investigaciones Bibliotecológicas y de la Información (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) and the Escuela de Bibliotecología, Documentación e Información (Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica) organised the *2do. Encuentro de Educación en Organización de la Información: "Retos y oportunidades en la enseñanza y aprendizaje de RDA Toolkit"*³ (2nd Meeting on Education for the Organization of Information), parting from the concerns about new challenges brought upon by the transition from the Original RDA Toolkit to the Official RDA Toolkit, its teaching and learning, and the understanding that it is essential to analyse and discuss these challenges among educators in Latin American countries.

The following month, the Grupo RDA México invited the community of RDA subscribers from Mexico and Latin America to participate in the *1ª. Reunión de Usuarios RDA*⁴ (1st RDA Users Meeting). It was held on 14 May 2025 at the Universidad Nacional

¹ <https://www.rdatoolkit.org/latinamerica>

² RDA Mexico Group, website: <https://difusion.iibi.unam.mx/RDA-M%C3%A9xico/index.html>

³ Conference website: <https://difusion.iibi.unam.mx/EEOI/2025/index.html> and conference recordings: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLh_W-DNA7i7hM76nMrvVf3DLFwYvdB4Z

⁴ Conference website: <https://difusion.iibi.unam.mx/EURDA/programaAcademico.html>

Autónoma de México with the objective of sharing experiences, best practices, and success stories on the adoption and application of RDA Toolkit in libraries and other institutions.

Coinciding with the establishment of the ALyC RDA Group, from 16 to 18 June 2025, the Biblioteca Nacional del Perú (BNP), together with the Grupo RDA Peru⁵, organised the *II Encuentro sobre organización de la información*⁶ (2nd Meeting on Information Organisation), which collected a variety of national and international experiences on the organisation of information, the implementation of RDA, and new trends in the formation of professionals entrusted with these tasks.

Felipe Martínez, RSC representative from Mexico, and Ángela Quiroz, RDA Board member from Chile, participated as speakers in all three of these meetings.

Felipe Martínez, LAYC Representative to the RSC, also delivered the conference papers '*De la catalogación a la gestión de metadatos: Las RDA en los archivos sonoros y audiovisuales*'⁷ ('From Cataloging to Metadata Management: RDA in Sound and Audiovisual Archives', [Martínez Arellano, 2025a](#)) on 27 June 2025, at the invitation of the Red Iberoamericana de Preservación Digital de Archivos Sonoros y Audiovisuales⁸ (RIDAPSA), and '*RDA Toolkit Oficial: un estándar para la organización de la información del futuro*' ('Official RDA Toolkit: A Standard for the Organization of Information of the Future', [Martínez Arellano, 2025b](#)), during the *1er Simposio sobre Organización de los Datos y la Información en los Ecosistemas Digitales*⁹ (1st Symposium on Data and Information Organization in Digital Ecosystems), held from 3-5 September 2025 by El Colegio de México and the Red de Bibliotecas Académicas de América Latina y el Caribe¹⁰ (RedBAALC).

The *XIV Encuentro Latinoamericano de Catalogación y Metadatos*¹¹ (XIV Latin American Meeting on Cataloging and Metadata) was held on 1 to 3 October 2025 at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) with the theme '*Reflexiones en torno al RDA Toolkit Oficial*' ('Reflections on the Official RDA Toolkit'). It was organised by the Grupo RDA México and sponsored by the Instituto de Investigaciones Bibliotecológicas y de la Información (UNAM), the Dirección General de Bibliotecas y Servicios de Información Digital (UNAM), and the Biblioteca Nacional de México. Keynote speakers included Charlene Chou, member of the RDA Board and RSC Joint Working Group on Artificial Intelligence, who presented on RDA and Artificial

⁵ RDA Peru Group, more information at: <https://www.bnp.gob.pe/tag/grupo-rda-peru/>

⁶ A summary of the event is available at: <https://www.bnp.gob.pe/biblioteca-nacional-del-peru-realizo-con-exito-ii-encuentro-sobre-organizacion-de-la-informacion/>

⁷ Conference website: <http://www.congresoarchivosdigitales.unam.mx/metadescripcion/>

⁸ Ibero-American Network for Digital Preservation of Sound and Audiovisual Archives, website: <https://www.cyted.org/RIPDASA>

⁹ Conference programme: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Kv4ZWWnizp7POAjlJWZf-vq5ABGU059Z/view>

¹⁰ Network of Academic Libraries of Latin America and the Caribbean, website: <https://redbaalc.udualc.org/>

¹¹ Conference website: <https://difusion.iibi.unam.mx/ECyM/2025/index.html>

Intelligence ([Chou, 2025](#)), and Michalis Gerolimos, Head of the Cataloguing Department at the National Library of Greece, who gave a paper entitled '*Implementing the Official RDA at the National Library of Greece: Challenges and Lessons Learned*' ([Gerolimos, 2025](#)). In addition to contributing to the previous experience-sharing goals, this meeting was intended as a space in which the Official RDA Toolkit was examined in order to understand its particularities, differences from the Original RDA Toolkit, and the influence it will have on the future of cataloguing and metadata in a world where information resources are increasingly varied and emerging technologies change the way information is accessed and retrieved.

This meeting also provided a space for the official presentation of the RDA Toolkit Spanish translation, published on 29 September 2025 and available to all subscribers. Renate Berhens, Chair of the RSC, ([Behrens, 2025a](#), [Behrens 2025b](#)) James Hennelly, Director of ALA Digital Reference, Felipe Arellano, Representative of Latin America and the Caribbean (ALyC) to the RSC; Cecilia Hernández, Executive Secretary of the Asociación de Estados Iberoamericanos para el Desarrollo de las Bibliotecas Nacionales de Iberoamérica¹² (ABINIA) and Ricardo Santos, from ABINIA's Grupo de Trabajo RDA¹³, participated with speeches on the importance of this translation for Latin American countries. Felipe Martínez also delivered the keynote address *Retos para la implementación de RDA Toolkit Oficial en América Latina*¹⁴ ([Martínez Arellano, 2025c](#)).

The Spanish language release of RDA Toolkit responds to a commonly expressed need in the region: the language barrier prevented Spanish speakers from familiarising themselves with RDA Toolkit and implementing it. An agreement was reached with ABINIA, who determined the Biblioteca Nacional de México would be responsible for the translation, with Felipe Martínez acting as its coordinator. The project began in November 2023 and ended in October 2025 supported by a joint contribution to its funding by the American Library Association (ALA) and Información Científica Internacional (ICI).

Now that the Spanish translation has been released and is available to all Spanish speaking cataloguers, the path for continuing the work that has already been done is clearer. Next steps focus on training in the use of the RDA Toolkit and promoting its adoption and implementation across the Latin American region. This point will be addressed in the future with the development of a training program. Finally, it is considered very important that Latin American cataloguers explore the RDA Toolkit and familiarise themselves with it as a previous stage for its adoption and application.

¹² Association of Ibero-American States for the Development of National Libraries of Ibero-American Countries, website: <https://www.asociacionabinia.org/>

¹³ RDA Working Group, website: <https://www.asociacionabinia.org/trabajorda>

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The role of the RDA Registry in RDA implementation

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the Technical Team Liaison Officer provides an overview of the RDA Registry and the ways in which it is useful not only for Linked Open Data developers but for others implementing Official RDA.

KEYWORDS RDA; RDA Registry; RDA Toolkit

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Introduction

RDA is defined as “a package of data elements, guidelines, and instructions for creating library and cultural heritage metadata that is well-formed according to international models” ([RDA Steering Committee, 2022](#)). This “package” is provided through several different venues, including the *RDA Registry* and the *RDA Toolkit*. The *RDA Registry* site documents the entities, elements, and value vocabularies that are part of RDA, while the *RDA Toolkit* provides the guidelines, instructions, and policy statements for how to use them. One can think of the *Registry* as describing the pieces of RDA, with the *Toolkit* as an instruction manual on how these pieces can be used.

RDA provides entities and elements for creating a metadata description set. RDA entities are based on the entities described in the *IFLA Library Reference Model (LRM)* ([Riva, Le Bœuf and Žumer, 2018](#)). These entities represent the objects that are being described. RDA elements are used to describe the entities by recording their attributes and relationships to one another. The attributes of an entity may be described using one of RDA's controlled vocabularies.

The *Registry* includes representations of these entities, elements, and vocabularies in Resource Description Framework (RDF), a standard which facilitates the use of RDA in metadata applications using linked open data ([American Library Association, Canadian Federation of Library Associations and Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, 2024](#)). Additionally, the *RDA Registry* contains maps and alignments from the RDA element set to related standards, such as the LRM, the

International Standard for Bibliographic Description (ISBD), and the MARC 21 standards.

The primary audience for the *RDA Registry* is application developers and the Linked Open Data community. However, the *Registry* is available to all. RDA's element sets and value vocabularies are available in multiple RDF serialisations, including RDF/XML, JSON, and N-triples, as well as in CSV format. Maps and alignments to related standards are available in N-triples and Turtle, as well as CSV, with selected maps and alignments also available in RDF/XML. The availability of the RDA entities, elements, and vocabularies in the *Registry* ensures consistency when these are used in broader applications, as well as maintaining the semantic coherence of RDA (such as the hierarchy of RDA elements). All element sets and vocabularies are browsable and searchable on the *RDA Registry* site. In the interest of promoting RDA as an international standard, the labels and definitions of RDA element sets and vocabularies are available in multiple languages.

The data of the *RDA Registry* is updated at regular intervals in conjunction with the *Toolkit*, to reflect changes in the content of RDA itself as decided by the RDA Steering Committee (RSC). Additional *Registry* updates may happen at other times in order to support new or edited translations of element labels and definitions in various languages.

The structure of the element sets in the Registry

RDA contains thirteen entities:

- RDA Entity,
- Work,
- Expression,
- Manifestation,
- Item,
- Agent,
- Collective Agent,
- Person,
- Family,
- Corporate Body,
- Nomen,
- Place, and
- Timespan.

The entities are defined on the *RDA Registry site* under the RDA Classes element set ([American Library Association, Canadian Federation of Library Associations and Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, 2026](#)). These entities make up the backbone of RDA.

The *Registry* site organises the RDA elements into nine element sets, each of which includes the attributes and relationships of one of the classes of RDA entities.¹ The current *Registry* website allows the user to browse or search each of these nine sets of elements, as well as see the hierarchical relationships between elements. Each element contains a label and a definition in at least one language, as well as the status of the element (published or deprecated), and a compact URI (CURIE) with a link to the full URI of the entry. Each element set has its own CURIE prefix; all Work properties, for example, will have CURIE that begins with *rdaw*.

To demonstrate one example, the element with the CURIE *rdaw:P10256* has an English label of “has subject” and an English definition of the element: “Relates a work to a topic that a work is about.” The *rdaw:P10256* CURIE can be expanded to the full URI of: <https://www.rdaregistry.info/Elements/w/#P10256>.

The canonical element set includes a listed domain for each element, which is the entity that is described by that element. There are two further element sets, known as the datatype element sets and the object element sets. These two “child” sets allow for more specific applications of RDA elements in a linked data context. Each element in the datatype and object elements sets is linked to the related element in the canonical element set as a subproperty. The datatype and object element sets have CURIE prefixes that reflect their relationship to the related canonical element set; if the canonical element set of Work properties has a CURIE prefix of *rdaw*, then the Work datatype properties have a prefix of *rdawd*, and the Work object properties have a CURIE prefix of *rdawo*.

Each element in the datatype element set has a range (or accepted value of a relationship or attribute element) that allows for the entry of text strings. Each element in the object element set has a range of another RDA element or, in some special cases, a range that allows the entry of a concept outside the scope of RDA. (For example, the object element *rdawo:P10256* (“has subject”) has a domain of Work and a range of *skos:Concept*², allowing one to make the statement that a Work has the subject of a concept that is outside the scope of RDA). Each object element also lists the inverse element when appropriate; for example, *rdawo:P10002* (“has identifier of work”) has a domain of Work and a range of Nomen; the inverse element, *rdano:P80049* (“is identifier of work for”) has a domain of Nomen, and a range of Work.

The *Registry* also includes a set of unconstrained elements. These are elements that have no listed domain or range, and have semantics that are independent of the IFLA LRM. In this set, the LRM-specific entities of Work, Expression, Manifestation, and Item are reduced to “Resource,” and the RDA entities of Agent, Collective Agent, Family, Corporate Body, and Person are reduced to a generic “agent.” The unconstrained

¹ The number of element sets does not match the number of RDA entity classes. This is because the element set for Agent contains the attributes and relationships for the entity subtypes of Agent, which includes Person, Collective Agent, Family, and Corporate Body.

² This is a class in SKOS, an application of RDF that can be used to represent a list of controlled terms. See <https://www.w3.org/TR/swbp-skos-core-spec/>

element set is suitable for more generic applications of RDA that do not rely on the semantics of LRM. A map from the more specific RDA elements to the more generic unconstrained elements is provided on the *Registry* site. While the unconstrained elements are supertypes of RDA elements, meaning that they are less specific, they are not conformant with RDA itself.

Value vocabularies in the Registry

The *Registry* contains the value vocabularies that are included in RDA as controlled terms that can be used to describe the attributes of entities. These vocabularies are published with labels, definitions, and scope notes in multiple languages, as well as CURIEs and URIs that allow for linked data applications. The vocabularies are represented as SKOS vocabularies, an application of RDF that can be used to represent a list of controlled terms. The *Registry* also contains vocabularies for the RDA/ONIX framework, a specified set of attribute values used to derive RDA's content and carrier specifications.

Maps and alignments in the Registry

The *Registry* contains maps and alignments from RDA elements and vocabularies to other standards. The maps in the *Registry* represent a single relationship between two classes, properties, or concepts, expressed as an RDF triple. The alignments record general relationships between two standards, using less precise semantics, and are published in tables, usually in CSV format. These maps and alignments only function in one direction; the Registry does not include any maps or alignments from other standards to RDA.

External standards to which RDA is mapped or aligned include Dublin Core, the IFLA LRM, ISBD, MARC 21 authority and bibliographic standards, and the RDA/ONIX framework. Some maps are relatively static, while others, such as the maps to MARC 21, are updated on a regular basis by specific task groups in order to keep up with the development of standards.

Use of the Registry in RDA implementation scenarios

RDA lists four implementation scenarios under the Guidance section of the RDA Toolkit ([RDA Steering Committee, 2020](#)). The scenarios outline various levels of application for RDA, from Scenario A (linked open data) to Scenario D (a “flat file” of data).

The *Registry* can be used in all four implementation scenarios. In the case of Scenario A, linked open data, the *Registry* can be used to provide IRIs for elements to allow metadata description sets to be expressed as linked open data in RDF. Values taken from RDA's vocabularies can also be expressed using IRIs in the *Registry*. In Scenario B, relational or object-oriented data, identifiers for RDA elements can be taken from the

compacted version of their IRIs for use in structured data tables. In Scenario C, a bibliographic and authority file, labels can be taken from the *Registry* elements to be used as structured descriptions for access points in a bibliographic record. And in Scenario D, a flat file, a string encoding scheme can be used to organise literal text strings that describe the elements and vocabularies in the *RDA Registry*, with values of descriptive elements recorded as unstructured descriptions when structured descriptions from vocabulary encoding schemes are not available.

In each scenario, the RDA Registry can be used for application developers to provide the needed information about the classes, elements, and vocabularies that make up RDA.


Conclusion

While the *RDA Registry*'s intended purpose is for the development of linked open data applications of RDA, it functions as an important resource for all metadata practitioners using RDA. The Registry site allows for quick reference of RDA, providing an easily searchable list of elements and vocabularies, with the ability to quickly switch languages for labels and definitions. The *Registry* also makes explicit the hierarchies of RDA elements. While the *Registry* does not include any of the robust instructions and guidance that comes with the Toolkit, it serves as an essential part of the RDA package, providing the explicit structure of the RDA entity classes, relationship and attribute elements, and value vocabularies that make up an RDA metadata description set.

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The role of education and training in adopting Official RDA

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ABSTRACT

As well as providing links to resources for training, this article outlines the centrality of training to implementation and highlights the position of RDA education within the longer history of cataloguing education within the Anglo-American cataloguing tradition.

KEYWORDS RDA; AACR2; cataloguing education

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Introduction

“The decision to adopt any new cataloging code will generate disagreement, controversy, and seemingly endless debate and discussion... We have had our debate, we have had our delay. Now it is time to push forward even though it might seem like leaping into a void” ([Dougherty, 1980](#)).

When R.M. Dougherty wrote his editorial for the July 1980 issue of *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, he was referring to the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, 2nd edition* (AACR2), which had launched two years earlier amid resistance from some institutions. The “dismay, anger, apprehension,” and “resignation” had even led some to call for a boycott due to the anticipated impact on catalogues ([Dougherty, 1980](#)). Decades later, reflecting upon the lessons learned from implementing AACR2, Arlene G. Taylor from University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, summed up the matter at heart: “Recognize that change is difficult” ([Taylor, 2012](#), p. 125).

Any information professional tasked with implementing a new standard will understand that successful adoption requires a multi-faceted strategy. That strategy must address training that brings aboard practitioners, and education that prepares future professionals. RDA as found in the RDA Toolkit that launched in December 2020 (subsequently referred to as “Official RDA”) is no exception. Although the transition from RDA as found in the original Toolkit (published from 2010-2017 and referred to as

“Original RDA” in this article) can feel monumental, training resources are available to help organisations and practitioners through the change.

As the current Education and Orientation Officer (EOO) on the RDA Steering Committee (RSC), this article contains my reflections on learning theories that can inform RDA teaching. In this article, “teaching” and “training” are used interchangeably without any intention of conflating different learning contexts. I reflect on my own interactions with Official RDA as a practitioner-educator and provide examples of how I have approached RDA training in a library and information science (LIS) education program and in workplace-oriented training. Lastly, I discuss the EOO role as a resource for educators and trainers.

Initial teaching and training offerings

Since preparations to launch Official RDA, the RSC has kept training in mind. Whereas the data generated using Official RDA will look nearly the same for institutions that choose to stay within their existing data environments ([Sze, 2024](#)), the architecture of the RDA Toolkit has changed and entity-relationship modelling has been integrated to accommodate linked data applications. To reduce intellectual barriers, RSC collaborated with its publisher to offer early training through the *RDA Lab Series* ([RDA Lab Series Preview with Instructor Kate James, 2020](#)). To reach a wider audience, new videos were continually added to the free RDA Toolkit YouTube channel³, including micro-lectures (the “RDA Concepts” playlist), and recordings of complimentary presentations.

In September 2021, RSC took a novel approach to its relationship with library communities by appointing an EOO. At first a co-option to facilitate Official RDA instruction, this role has become permanent since January 2024. The EOO position has infused training perspectives into the ongoing development of Official RDA, established a direct personal contact for educators interested in speaking with someone on RSC about Official RDA, and led to the creation of resources for educators and trainers ([Learning Resources, 2025](#)).

Theories of adult learning, and their application to RDA training

Case studies in the LIS literature showcase many implementations of standards, but few works have attempted to engage directly with the application of adult learning theories to cataloguing training. An exception is Young ([2012](#)) that examined the Original RDA test in the United States and adult learning theories for RDA training inspiration. Young ([2012](#)) referenced Malcolm Knowles' theory of adults' distinct learning orientation and Etienne Wenger's writings on communities of practice as sources of knowledge.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/@RDAToolkitVideo>

While the overview provided ideas for workplace training, a drawback is Young's reference to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator as a predictor for the learning preferences of cataloguers. In the intervening years, scholars have criticised personality typologies and learning styles for lacking empirical evidence while offering simplistic solutions ([Cuevas, 2015](#); [Fallace, 2025](#)). Nonetheless, Young's suggestions around learning environments (e.g., ensuring visible display screens, comfortable classroom spaces, anonymous feedback mechanisms, and buffer time for breaks and reflection) can be applied generally.

In a *BIBFRAME Workshop in Europe* presentation, Sze, Chan and Jemison ([2025](#)) highlighted other theories that inspire their RDA teaching. The new terminologies and organisational structure of Official RDA encouraged them to apply a scaffolded teaching approach, where complex tasks are broken into discrete steps that learners practice, before more context or instructions are added. Various methods for searching and finding guidance, and tips for reading and deciphering Official RDA text, are also demonstrated in real time.

Scaffolded teaching is backed by several adult learning theories. The Dreyfus five-stage model of adult skills acquisition views the progression of learning through these levels: novice, advanced beginner, competence, proficiency, and expertise ([Dreyfus, 2004](#)). The lesson from the Dreyfus model is to find opportunities to break up RDA instruction into smaller pieces of knowledge, introducing each piece as earlier ones are mastered, and building upon familiar contexts. Sze, Chan and Jemison ([2025](#)) also discuss cognitive load theory ([Sweller, Ayres and Kalyuga, 2011](#)), active-learning techniques borrowed from evidence-based teaching that have been shown to improve information retention ([Buskist and Groccia, 2011](#)), and micro-learning ([Herzog, 2024](#)).

While the diverse contexts and histories of each community makes it impractical to assert a universal approach to teaching RDA, cognitive load theory (CLT) offers insight into the memory processes of adult learners irrespective of culture or language ([Sweller, Ayres and Kalyuga, 2011](#)). CLT focuses on knowledge acquisition through the lens of problem solving—an orientation familiar to cataloguing practitioners. Building upon the schema theory, CLT posits that long-term memory holds many schemas (constructs that classify learned problems alongside solutions); knowledge acquisition occurs when an unfolding problem is compared to schemas stored in long-term memory, resulting in the reinforcement or reorganisation of existing schemas, or the generation of new ones ([Sweller, Ayres and Kalyuga, 2011](#), pp. 22–23).

CLT postulates these characteristics of cognition and memory based on empirical research:

- Human memory consists of working memory, used for processing and transferring information, and long-term memory, used for storing knowledge.
- Human cognition has a limited capacity to process new information.
- Working memory can only retain new information for a few seconds.

- Knowledge acquisition occurs only when information processed by working memory transfers to long-term memory, and working memory can call upon schemas to make sense of an unfolding situation ([Sweller, Ayres and Kalyuga, 2011](#)).

The “instructional implications” suggested by Sweller, Ayres and Kalyuga ([2011](#)) can be applied to Official RDA training in concrete ways:

- Limit the amount of new information added to each lesson to avoid cognitive overload. Official RDA contains many new terms and concepts that require plain language explanations, but these can be introduced gradually.
- Provide “constant rehearsal of novel information”, to enable information transfer from working memory to long-term memory. This could take the form of search and navigation activities to accustom learners to methods of information look-up in Official RDA and build recognition of boilerplate texts.
- Avoid unnecessary redundancies to reserve learner's cognitive load for processes not yet mastered.
- Prompt learners to explain their problem-solving process by citing RDA options and navigational paths.
- Reduce “split attention”. Provide a guided demonstration of an *application profile* that collates all the reference sources learners need to begin cataloguing: RDA elements to use, local policies, and practices to continue. The purpose of training with an application profile is to simulate new workflows while reducing noise and cognitive load.
- Present RDA information through multi-modal delivery. Provide auditory signals and cues when explaining information that is presented visually.
- Reduce instructor's guidance gradually as learners' expertise increases.

Personal reflections as a practitioner-educator

The instructional implications of CLT have retrospectively validated my experiences as a cataloguing practitioner-educator. It has described the learning behaviours and outcomes that I have observed as an instructor of a master's level cataloguing course and as a workplace trainer. More importantly, it has influenced how I package training content.

Customising RDA training means not only recognising diverse professional backgrounds and potential language barriers, but also constraints on human attention and working memory. In my experience, audience engagement has been highest during hands-on practice sessions, while fatigue is visible during lecture-based instruction. The nature of Official RDA requires concepts to be defined; to cut through fatigue, my co-instructors and I look for ways to intersperse lecture content with

activities that have learners move around a physical classroom or complete a group task.

As much as possible, I have integrated exercises—even small-scale quizzes—to encourage practice and provide immediate feedback before incorrect schemas set in. While theory and models remain important, discussion of abstract concepts is undertaken only as needed. An example of this approach can be seen from the Ontario Library Association Super Conference Pre-Conference Workshop in January 2026 ([Brenndorfer et al., 2026](#)), where audience members started with immediate application: cycling through “confidence boosters” that have learners interact immediately with transcription and recording methods, Toolkit navigation, and entity and element labels. Finally, learners were shown how to integrate these pieces of knowledge through a sample application profile and participated in a guided demonstration of the cataloguing process using said application profile, the RDA Toolkit, and supplementary documents. Concepts were explained when terms arose. Retention of audience attention was high and continued throughout the solo activity assigned in the last hour of the workshop.

Teaching LIS students differs from training practitioners but the instructional implications of CLT persist. Viewing cataloguing principles as foundational, my assessments of students' RDA understanding prioritise the rationale behind their choices over the data they create. As Taylor observed, cataloguing guidance may cover known scenarios, but standards and instructions change; students who grasp the fundamental principles have greater capacity to adapt to change ([Taylor, 2012](#)).

Incremental changes that support to RDA educators and trainers

My aims as EOO have been to identify and reach out to educators and trainers, to inform RSC of circumstances impacting RDA training across different communities, and to develop supports to help international audiences. By fielding questions about Official RDA, some concrete developments have been realised: the introduction of the “Orientation” view of the RDA Toolkit “Guidance” menu with the September 2023 RDA Toolkit Release, clarification of selected Guidance pages ([Sze, Holden and Iseminger, 2025](#)), and examples contributed through the RSC Examples Working Group.

Outreach events and webinars introducing RDA concepts to audiences in Asia, Europe, North America, and South America, as well as one-on-one conversations with interested educators and trainers in Africa have revealed demand for RDA training, from basic introductions to advanced programming. As a start, the RSC website hosts a “Learning Resources” page (<https://www.rdatoolkit.org/news/rda/learning-resources>) that includes template teaching slides, which educators anywhere can freely adapt, customise, and re-use.

Conclusion

Official RDA adoption may not be a simple feat, but with a plan in place for iterative training, implementation is possible. Moreover, plans need not be identical across institutions nor remain static. The diverse contexts of each community warrant bespoke training that respects local circumstances, capacities, and changing environments. While this may make planning for RDA training challenging, it also reflects why internationalisation, a core principle of RDA development, will offer more communities an opportunity to benefit from increasing interoperability and data exchange.

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Official RDA and Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (RDA Edition)

a multifaceted approach to rare materials cataloguing

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ABSTRACT

Descriptive cataloguing standards for rare materials have aligned with general-purpose library metadata standards, such as ISBD and AACR2, for decades. However, the characteristics of rare and antiquarian materials and the historical contexts in which they have been produced necessitate standards that extend, or even deviate from, generalist guidelines. *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (RDA Edition)* (DCRMR) is a recent example of a rare materials cataloguing standard developed by and for its community of practitioners that remains in alignment with international cataloguing standards and principles. DCRMR supports a multifaceted approach to rare materials cataloguing in RDA, including a standalone, open-source manual for use in tandem with the RDA Toolkit and policy statements maintained by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) that offer guidance on rare materials cataloguing within the Toolkit itself.

KEYWORDS DCRMR; DCRM; RBMS policy statements; RDA

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Introduction

Descriptive cataloguing standards for rare materials have aligned with general-purpose library metadata standards for decades, just as general standards have carved out provisions for early printed resources. For example, *Bibliographic Description of Rare Books* (BDRB), published in 1981, is based on *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, 2nd edition* (AACR2), and aligned with the principles of ISBD(A): *International Standard Bibliographic Description for Older Monographic Publications (Antiquarian)* ([Library of Congress Office for Descriptive Cataloging Policy, 1981](#)). Since the time it was first published in 1978, AACR2 has included a brief set of rules for early printed monographs, which covers the description of books, pamphlets, and printed sheets ([Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, 1978](#)). However, such brief provisions in generalist guidelines are not sufficient for many rare materials cataloguers. As the

preface of BDRB concedes, AACR2's "brief section on rare printed materials...might benefit from some expansion and elaboration to address...the often troublesome questions of rare book description." ([Library of Congress Office for Descriptive Cataloging Policy, 1981](#), p. v).

Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (RDA Edition) (DCRMR) is a more recent example of a rare materials cataloguing standard developed by and for its community of practitioners that, nevertheless, remains in alignment with international cataloguing standards and principles ([Association of College and Research Libraries Rare Books and Manuscripts Section Bibliographic Standards Committee, 2026a](#)). First published in February 2022, DCRMR is a standalone, open-source manual aligned with the official RDA Toolkit and maintained by the RBMS RDA Editorial Group, a subcommittee of the Bibliographic Standards Committee (BSC) of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), a division of the American Library Association (ALA). Currently, DCRMR supports the cataloguing of rare books. Eventually, it will include instructions for other formats of rare materials. To further support the description of rare materials using RDA, the RBMS RDA Editorial Group published the first release of the RBMS Policy Statements, which are based on DCRMR, within the RDA Toolkit in October 2025 ([Grzegorski, 2025](#)).

This paper provides an overview of DCRMR, including the rationale for creating the standard and a brief history of its development. As a member of the RBMS RDA Editorial Group and a former chief editor of DCRMR, I will share insights on the editorial process and community feedback which have informed the standard. This paper also gives practical guidance on using DCRMR in tandem with RDA and the RBMS Policy Statements to support a multifaceted approach to rare materials cataloguing and concludes with a summary of next steps in the development of DCRMR.

Overview of DCRMR

DCRMR is the latest instalment in the *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials* (DCRM) suite of manuals. Unlike DCRMR, previous manuals in the suite were based on AACR2. The first, covering rare books, was published in 2007 as a joint effort between the Library of Congress and the RBMS BSC. Five subsequent manuals published by the BSC cover rare serials (2008), graphics (2013), cartographic resources (2016), manuscripts (2016), and music (2016) ([Knudson Davis et al., 2023](#), p.27).

After the publication of RDA in 2010, the BSC and the larger rare materials cataloguing community began to consider the future relationship between DCRM and RDA. John Attig and Robert Maxwell (2010) authored a discussion paper outlining differences between DCRM and the original RDA Toolkit, including terminology, structure, transcription practices, and recording sources of information. This paper led to the creation of the DCRM-RDA Task Force in 2011 and subsequent RBMS task forces

and editorial groups, each of which took a different approach towards aligning DCRM with RDA. Initially, these groups began to draft RDA-compliant revisions of the DCRM manuals. In 2014, they pivoted to authoring a set of policy statements for the original RDA Toolkit rather than rewriting the manuals ([Association of College and Research Libraries Rare Books and Manuscripts Section Bibliographic Standards Committee, 2026b](#)).

After a substantially revised RDA Toolkit was released in 2019, it was clear that the draft policy statements no longer fit within the Toolkit's new structure ([Association of College and Research Libraries Rare Books and Manuscripts Section Bibliographic Standards Committee, 2026b](#)). I attended the ALA Annual Conference in Washington D.C. that year and participated in RBMS discussions about the future of DCRM in light of these changes. I joined dozens of my deeply invested colleagues at the RBMS Technical Services Discussion Group meeting at which, the minutes attest, there was “standing room only.” ([Association of College and Research Libraries Rare Books and Manuscripts Section Technical Services Discussion Group, 2019](#)). Indeed, many of us who have been longtime members of the RBMS RDA Editorial Group refer to this as the “meeting where we ran out of chairs”. Our community expressed a clear preference for a standalone, integrating manual incorporating all of the rare formats covered in the DCRM suite, and we pivoted once again to support their needs ([Association of College and Research Libraries Rare Books and Manuscripts Section RDA Editorial Group, 2020](#)).

The current release of DCRMR maps instructions from the DCRM(B) manual, which covers rare books, to relevant RDA elements. In response to community feedback, the standard uses language that is familiar to cataloguers while incorporating new terminology from RDA, organises elements in workflow order (i.e., in order of ISBD areas of description), provides clear and prescriptive instructions regarding the description of rare materials, and employs detailed citation numbering. DCRMR is published as an open-access resource hosted on GitHub. Licensed with a Creative Commons Attribution Non Commercial Share Alike (CC BY-NC-SA) license, DCRMR is available online at no cost, and users may adapt or translate the text to meet their organisational or community needs ([Knudson Davis et al., 2023](#), pp. 29, 31).

Using DCRMR with RDA

DCRMR facilitates multiple approaches to cataloguing rare materials with RDA. It is foremost a cataloguing manual accessible outside of the RDA Toolkit that supports all RDA implementation scenarios, including flat file (e.g., MARC) and linked open data ([RDA Steering Committee, 2020b](#)). However, DCRMR concerns itself primarily with manifestation- and item-level elements to support the rare materials cataloguing objective of describing the artefactual characteristics of a resource. The construction of access points and the description of agents, for example, are outside the scope of DCRMR ([Association of College and Research Libraries Rare Books and Manuscripts Section Bibliographic Standards Committee, 2026d](#)). In one sense, DCRMR is a detailed

RDA metadata application profile for the description of rare materials. It is more prescriptive for certain elements than RDA is but leaves decisions regarding elements outside of its scope to individual cataloguers, organisations, and communities of practice. In this way, DCRMR is designed to be used in tandem with the RDA Toolkit to create a full metadata description.

The RBMS Policy Statements provide another avenue for cataloguing rare materials. These statements provide concise guidance on the application of options in the RDA Toolkit. Every RBMS Policy Statement includes hyperlinked citations to pertinent instructions in DCRMR, which cataloguers may consult for more detailed information. ([Association of College and Research Libraries Rare Books and Manuscripts Section Bibliographic Standards Committee, 2025](#)). This facilitates the work of cataloguers who work primarily within the Toolkit rather than in DCRMR. The Policy Statements also provide flexibility for communities that may want to incorporate some DCRMR instructions into their workflows or application profiles but not necessarily create fully compliant DCRMR descriptions.

DCRMR expands upon, or deviates from, RDA in important ways. As a general cataloguing standard, RDA does not directly address thorny issues of description and transcription that many rare materials cataloguers face. Among these issues are the transcription of complex publication statements and the construction of statements of extent for manifestations ([Burns, 2019](#), pp. 12-15, 25). For example, it is not uncommon for an early printed resource to include multiple sequences of numbered and unnumbered pages and errors in pagination. Following RDA instructions for recording extent without square brackets “can produce cumbersome statements of extent” that are difficult for end users to parse ([Burns, 2019](#), p. 12). Fortunately, RDA permits communities to adapt the standard to their needs in many ways. The RBMS Policy Statements, for example, follow the option in RDA to “apply any transcription guidelines” and direct cataloguers to DCRMR's extensive chapter on transcription ([RDA Steering Committee, 2022](#)). DCRMR similarly retains the practice of using square brackets for unnumbered pagination sequences and for corrected numbering in the case of pagination errors on the manifestation ([RDA Steering Committee, 2020a](#)).

Future development of DCRMR

The RBMS RDA Editorial Group continues to maintain and develop DCRMR, responding to changes in RDA and evolving descriptive practices within the rare materials cataloguing community. We are currently mapping instructions from the DCRM(G) manual covering rare graphics into RDA to incorporate into DCRMR. Once this editorial work is complete, we will provide several opportunities for review from stakeholder communities at the international level, just as we did for the initial release of DCRMR. Another project includes improvements to sections in DCRMR on the transcription of early letterforms and brevigraphs ([Association of College and Research Libraries Rare Books and Manuscripts Section Bibliographic Standards Committee, 2026e](#)). We also continue to develop and revise the RBMS Policy

Statements. We expect to add a substantial number of Policy Statements upon the publication of instructions for rare graphics in DCRMR.

In the spirit of open access, we encourage other communities of practice to build upon DCRMR to meet their needs. Anyone may copy and then adapt and modify the codebase in the DCRMR GitHub repository for other projects ([Association of College and Research Libraries Rare Books and Manuscripts Section Bibliographic Standards Committee, 2026c](#)). DCRMR's Creative Commons license also permits, with attribution, the non-commercial use and adaptation of the standard for other purposes. One example of this use is the RDA DACH manual for German-speaking countries, which has translated and adapted instructions for early printed resources from DCRMR for the RDA extent of manifestation element ([Alte Drucke, 2025](#)). In this way, RDA builds the scaffolding for an international language for resource description but provides space for communities of practice to customise the structure to their needs.

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Original RDA and Official RDA

one standard

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the Chair of the RDA Board provides an overview of the decision-making behind the creation of Official RDA.

KEYWORDS RDA

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At first glance, Original RDA and Official RDA look so different from each other that it is natural to wonder whether they are two separate standards. Original RDA and Official RDA are the same standard but can be seen as two stages in its evolution.

From the outset, the development of RDA was guided by four major goals:

- to create metadata for the digital age
- to build a standard that was a web-based tool
- to support use in many environments – from traditional cataloguing to digital projects, for use by libraries and by other cultural heritage institutions
- to be adaptable for use around the globe

The wording and shape of RDA may have changed between Original and Official RDA, but the intent has been consistent from the beginning. It is easy to lose sight of this continuity when focusing on the list of changes one needs to know when transitioning from Original to Official RDA. The differences can feel overwhelming: new entities, a new structure, a reconfigured RDA Toolkit. But stepping back and looking at RDA's progression from early days until now, the continuity may be more evident

To understand this evolution, it may help to revisit the context in which RDA first emerged. The late 20th century was a period of intense change in publishing and information technology. Electronic publications proliferated, new forms of content appeared, and digital delivery mechanisms transformed how information was created, shared, and accessed. It was difficult to apply traditional cataloguing rules, rooted in print-based assumptions, to new types of resources and new delivery systems.

At the same time, a major conceptual shift was beginning. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) published *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records* (FRBR) in 1998 ([IFLA Study Group on the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records, 1998](#)). FRBR introduced a new way of thinking about bibliographic information. Until then, there had been no clearly expressed conceptual framework to form the basis for cataloguing standards and guidance. The FRBR model provided a shared vocabulary and a theoretical foundation for rethinking resource description in a digital environment. It quickly became the common, shared language for discussions of cataloguing and cataloguing revision, and the basis for new research and new applications.

IFLA subsequently developed two additional models so that there would be a fuller conceptual framework covering all the key aspects of resource description: *Functional Requirements for Authority Data* ([IFLA Working Group on Functional Requirements and Numbering of Authority Records, 2013](#)), and *Functional Requirements for Subject Authority Data* ([IFLA Working Group on the Functional Requirements for Subject Authority Records, 2010](#)). Sometimes the three are called the FR models.

With the FR models providing the underlying theoretical framework, the discourse in cataloguing communities started to change. Now people were talking in terms of entities, their attributes, and relationships. The FR models were developed using the entity-relationship modelling technique that was well-known in computer and data sciences. It now also became easier to explain library bibliographic information to those outside the library domain and to envisage connections between the data of different domains. FRBR was opening a door: it was changing our thinking as well as making it easier to orient towards the digital environment, towards creating data that could be efficiently and accurately processed by computers.

From the start, RDA has been an implementation of the IFLA bibliographic conceptual models. The origins of RDA can be seen at the decision point in 2005 when cataloguing leaders on the Joint Steering Committee decided to fundamentally reorient their work on a new standard that was already under development and to align it closely with the FRBR model (and subsequently with the other two FR models) ([Joint Steering Committee for the Development of RDA, 2005](#)). This alignment shaped Original RDA. A glance at Original RDA's table of contents shows how it was organised according to the FRBR entities.

Original RDA incorporated this new understanding of bibliographic information as data, rather than as strings of characters. The new focus was on distinct and well-defined data elements that were compatible with machine processing, with networked online environments, and designed to function in both current and newly emerging technological environments such as linked data. It created pathways for functioning within a digital environment, for describing new types of resources, and helped us to move beyond 20th century practices.

Official RDA does not break with any of this reorientation. It takes us further ahead but on the same path. For example, in Official RDA, one sees much more clearly the building blocks that enable use of RDA data in a linked data environment.

Original RDA was an important stepping stone from 20th century cataloguing practices to 21st century metadata creation. But one of the goals for Original RDA was also not to create a complete break with the past because of the huge amount of legacy data that existed. The framework was entirely new, but many past practices were brought over and incorporated into this framework. Also, there were no encoding systems that could record RDA data in as full and accurate a way as the RDA data elements did. Implementations also tended to choose a conservative path through RDA that came close to past practices.

The new ideas were there, but not fully unleashed. On the other hand, there were also questions whether Original RDA had moved sufficiently forward at the time of its publication in 2010, and whether there were still areas requiring more work. However, cataloguing communities desperately needed to have an up-to-date standard, since the previous standard, AACR2 (*Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, 2nd edition*) had not been revised since 2002.

While Original RDA was being implemented, a new change was coming. The expansion to three FR models had yielded a fuller conceptual framework covering all the major areas of bibliographic data. But it also brought out issues with the boundaries of entities, inconsistencies between the models, questions about underlying concepts, and the need to shape one coherent bibliographic conceptual model that could be applied more easily and consistently. Out of the three FR models came the *IFLA Library Reference Model* (IFLA LRM) ([Riva, Le Boëuf, and Žumer, 2018](#)). It was more than just a knitting together of three disparate models. The consolidation created a high-level umbrella framework that encompassed all the important aspects of bibliographic data while also creating a stable and flexible foundation that communities could implement consistently and extend further as needed.

The close tie between RDA and IFLA's bibliographic conceptual models meant that RDA had to pass through a similar evolution as the models did. Just as IFLA LRM marked a series of forward steps in terms of its modelling, so also did RDA need to evolve further.

Firstly, once the FR models became obsolete, it was imperative that RDA align with the new, valid IFLA bibliographic conceptual model, IFLA LRM. RDA had to maintain its close alignment with the internationally approved model. All parts of RDA had to be brought to a uniform and consistent interpretation of IFLA LRM. Radical changes to the structure of RDA were also needed to accommodate the new IFLA LRM entities.

Secondly, the RDA Toolkit had to move forward and become a real web tool. Its structure and internal workflows were updated to match the needs of a digital environment.

Official RDA preserved the essence of Original RDA. But its wording, structure and look changed completely when it was reshaped to better meet the needs of a 21st century metadata standard.

The Countdown Clock

Original RDA was first published in 2010. This marked the beginning of a period of change as cataloguing communities began to transition from 20th century thinking to a more data-oriented understanding of bibliographic information. Official RDA was first published in 2020, in a new, more efficient RDA Toolkit. It was a fuller realisation of the original goals for RDA and better attuned to the demands of the digital environment.

Due to the generosity of ALA Digital Reference, two RDA Toolkits have been made available to subscribers for what will have been a period of seven years when the Original RDA Toolkit is removed on May 11, 2027. This long transition was intended to give users of Original RDA sufficient time to implement Official RDA. The transition entailed a shift from an early version of RDA to a more fully developed version of RDA. But the RDA Board understood that there were a lot of changes for frontline cataloguers especially if cataloguing communities decided to embrace a fuller implementation of RDA rather than trying to replicate earlier practices. This time, there were also encoding options available that supported an accurate use of RDA in systems based on entity management. So, the long transition also allowed for changes to new ways of encoding, storing, and sharing data.

In 2023, when the RDA Board agreed on the removal of the Original RDA Toolkit, there was also the idea of a countdown clock for the year before removal. On May 11, 2026, the countdown clock begins and it acts as a reminder that the time for transition is at hand.

For those who never used Original RDA, they will begin with Official RDA. In future years, it may be interesting to study whether it would have been easier to jump into the deep end of the pool by implementing Official RDA directly. Or whether it was easier to inch towards the deeper end of the pool by implementing Original RDA first and then transitioning to Official RDA. But, either way, we are now in a new era where it is normal to talk about resource description in terms of entities and entity management, data elements, relationships, domains and ranges, namespaces, etc.

The countdown clock also reminds us of the extensive work required to build this pathway to 21st century metadata creation and to keep our profession relevant and influential in the information ecosystem.

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Intelligence, artificial and otherwise

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

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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

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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>.

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RDA and the RDA Toolkit

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ABSTRACT

For more than a decade, RDA has been a globally recognised and applied standard for cataloguing collections in cultural institutions. From the start RDA established itself as a unique standard, one seeking to be international in its usage and available exclusively online through the RDA Toolkit. These goals were bold and widely questioned initially.

This article describes the development of RDA from its beginnings to the present day. It covers the evolution of the content of the standard as well as its governance and publication format.

The article also looks forward to further developmental work that will improve processes and better support users of RDA and the entire cataloguing/metadata community.

KEYWORDS RDA; AACR2; RDA Toolkit

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Where we come from

Over the years, libraries have tried to organise and document their collections. This is still the case today, yet much has changed. In the beginning, cataloguing was the most important concern. There was no thought of exchanging information about one's own institution. It was not until the end of the 19th century that the professional library world began to consider this kind of exchange, but always within its own linguistic and cultural sphere. In the middle of the 20th century as collections expanded and also grew more complex, this process became increasingly relevant, and technological advances made possible projects that no one had previously considered.

Initially developed within different language spheres, there was a growing desire to carry out such projects worldwide, and international cooperation was sought. But how could the language barriers be overcome? It seemed obvious to look for English-language rules, as the English language would be applicable in many communities. The *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules. 2nd edition* (AACR2) ([Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR, 1978-](#)) were considered suitable at the time. They were first published in 1978, built on the previous *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules* (AACR)

published in 1967 ([Joint Steering Committee for AACR, 1967](#)), and were regularly updated until 2005.

At the same time, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) developed new models for standardisation, which were intended to serve as an international basis for cataloguing in libraries. The simultaneous development of technologies that enabled data to be networked paved the way for a more efficient transfer of information.

In view of these fundamental changes and the expanded possibilities, the effectiveness of many existing standards worldwide had to be questioned at the end of the 20th century. The Joint Steering Committee (JSC), the committee responsible for AACR2, also addressed this issue and came to the conclusion that rather than simply continuing to update AACR2 a wholly new standard was needed in order to fully address the cataloguing challenges facing libraries.

AACR2 saw its final update in 2005, while work began on the new standard, *Resource Description and Access* (RDA). The original developers of RDA established goals that the standard should be optimised for use in the digital world, available primarily through a website, and seek out international adoption. RDA was first published in the RDA Toolkit website in 2010. In the subsequent years the responsible bodies also changed their names, and from then on, the RDA Board and the RDA Steering Committee (RSC) were responsible for the new RDA standard.

What happened next

The user communities around the world that had already been working with AACR2 were the first to adopt the new standard. However, new communities, such as the German-speaking community, also began to use RDA for cataloguing. Within its first five years the Toolkit had added translations in French, German, Spanish, and Finnish, as well as policy statements from the US, the UK, and the German Language community. In this way we can say that the RDA Toolkit became multilingual.

The original RDA standard still drew significantly from its predecessor AACR2, and as users transitioned to RDA it became clear to the Non-English-speaking user communities that RDA, despite its international intentions, had an Anglo-American flavour that was impossible to overlook and which made implementation in other cultural contexts difficult.

The RDA Board and the RSC took these concerns on board and soon after its initial publication, the standard underwent a fundamental revision. The RDA Toolkit Restructure and Redesign (3R) project was carried out from 2016 to 2020 with the goals of making RDA fully compatible with the *IFLA Library Reference Model* (IFLA LRM) ([Riva, Le Bœuf and Žumer, 2018](#)), further optimising the standard for linked data environments, redesigning the Toolkit for improved scalability and reducing Anglo-

American bias within the standard ([RDA Steering Committee and ALA Digital Reference, 2021](#)). The results were published in 2020 as the new Official RDA ([ALA Digital Reference, 2019-](#)). The Original RDA online tool was made available in parallel ([ALA Digital Reference, 2012-2027](#)).

Following the 3R project, RDA became significantly more useful to an international user community and now offers numerous options designed to meet the requirements of different traditions and cultural backgrounds. However, this flexibility also requires greater involvement on the part of user communities, who now have to evaluate the many options available to meet their needs.

Diversity in unity

Despite all the improvements, it was not easy for many user communities to apply the changed standard. The structure of the standard had changed from that of a manual to one that was more like a data dictionary. Many have had difficulty navigating the new Toolkit and understanding the new concepts that were introduced in 3R. Above all, there was initially great uncertainty about how to implement the new possibilities, especially the many options. After the 3R project, Official RDA was no longer a standard that could be applied one-to-one. Experts, cataloguers and trainers alike were unsure whether this new concept could be applied in practice in their contexts. The RSC and publishers of RDA took action to respond to these concerns, offering free webinars to introduce new concepts and developing online courses that took a deeper dive into how to navigate the Toolkit and address the decisions required to implement the standard. The RSC created a new position within the RSC to more effectively address education and orientation issues. This new role resulted in a survey of cataloguing educators and trainers, a report of those results, and new documentation for introducing RDA to new cataloguers and existing staff ([Sze, 2022](#)). The main aim was to clarify that RDA is now a framework standard for cataloguing and cannot be implemented in practice without interpretation and adaptation by user communities.

Gradually, different approaches to applying the standard were developed, so that today we have a colourful picture of different implementations worldwide, all of which are based on RDA as a framework standard and thus on the IFLA LRM. Some user communities continue to document their local requirements, as in the Original Toolkit, through policy statements. Others describe the application for practical cataloging in manuals which are managed outside the RDA Toolkit. In addition, the approach to translations has also adapted to new circumstances. Many user communities, especially those with cataloguers who have a good knowledge of English, do without a complete translation and limit themselves to offering only the RDA Registry in their language. It has also become apparent that in individual communities it makes perfect sense to initially apply RDA only to a specific area of their publications, or to proceed step by step in order to limit and distribute the implementation effort.

These different approaches to using RDA may seem confusing at first, but they are precisely in line with the approach taken in the 3R project, which made it possible to give the RDA standard a truly international character ([Figure 1](#)).

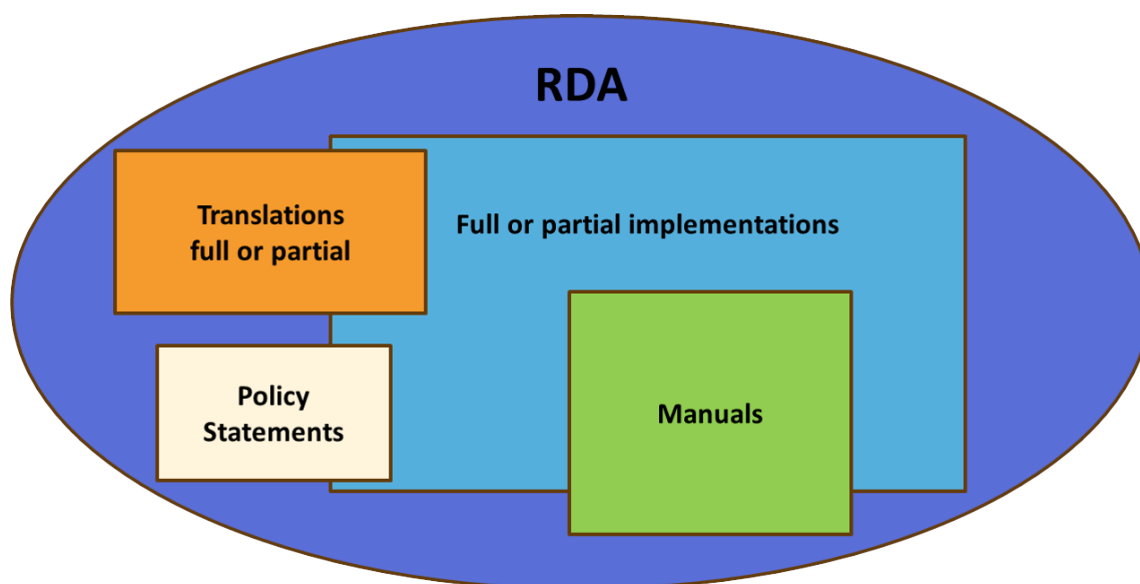


Figure 1 RDA implementations

How will the RDA standard continue to develop?

A standard is never finished and must necessarily adapt to changing circumstances. The RSC has developed a fixed and sustainable organisational structure for this purpose ([Welsh, 2025](#)). In addition to the positions of Chair, Secretary and ALA Representative, there are representatives responsible for training and education, for examples, for technical implementation and for the different regions of the world. The Regional Representatives play a very important role. Only through them is it possible to keep the standard truly international and to incorporate the needs of different cultural groups. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, there are currently no representatives from Africa and Asia in the RSC. However, these regions also have a permanent contact person at the RSC in the form of the Wider Community Engagement Officer, and the structure is in place to accept these regions into the RSC when the time is right. In contrast, all regions are represented on the RDA Board.

Another important component are the RSC Working Groups on specific topics ([RDA Steering Committee, 2026b](#)). Here, the needs of the respective specialist community are discussed and incorporated into the overall context. These working groups are open to colleagues with relevant expertise from all regions of the world and from different institutions. The work here is facilitated by virtual meetings, and colleagues can contribute on an ongoing basis. The working groups have a fixed mandate from the RSC, which is supplemented by additional mandates as required. [Figure 2](#) shows how the work of the working groups feeds into the RSC.

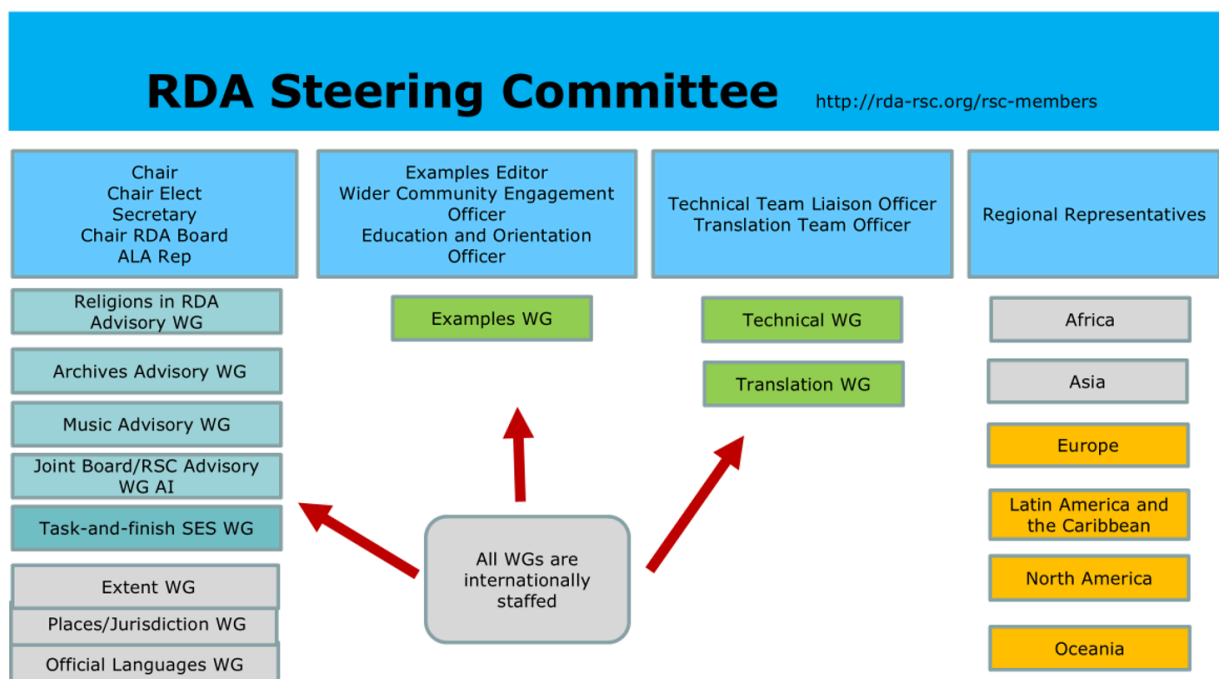


Figure 2 How working groups feed into the RSC

Proposed changes from all regions can be submitted to the RSC using a formal revision process ([RDA Steering Committee, 2023](#)). They are then discussed and voted on by the RSC on a quarterly basis and subsequently incorporated into the RDA Toolkit in regular releases.

In order to keep the RDA standard truly international and compatible, there are official protocols with other international institutions such as the IFLA Committee on Standards, the ISSN International Centre, the MARC Advisory Committee and the BIBFRAME Community ([RDA Steering Committee, 2026a](#)). Only through cooperation can the modern challenges to standards be overcome and global data exchange be made possible and sustainable. It is important that all players adhere to the basic models and principles so that compatibility can be guaranteed. Figure 3 shows where RDA sits in relation to the Statement of International Cataloguing Principles (ICP) ([Galeffi et al, 2017](#)), the LRM, and local cataloguing contexts.

Examples of local contexts given in the figure are the *ISBD for Manifestation* (ISBDM) ([International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2025](#)), *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (RDA Edition)* (DCRMR) ([Association of College and Research Libraries Rare Books and Manuscripts Section Bibliographic Standards Committee, 2026](#)), the *Metadata Guidance Documentation* (MGD) from the Library of Congress's Program for Cooperative Cataloging (LC-PCC) ([Library of Congress Program for Cooperative Cataloging, 2026](#)) and the Policy Statements created by a range of cataloguing communities, including the British Library, Libraries and Archives Canada, the National Library of New Zealand, the Music Library Association and, as discussed

elsewhere in this special issue (Grzegorski, 2026), the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries.

RDA and the Official Toolkit are well positioned to adapt and grow in accordance with International Cataloguing Principles and fulfill its core mission of creating bibliographic metadata that can be shared internationally.

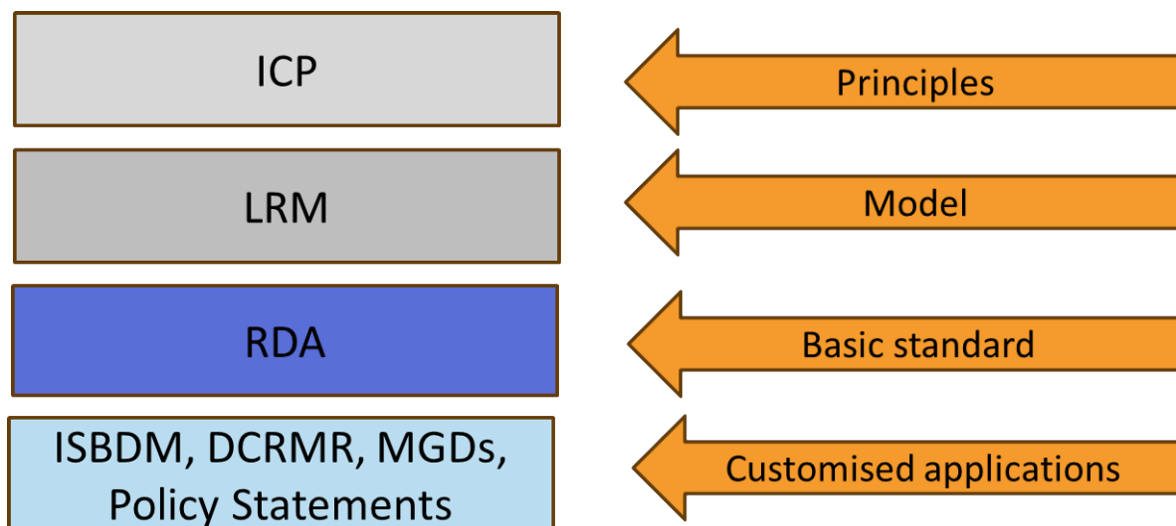


Figure 3 RDA's position in relation to the International Statement of Cataloguing Principles (ICP), the IFLA Library Reference Model (LRM) and local cataloguing contexts

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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 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)¹ provides feedback to the European RDA Interest Group (EURIG)², whose current RSC Representative is Ahava Cohen³. 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 Alemu⁴ 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.

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.

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

² <https://www.rdatoolkit.org/europe>

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

⁴ <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 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.

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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