Response of the Library of Congress, the National Agricultural Library, and the National Library of Medicine to the RDA Test Coordinating Committee

June 13, 2011

Introduction

When the Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control issued its report, *On the Record*, on January 9, 2008, it introduced the findings with these observations:

> The future of bibliographic control will be collaborative, decentralized, international in scope, and Web-based. Its realization will occur in cooperation with the private sector and with the active collaboration of library users. Data will be gathered from multiple sources; change will happen quickly; and bibliographic control will be dynamic, not static. The underlying technology that makes the future possible and necessary—the World Wide Web—is now almost two decades old. Libraries must continue the transition to this future without delay in order to retain their significance as information providers.

Most of the recommendations in the report call for changes in the current bibliographic control system that will move libraries toward this desirable future. One recommendation--3.2.5--was notable in that it called for a suspension of work underway on RDA. The Working Group suggested that further development work on Resource Description and Access (RDA) be suspended until a business case had been articulated, benefits demonstrated, and there had been better testing of FRBR (Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records) as it relates to RDA.

Work on RDA had been underway for several years, so a decision to suspend it could not be made lightly. In March, Deanna Marcum, Associate Librarian for Library Services at the Library of Congress, who had commissioned the Working Group, convened her counterparts from the National Agricultural Library and the National Library of Medicine to discuss the entire report, but specifically asked for collaboration on the response to the recommendation on RDA (3.2.5). After careful deliberation the three national library executives issued a joint statement on RDA.

The three principals from the three national libraries—Deanna Marcum, Sheldon Kotzin, and Peter Young—accorded special consideration to RDA, as it was the only international standard that had been developed, and all agreed that whatever else one might think about the future of bibliographic control, it would surely be an international endeavor. They noted "RDA is an important international initiative that has been underway and is one that requires continued collaboration with our international partners who have joined with the United States in a global initiative to update bibliographic practices to make library resources more accessible and useful to users."

The Library of Congress, the National Library of Medicine, and the National Agricultural Library concluded that a thorough and rigorous test of RDA was needed to answer

questions about whether or not it should be further developed and implemented. The three institutions pledged to design jointly the test of the tool, to involve a broad spectrum of the user community in carrying out the test, and to disseminate the results of the test widely. The test was meant to include an articulation of the business case and a cost analysis for retraining staff and re-engineering cataloging processes necessitated by a new code.

They also agreed to an optimistic resolution that if there were a decision to implement RDA, implementation would not occur before the end of 2009. They did not fully appreciate how involved the development of a reliable test methodology would be, and the unavoidable delays that would occur in issuing RDA.

The RDA Test

The three libraries named staff to work on the test methodology, to carry out the test, and to make recommendations to the agencies' executives based on the results. Perhaps the most important decision was that the three agreed that they would make a joint decision whether or not to adopt RDA.

On June 9, 2008, the members of the U. S. RDA Test Coordinating Committee met for the first time. The dedication of the members of the group[1] cannot be adequately described. They met regularly--sometimes weekly--to develop all of the criteria that would be used to make a final recommendation. They enlisted twenty-six partners (including the three national libraries) that represented many types and sizes of libraries as well as archives, book vendors, systems developers, library schools, and consortia. They carried out the test and analyzed the results over a period of several months.

Recommendation

The most challenging task was to turn the test data into a single recommendation for the three national libraries. There was no clear, easy answer. RDA presents complicated issues for all libraries. **In the final analysis, the RDA Test Coordinating Committee recommended that the national libraries adopt RDA with certain conditions and that implementation will not occur before January 1, 2013.**

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[1]**List of Members**: *Committee Co-chairs*: Christopher Cole, National Agricultural Library, Jennifer Marill, National Library of Medicine (January 2011--), Diane Boehr, National Library of Medicine (Acting: June 2010-December 2010), Dianne McCutcheon, National Library of Medicine (2008-May 2010), Beacher Wiggins, Library of Congress; *Committee Members*: Barbara Bushman, National Library of Medicine, Michael Esman, National Agricultural Library, Judith Kuhagen, Library of Congress (December 2010--), Susan R. Morris, Library of Congress, Regina Romano Reynolds, Library of Congress, Tina Shrader, National Agricultural Library, Barbara B. Tillett, Library of Congress.

Statement from the Executives of the Three National Libraries

Simon Liu (NAL), Sheldon Kotzin (NLM), and Deanna Marcum met on May 24, 2011 to review the report and to reach agreement on a response. They agreed on the great importance of the work the Coordinating Committee had accomplished, and they expressed deep appreciation for the investment each member made to the overall effort.

The official statement is:

> "We endorse the report, with the conditions articulated by the committee. Even though there are many in the library community who would like to see a single "yes" or "no" response to the question should we implement RDA, the reality is that any standard is complicated and will take time to develop. We also recognize that the library world cannot operate in a vacuum. The entire bibliographic framework will have to change along the lines recommended in the report of the Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control. The implementation of RDA is one important piece, but there are many others that must be dealt with simultaneously. We especially note the need to address the question of the MARC standard, suggested by many of the participants in the RDA test. As part of addressing the conditions identified, LC will have a small number of staff members who participated in the test resume applying RDA in the interim. This will allow LC to prepare for training, documentation, and other preparatory tasks related to the further development and implementation of RDA.

> The conditions identified by the Test Coordinating Committee must be addressed immediately, and we believe that the Committee should continue in an oversight role to ensure that the conditions are met. We have discussed the Committee's recommendations with the Library of Congress Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control. We will continue to work closely with the Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control to think about the overall direction of bibliographic control and the changes that are necessary to assure that libraries are in the best position to deliver twenty-first century services to users.

> We believe that the long-term benefits of adopting RDA will be worth the short-term anxieties and costs. The Test Coordinating Committee quite rightly noted the economic and organizational realities that cause every librarian to ask if this is the time to make a dramatic change in cataloging. Our collective answer is that libraries must create linkages to all other information resources in this Web environment. We must begin now. Indefinite delay in implementation simply means a delay in our effective relationships with the broader information community."