

Library of Congress Bibliographic Framework Initiative Update Forum
ALA Midwinter Meeting, Dallas, Texas
January 22, 2012

Meeting Summary

1. Greeting and Introductions (Beacher Wiggins, Deanna Marcum, others)

Beacher Wiggins, director for acquisitions and bibliographic access, Library of Congress, welcomed the audience of about 110 people, including representatives of the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, Biblioteca Nacional de España, and Library and Archives Canada, to the first Library of Congress Bibliographic Framework Transition Initiative Update Forum. He explained that the Library of Congress, the institution that led the development of the MARC formats in the late 1960s, intended to maintain MARC as long as necessary but at the same time had begun to seek a better framework for the encoding and distribution of bibliographic data in the broadest sense, including authority data. He said that LC had convened this Forum, the first in a series, to learn how the Library of Congress could engage the community in the Bibliographic Framework Transition project and to foster dialogue about community concerns. Wiggins mentioned the other Library of Congress staff who were currently working on the project: Ann Della Porta, Chief, Integrated Library System Program Office; Kevin Ford, Digital Project Coordinator, Network Development and MARC Standards Office (NDMSO); Sally McCallum, Chief, NDMSO; Susan Morris, Special Assistant to the Director for Acquisitions and Bibliographic Access; Dave Reser, Senior Cataloging Policy Specialist, Policy & Standards Division (PSD); Ruth Scovill, Director for Technology Policy; and Barbara Tillett, Chief, PSD.

2. Opening statements

a. Need for a new bibliographic framework (Deanna Marcum)

The first speaker was Dr. Deanna Marcum, who recently retired as associate librarian of Congress for Library Services and is now managing director of the not-for-profit strategic consulting service Ithaka S+R. Marcum explained that she had grappled for years with the question of how to evolve from the MARC format that has been the principal bibliographic data carrier since the late 1960s to a flexible framework suited to the World Wide Web. At the 2005 ALA Midwinter Meeting in Boston, Mass., she spoke to the EBSCO Leadership Seminar on "The Future of Cataloging." That speech caused her to think in earnest about what we as a community need to do to produce relevant bibliographic control for the digital age. The vast quantity of legacy data expressed only in MARC made it difficult to contemplate such a shift, but two events showed that the time for a new framework had come.

First, in January 2008, the Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control (<<http://www.loc.gov/bibliographic-future/>>) made 108 recommendations to LC and the community. Among these, the Working Group recommended suspension of work on the new cataloging instructions *RDA: Resource Description and Access* and development of a more flexible, extensible metadata carrier that would promote easier interchange of metadata among libraries and other parts of the information community. At Marcum's suggestion, the Library of Congress, National Agricultural Library, and National Library of Medicine conducted a large-scale national test of RDA and issued a joint decision in June 2011 on how they would implement it.

Second, in its resulting report <<http://www.loc.gov/bibliographic-future/rda/source/rdatesting-finalreport-20june2011.pdf>>, the US RDA Test Coordinating Committee of LC, NAL, and NLM specified "credible progress toward a replacement for MARC" as one of the necessary conditions for implementing RDA.

In May 2011 Marcum therefore assigned Wiggins and several other LC managers to begin the transition to a new bibliographic framework. Mindful of the Library's huge investment in MARC, she asked the LC team what MARC's primary inventor, Henriette D. Avram, would have done in the age of Google. All agreed that Avram would not have viewed MARC as the final answer, but would have overseen an evolution of MARC to meet contemporary needs. The LC team drafted a high-level plan for the transition and posted it to the Library's new Bibliographic Framework Transition Initiative Website (<http://www.loc.gov/marc/transition/>) on October 31, 2011. The plan calls for formation of two groups, an advisory group to establish overall principles and a technical development group. Marcum, noting that all parts of the library community are struggling with the same question—how to do the best job we can for future generations—said she had agreed to serve, on a volunteer basis, as the chair of the advisory group.

b. Overview of initial plan for Bibliographic Framework Transition, issued October 31, 2011 (Sally McCallum)

McCallum gave a brief overview of the October 31 plan. She stressed that the plan is very high-level at this time; its purpose was to set forth future requirements, propose ways to investigate next steps, and suggest how the Library of Congress and the community can handle their legacy data and systems. The plan envisions a new framework that features:

- Broad accommodation of content rules and data models--The new framework must be agnostic to cataloging rules, because in addition to RDA, it must accommodate descriptions in *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (DACS), *Cataloging Cultural Objects* (CCO), and specialized rule sets such as those used in the sciences;

- Provision for types of data that logically accompany or support bibliographic description;

- Accommodation of textual data, linked data with URIs instead of text, and both—a requirement since libraries are not all alike now, and never will be all alike;

- Consideration of the relationships between and recommendations for communications format tagging, record input conventions, and system storage/manipulation—cataloging interfaces have been very MARC-like, but end-user interfaces have become much more varied, and McCallum predicted that there would be increasingly diverse interfaces for both;

- Consideration of the needs of all sizes and types of libraries, from small public to large research;

- Continuation of maintenance of MARC until no longer necessary;

- Compatibility with MARC-based records;

- Provision of transformation from MARC21 to a new bibliographic environment;

The plan commits the Library to maintaining MARC for as long as necessary and to providing automated tools for transforming data from MARC to the new framework. The latter will most likely be based on Linked Data principles and use the Resource Description Framework (RDF), a World Wide Web Consortium specification, as its basic data model. The new framework will support many more options for data storage and retrieval than is the case now. McCallum envisioned development of RDF ontologies for the new bibliographic framework. Above all, she stressed the need for community collaboration. She recalled that Avram, leading the development of MARC more than forty years ago, made it a practice to develop a small piece of the format, have it reviewed and adjust it accordingly, then issue another small piece, in an iterative process that resulted in a very robust and widely accepted format.

3. Updates

a. Synopsis of responses to initial Transition plan (Sally McCallum)

McCallum encouraged all Forum attendees to subscribe to the BIBFRAME listserv (<<http://listserv.loc.gov/listarch/bibframe.html>>) and make and follow comments there. Comments to date have highlighted several themes:

Core data: how will the developers determine what elements are core, in a world in which every data element is core to someone?

Goals of the Bibliographic Framework Transition with respect to end users: how will it enable libraries to deliver more value to patrons?

Goals with respect to catalogers: the new framework is not likely to prescribe an interface.

McCallum added that several national libraries abroad had submitted statements of support for the Transition Initiative.

b. Funding for the Transition Initiative (Deanna Marcum)

Marcum said she had promised to pursue funding for the Transition Initiative and hoped to have some funding commitments this winter. The community conversation on the new bibliographic framework had to include voices from other countries and from around the U.S., a factor that would make the project expensive. [Wiggins mentioned after the Forum that the LC group hoped to host a series of invitational meetings in different regions, as the Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control had done in 2007.] Marcum would chair the Transition Initiative Advisory Group that would provide long-term guidance, monitor costs, and ensure that libraries' managers were informed about the Initiative as it progressed.

c. Advisory and Technical Groups (Beacher Wiggins, Deanna Marcum)

Wiggins said that the technical group would develop the new framework in modules. He said that LC didn't plan to announce the members of either group until both were fully populated. He said that LC also envisioned the formation of several technical subgroups to work on various aspects of the framework. He encouraged those interested in serving on a group or subgroup to email ndmsso@loc.gov

4. Expectations for and from the community

This topic was folded into previous agenda items.

5. Questions and answers/Open discussion (All)

Elizabeth O'Keefe: What is the nature of the commitments of time and resources that will be expected of advisory and technical group members?

Wiggins replied: The Library of Congress and Marcum are seeking funding to host at least one face-to-face meeting for each group in 2012. No one in either group would be expected to make it a full-time job.

Paul J. Weiss: What role do you see for other countries' MARC maintenance agencies?

McCallum replied: They'll be eagerly invited to participate; several national libraries have sent messages of support for the initiative.

Louise Ratliff: Please post some "recommended reading" on the Bibliographic Framework Transition Initiative Website.

Wiggins replied: An excellent suggestion. LC will undertake to post a bibliography of readings. Recommended readings will touch on the Resource Description Framework, Linked Systems, and other relevant topics.

John Espley: Is there a way to make the BIBFRAME listserv comments more to the point? The tone is sometimes negative.

McCallum replied: We feel that people need to have a voice and should be able to feel that their input is considered.

John Attig: BIBFRAME readers and the Forum audience would welcome a direct conversation with the decision-makers for the Transition Initiative. They want LC people to express individual viewpoints on the listserv.

Robert Ellett: The ALCTS Webinar on RDA by Marcum and Wiggins in August 2011 was excellent; will there be more such opportunities?

Wiggins replied that additional Webinars, by LC, ALCTS, or other entities, were under consideration.

Janet Ahrberg: Are you involving vendors in the Transition Initiative?

Wiggins replied that this was already underway.

John F. Myers: When you're used to a certain framework of perception, it's hard to recognize the next dimension as it unfolds. Those working on the Transition Initiative shouldn't let negative remarks discourage them. It is important to provide for transformations from MARC to the new framework, but it makes sense to develop the new framework first and then build bridges back to MARC.

Diane Hillmann: Wishes LC members would respond to comments on BIBFRAME with their personal opinions. The suggestion that LC is developing the Next Big Thing calls for reassurance that the community will be full participants so that siloing can be avoided. There is concern in the community about all having a voice in the discussion.

Paul J. Weiss: It's understandable that vendors and national libraries must have unified voices, but nowadays the community considers the Library of Congress a partner, not a parent. Framework developers should not worry about having disagreements in public view of the community.

John Attig: "Made at LC," or even "Made in libraries," would not be desirable.

Cheryl Cook: Framework groups should look at Quali OLE, a community-wide research library management system using open-source software, because it links financial and bibliographic data.

Wiggins replied that the Framework would indeed consider this kind of linking.

The Forum closed with a comment that the library community needs a Mark Zuckerberg (chief executive of Facebook).

*Subscribe to the BIBFRAME electronic discussion list at
<http://listserv.loc.gov/listarch/bibframe.html>*

Email suggestions for the Advisory and Technical groups to ndmso@loc.gov