

**To:** RDA Steering Committee  
**From:** Kathy Glennan, RSC Past Chair  
**Subject:** Policies and Procedures for Updating RDA Content

This document sets out policies and procedural information related to changing and/or developing RDA content.

## Contents

- 1 [Definition of RDA](#)
- 2 [RDA Development](#)
- 3 [Steps in the Change Process](#)
- 4 [Proposing Changes to RDA](#)
- 5 [Process for discussion papers and proposals](#)
  - [Discussion paper and proposal development](#)
  - [Submission](#)
  - [Scheduling](#)
  - [Informal discussion](#)
  - [Formal discussion](#)
  - [RSC approval](#)
  - [Implementation](#)
- 6 [Fast Tracks](#)
- 7 [RDA Vocabulary Encoding Schemes and Vocabulary Terms](#)
- 8 [Schedule for RDA Changes](#)
- 9 [Reporting Out Changes to RDA](#)
- 10 [Other Changes to RDA Content](#)

## 1 Definition of RDA

*RDA: Resource Description and Access* refers to the international standard which is a package of data elements, guidelines, and instructions for creating library and cultural heritage resource metadata that are well-formed according to international models.

## 2 RDA Development

The RDA Steering Committee (RSC) is responsible for the content of the RDA standard. Revisions, consolidations, additions, and other changes may be made to RDA only with RSC approval. Changes to the standard must conform to the RDA Board's [Internationalization Principles](#).

The working language of the RSC is English, and all changes to RDA are developed first in English before being applied to other language translations.

The official content of RDA includes:

- Base RDA: RDA text contained in the guidance chapters, entity pages, element pages, the glossary, and the RDA vocabulary encoding scheme pages.<sup>1</sup>
- Alignments and mappings from RDA to related standards
- The English language text of RDA (including all Guidance and Entity chapters)
- The content in the Resources tab generated by RDA Reference
- The linked data representation of RDA Reference in RDF and associated documentation available from the RDA Registry, excluding the unconstrained element set which supports interoperability of RDA and non-RDA data.

RDA Toolkit also contains unofficial (or community) content:

- Examples, which are amended or adjusted by each translation team as appropriate<sup>2</sup>
- Policy statements
- Content in the Community resources section
- User-created content in the Documents area.

The RSC and ALA Digital Reference partner to oversee and approve derivatives of RDA content. The RSC has responsibility for the accuracy of derivative RDA products, including simplified guides and extractions for particular categories of resources. The Translations Working Group leads the derivatives process for both full and partial translations. For information about creating a new translation, see [Policy for New Translations of RDA](#).

The RSC exercises oversight over community-based application profiles, policy statements, and the community resources content published in RDA Toolkit to ensure that these remain compatible with the RDA standard. The RSC is available to consult with community groups as they develop additional supplementary guidance and training documentation. The Technical Team Liaison Officer should be consulted as community refinements are prepared to assure RDA conformance.

### **3 Steps in the Change Process**

There are four major parts of the RDA change process:

- Discussion paper and proposal development, submission, and scheduling
- Informal and formal discussion
- RSC approval
- Implementation

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<sup>1</sup> “RDA Reference” has a related but different scope: it encompasses the linked data and Semantic Web representations of the entities, elements, and terminologies maintained in the RDA Registry.

<sup>2</sup> The RDA Examples Editor has primary responsibility for providing consistent, accurate, and relevant examples in the English language text of RDA and consults with translators on their example choices.

The process is streamlined from the earlier process used by its predecessor, the JSC. The RSC has the following goals:

- Ensuring an efficient process that allows for consideration of change proposals at any RSC meeting, but with the benefit of getting community review and feedback
- Allowing for enough time to make an informed decision, without holding up difficult decisions because they are too complex
- Requiring less formality, time, and effort to prepare responses, as compared to past practices
- Taking into account the different time zones and cultural conditions of the RSC members, if possible
- Promoting more collaboration among RSC members, including the possibility of having a discussion paper or proposal from multiple members
- Retaining transparency in RSC decision-making.

#### **4 Proposing Changes to RDA**

The RSC considers three different types of recommendations: discussion papers, proposals, and fast track changes. These recommendations must be in harmony with the [Objectives and principles governing RDA](#), as described in the RDA Toolkit guidance chapter on this topic. The RSC will reject submissions which do not meet these conditions. Examples include changes that are not international in scope, string encoding schemes that go beyond the basic model, additions to closed vocabularies, and changes that contradict the IFLA Library Reference Model. For all rejected submissions, the RSC will notify the proposing group or individual with an explanation.

*Discussion papers* raise topics for RSC consideration before formal proposals are prepared. Discussion papers may suggest a need for investigation of issues related to RDA development, identify issues related to other standards, raise and address questions, etc. Options in discussion papers should be presented as votable propositions; this will allow the RSC to make decisions between multiple viable options.

*Proposals* are formal recommendations to add, amend, or delete RDA content. Substantial changes to RDA content should come to the RSC as a discussion paper first and not as a proposal.

*Fast track* changes originate from RSC members or from RDA users who identify editorial inconsistencies and submit them through the “Submit Feedback” button in RDA Toolkit.

The RSC follows the same basic procedures for discussion papers and proposals; see [Section 5](#) for details. Procedures for fast track changes differ; see [Section 6](#) for more information.

Discussion papers and proposals may originate from and be submitted by:

- RSC members
- RDA regional representative bodies, via their regional representative
- RDA users
  - Via their regional representative body, and if approved, by their regional representative
  - Via the Wider Community Engagement Officer, if they are not represented by a regional representative body
- RSC task and finish working groups, via the RSC Chair
- Information standards groups, via the RSC Chair

The RSC also may request discussion papers or proposals regarding specific instructions or issues from RDA regional representative bodies, RSC members, or RSC working groups.

## **5 Process for discussion papers and proposals**

### ***Discussion paper and proposal development***

For information on document structure, numbering, and best practices, see *Guidelines for Discussion Papers, Proposals, and Responses to Them* (RSC/Operations/5).

All discussion papers and proposals must be submitted in English.

By submitting a document, the submitter acknowledges that the RSC may post the document in full on its public website.

RDA is intended to be applicable to all user communities; solutions that apply to an individual region should follow the process for policy statements or other local documentation.

For discussion papers or proposals originating outside of the RSC, authors should consult with the appropriate RSC member for advice on scope, content, and framing. In addition, regional representatives have a gatekeeping role in working with their communities to develop discussion papers and proposals.

In consultation with the regional body as appropriate, the RSC member determines whether the discussion paper or proposal warrants RSC consideration. The RSC member then consults with the Technical Working Group to confirm that the recommendation is technically and semantically compatible with RDA. If so, the RSC member reviews the text for completeness and conformance to RSC guidelines.

### ***Submission***

All discussion papers and proposals must be submitted by an RSC member to the RSC Chair and RSC Secretary, who confirm that the proposed change meets the appropriate parameters for RSC discussion. If not, they will notify the RSC member and the proposing individual or group if applicable, suggesting next steps.

### ***Scheduling***

Discussion papers and proposals may be submitted at any time. They will first be reviewed by the Technical Working Group to assure semantic integrity with RDA before moving forward to the RSC.

Discussion papers and proposals will be scheduled for discussion during the public session of an in-person RSC meeting or a public conference call at an asynchronous RSC meeting to benefit from public input and to provide transparency.

The RSC Chair and RSC Secretary will determine if the proposed change will be on the agenda for the next RSC meeting, or if it will be discussed at a later meeting. The timetable must allow sufficient time for the RDA regional representative bodies and RSC members to translate, consider, and comment on proposed changes. The RSC Secretary will notify the RSC and the proposer of the timetable.

### ***Informal discussion***

RSC members may informally consult with each other in advance of the scheduled RSC discussion. There is a space in Basecamp for this purpose.

To assist with tracking responses within the RSC, a spreadsheet log will be maintained to indicate at a glance the agreement, disagreement, or general comments for discussion.

RSC regional representatives will consult with their representative bodies<sup>3</sup> before the RSC discussion to formulate responses to the discussion papers and proposals originating from outside their regions.

### ***Formal discussion***

All formal written responses must be in English. They will be made available publicly for review and discussion of their substance.

- All RSC voting members except the RSC Chair are expected to make a formal written response no later than two weeks before the meeting where the discussion paper or proposal is scheduled for discussion. Written responses should be submitted to the

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<sup>3</sup> Regional representative bodies are responsible for developing their own approaches for consulting with the groups/individuals they represent.

RSC Chair and RSC Secretary and will be published on the RSC website.

*Exception:* If an RSC position holder has contributed to their regional committee response, and the change proposal does not have a direct bearing on their RSC assignment, then they may opt out of writing a separate response. In this case, the position holder notifies the RSC Chair and RSC Secretary that a separate response will not be forthcoming.

- Responses should state explicitly whether the proposed changes are accepted or not accepted. Responses should include an explicit response to each recommendation in the proposed change document.
- Responses, revisions, and follow-ups should refer to the original document through the document numbering, and reflect the subsequent response, revision, or follow-up (e.g., RSC/Chair/2020/2/EURIG response; RSC/EURIG/2019/1/rev; RSC/TechnicalWG/2021/3/EURIG follow-up). The beginning of each revised proposed change document or response includes a summary of what was revised.
- Formal responses to proposed changes originating from an RSC working group will be shared directly with that group.
- Formal responses may be submitted by individuals or groups and should be sent to the RSC Chair and RSC Secretary.
- RDA users not represented by a regional representative body may submit formal responses to proposed changes directly to the Wider Community Engagement Officer.

During the public session, whether in-person or via conference call, the RSC will discuss the proposed changes, the responses from the regions, the comments from RSC members, and comments from other RDA users on each recommendation.

The proposing RSC member may withdraw a proposed change at any time prior to its approval (e.g., after responses are received, during an RSC meeting).

Occasionally, revised or updated discussion papers or proposals will be presented to the RSC during their meeting, often based on informal discussion or responses provided. The RSC will be clear in their deliberations about the version of the paper under discussion. Revised or updated discussion papers or proposals will be published as soon as feasible.

If the proposing group or individual decides to revise the proposed changes after reviewing the formal responses, the discussion of the revised document may be postponed to a future RSC meeting.

If there has been inadequate time for consideration of a document, the RSC Chair reserves the right to defer or continue the discussion to a subsequent RSC meeting.

### ***RSC approval***

The RSC voting members<sup>4</sup> will determine which of the following actions to take in relation to a *discussion paper*:

- Refer back to the proposing group or individual for further development or investigation; this may include developing a formal proposal based on the RSC discussion
- Refer to another appropriate individual or group for more work
- Defer to a later date
- Reject

The RSC voting members will determine which of the following actions to take in relation to a *proposal*:

- Accept
- Revise
- Refer to a group or individual for more work
- Reject

The RSC Chair will call for a formal vote at the close of discussion.

### ***Implementation***

The RSC vote, along with any adjustments to the discussion paper or proposal and the justification for those decisions (when not already clear in the proposal or responses), will be recorded in an official RSC document (the RSC minutes or the RSC Decisions document), and the proposing group or individual will be notified of the outcome. This includes notification and additional information (if any) about advancing a discussion paper to the proposal stage.

The RSC Secretary will record the content of the approved revision in the official RSC Decisions document. Final decisions on all matters of wording or style are the responsibility of the RSC Secretary and the Technical Team Liaison Officer. The RSC member who submitted the proposal will review the RSC Decisions document before it is posted on the RSC website and the changes made to RDA content.

## **6 Fast Tracks**

Fast track change recommendations

- Suggest improvements for consistency in wording or structure

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<sup>4</sup> See RSC/Operations/1, section 4.

- Propose uncomplicated additions to RDA Vocabulary Encoding Schemes
- Recommend other straightforward changes without significant impact.

Fast track change recommendations should be capable of inclusion in RDA without negative impact on its users.

Certain kinds of changes are not eligible for the fast track process because they have a wider impact, such as changes to element labels, changes to element hierarchies, and adding new options or condition/option combinations. In these cases, the formal proposal process is used.

Fast track change recommendations may be submitted at any time via email or through the RSC collaborative workspace. The timeframe for consideration by the RSC depends on the length of the fast track queue.

### ***Discussion***

The RSC discusses and votes on fast tracks via a collaborative workspace. There are separate discussion and voting phases.

Regional consultation is at the discretion of the RSC regional representative; it is not required.

Fast tracks are not made available publicly nor do they require the creation of formal responses.

Any RSC voting member may request that a fast track be referred to the proposal process. This request closes out the discussion of the fast track, which may then only be implemented via the proposal process.

### ***Approval process and voting***

All RSC members will review fast track change recommendations, posting their responses to the collaborative workspace, clearly stating if they agree, disagree, or have additional comments for discussion.

The RSC voting members will determine which of the following actions to take in relation to fast track change recommendation:

- Accept
- Revise
- Refer to the formal proposal process for a fuller review
- Reject

All voting members should vote unless there are extenuating circumstances.



The RSC Secretary will track the discussion, notify the RSC of any additional actions required, record the final decisions, and summarize any significant issues raised during the discussion. The final decisions will be recorded in an official RSC document.

Changes resulting from approved proposals will be implemented in the next appropriate Toolkit release.

## **7 RDA Vocabulary Encoding Schemes and Vocabulary Terms**

RDA Reference, through its value vocabularies, provides the infrastructure for the RDA vocabulary encoding schemes (VESs). Each RDA VES contains individual vocabulary terms. New VESs, and the addition or removal of specific terms, require the review of the Technical Team Liaison Officer before being passed on to the RSC.

New vocabulary encoding schemes should be submitted through the proposal process (see [Section 5](#)) and should include information about the element(s) with which they are associated.

New terms, or removing terms from existing vocabularies, may be submitted through the proposal process if complex or as a fast track if straightforward.

## **8 Schedule for RDA Changes**

The RSC follows a planned release schedule for changing the content of RDA. RDA content is updated in new releases of the RDA Toolkit (normally quarterly), and in ad hoc GitHub releases of RDA Reference data. The release schedule takes into account the following workloads and responsibilities:

- RDA Reference data published in a GitHub release (Technical Team Liaison Officer)
- Policy statements (ALA Digital Reference)
- Mappings to other standards, e.g., MARC 21, Dublin Core, IFLA LRM (Technical Team Liaison Officer and ALA Digital Reference)
- Examples (RDA Examples Editor)
- Translations (ALA Digital Reference)
- Derivative products other than translations, e.g., *RDA Essentials*; special extracts for particular categories of resource, etc. (ALA digital Reference with RSC responsibility for accuracy of derived content, review, and proofreading)

ALA Digital Reference ensures that translators and policy statement creators have advance notification of pending changes, along with the planned publication date in the Toolkit.

The content of each revision to RDA Toolkit will be agreed on by the RSC and will not be published before the RSC Secretary and one or more RSC members or designated agents

proofread the changes. Substantial changes to the standard must also have the support of the Copyright Holders Committee.

## **9 Reporting Out Changes to RDA**

The RSC publishes information on the substantive changes made to RDA content. Final versions of the agreed-upon changes are published for each proposal as RSC Decisions documents on the RSC website. Revision History in the RDA Toolkit also provides information about what has changed.

Updates to RDA Reference and the RDA Registry are published on the GitHub open access web service using semantic version numbering. All changes can be detected automatically using the built-in version control system.

## **10 Other Changes to RDA Content**

Typographical errors and other minor corrections are made upon notification or discovery and are published in the next RDA Toolkit release. These are not tracked as part of the Revision History.

- English version of RDA: Any RDA user may report such corrections directly to the RSC Secretary or through the “Submit Feedback” button in the official Toolkit.
- Other language versions of RDA: Any RDA user may report such corrections to the Translations Team Liaison Officer, who will forward them to the appropriate translation team.

Changes to examples may be included in any RDA Toolkit release without RSC approval. These are not tracked as part of the revision history.

- English version of RDA: Changes are managed under the authority of the RDA Examples Editor.
- Other language versions of RDA: Corrections to or questions about examples are managed by the Translations Team Liaison Officer, who will forward them to the appropriate translation team.