Core Competencies for Cataloging and Metadata Professional Librarians

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Introduction

The evolution of cataloging and metadata standards, library technologies, and technical services workflows has challenged the cataloging and metadata profession to reevaluate the core competencies required of metadata creation work. This document defines a baseline of core competencies for LIS professionals in the cataloging and metadata field. The document should also prove useful to managers and supervisors in their hiring, assessment, and position review/promotion decisions, to LIS students in making informed educational/internship choices, and to LIS educators for guidance with curriculum and course development.

This document defines competencies in broad terms to acknowledge the wide variety of work performed by cataloging and metadata professionals in libraries of all types and sizes, regardless of developments in a particular standard or technology. While a baseline of knowledge, skills, and behaviors for cataloging and metadata professional librarians is defined in this document, competence in cataloging and metadata is obtained over the course of an individual's career.

This document is meant to supplement the American Library Association's Core Competences of Librarianship, and as such, many general competencies of librarianship will not be listed here.

In addition to the competencies detailed below, metadata professionals are responsible for advancing diversity issues within the broader information community. Human beings unavoidably assign value judgments when making assertions about a resource and in defining (via metadata standards and vocabularies) the assertions that can be made about a resource. Metadata creators must possess awareness of their own historical, cultural, racial, gendered, and religious worldviews, and work at identifying where those views exclude other human experiences. Understanding inherent bias in metadata standards is considered a core competency for all metadata work. Development of inclusive metadata standards or best practices is a competency that should be developed over the course of a career.

Metadata creation competencies for specialized library communities, such as serials, audiovisual, music, and rare and special collections, are not covered in this document; however, specialized metadata communities may build on this core competencies document.

The document was drafted by the Cataloging Competencies Task Force of the ALCTS CaMMS Competencies and Education for a Career in Cataloging Interest Group. In preparation for this work, the Task Force conducted a literature review and a survey of position advertisements for professional catalogers. The Cataloging Competencies Task Force presented research results and preliminary thoughts concerning competencies to the community at its ALA Midwinter meeting in January 2016. After collecting feedback, the Task Force produced a draft, which was distributed in July 2016 for one month of public comment. This final document incorporates many of those recommendations. The Task Force would like to thank everyone who provided feedback during the creation of this document.

Core Competencies

(Please note that the examples given below are for illustrative purposes only and should not be considered prescriptive, exhaustive, or as an endorsement of a particular product or service. The Appendix contains the meaning of the acronyms and initialisms used throughout the document.)

(1) Knowledge Competencies

Knowledge competencies encompass background and context for cataloging and metadata work. These competencies include understanding conceptual models upon which standards are based, and the structure of basic cataloging tools and encoding standards.

Knowledge competencies fall under three main areas: principles, systems, and trends. Principles are comprised of standards for containers and content of bibliographic data. Systems encompass ways to manage bibliographic data. Trends include emerging tools and standards, as well as understanding how cataloging fits into the larger library world. (N.B.: Knowledge competencies can be viewed as an extension of the third competency area in the ALA Core Competencies of Librarianship.)

Knowledge of foundational cataloging and metadata principles

- Understands historical context for current metadata principles
  - Examples: Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science, Cutter's Objects and Means

- Understands principles of identity management and authority control

- Understands principles behind controlled vocabularies, including syndetic structure and the benefits and drawbacks of pre- and post-coordinated terms, and can identify the vocabularies in current use

- Understands various classification structures and can identify the classification schemes in current use

- Understands data standardization
  - Content standards
    - Examples: RDA guidelines, AACR2, DCRM, DACS, CCO
  - Structure standards
    - Examples: Dublin Core, MODS, MARC, RDA Element Sets, BIBFRAME, EAD, VRA Core
  - Data encoding, format, and exchange standards
    - Examples: MARC, XML, Turtle
  - Value standards
    - Examples: LCSH, LCGFT, LCMPT, LCC, DDC, RDA Value Vocabularies

- Understands conceptual models for library data
  - Examples: FRBR, RDF

Knowledge of systems and technology
- Understands indexing and database structure
    - Examples: understands utility of authorized text strings and unique identifiers for indexing and referential functionality

- Understands library services platforms/library management systems and/or institutional repository and digital library management systems
    - Examples: Sierra, Alma, Symphony, Koha, WorldShare Management Services, CONTENTdm, Islandora, DSpace

- Understands the nature and function of cooperative bibliographic databases
    - Examples: OCLC WorldCat, III SkyRiver

- Understands methods and approaches for metadata creation, editing, analysis, and transformation
    - Examples: Using tools such as OCLC Connexion, oXygen XML Editor, MarcEdit, OpenRefine, XML Notepad, XSLT

Knowledge of trends in cataloging and metadata profession
- Understands how cataloging fits within the broader library and cultural heritage context ("Big Picture" Knowledge)
    - Examples: the use of metadata to support reference, liaison, and circulation work; the impact of quality vs. lack of/poor metadata on user access to resources

- Has awareness of major trends/organizations in the cataloging profession
    - Examples: linked data, PCC, LC-PCC Policy Statements, RDA Steering Committee

(2) Skill & Ability Competencies

The basis for competent cataloging is not only the ability to master individual principles and skills but to synthesize these principles and skills to create cohesive, compliant bibliographic data that function within local and international metadata ecosystems.

Application of conceptual frameworks, standards, and principles within a bibliographic system

- Formulates consistent data
    - Example: Applies a metadata content standard such as RDA guidelines, AACR2, DACS, etc.

- Disambiguates creators, contributors, titles/series
    - Examples: Utilizes instructions from a metadata content standard (RDA guidelines) and/or a best practices document (PCC NACO Participants Manual) to formulate authorized entries; manages identifiers for entities

- Analyzes and classifies resources
    - Examples: Utilizes best practices for subject analysis and assignment (LC Subject Headings Manual); assigns terms from metadata value standard (LCSH, MeSH, TGM, AAT, Sears, etc.)
    - Example: Assigns a classification number from a metadata value standard (DDC, LCC, SuDocs, etc.)
    - Example: Assigns genre/form terms from a metadata value standard (LCGFT, AAT, RBMS Genre Terms, etc.)

- Encodes machine-actionable data
    - Example: Utilizes metadata structure standard (MARC, Dublin Core, MODS, etc.) via serialization standards (XML, Turtle, etc.)

- Asserts relationships between creators, works, etc.
    - Example: Utilizes a metadata value standard (RDA Element Sets) to relate different entities

Application of universal standards within a local context

- Assesses or seeks to understand local user needs for library metadata

- Sets (or advises on) local metadata practice, including selecting appropriate standards for local use

- Documents local decisions and practices

- Designs and modifies cataloging and metadata workflow processes

Integration, mapping, and transformation of metadata within a bibliographic system

- Converts or crosswalks a record/document from one metadata standard to another
    - Example: MARC-to-XML

- Employs standards to normalize metadata

- Documents input and mapping decisions

(3) Behavioral Competencies

Appropriate knowledge and skills form a basis for cataloging competency. A grasp of the key concepts and skills, however, do not add up to successful cataloging practice. Behavioral competencies describe both personal attributes that contribute to success in the profession and ways of thinking that can be developed through coursework and employment experience.

Interpersonal communication
- Collaborates effectively
- Demonstrates strong oral and written communication skills
- Builds and maintains collegial relationships
- Listens with genuine interest and an open mind

Public service orientation
- Recognizes multiple cultures and diverse populations
- Prioritizes user needs
- Values diverse viewpoints and ways of doing things

Initiative & adaptability

Demonstrates
- Creativity
- Flexibility
- Comfort with ambiguity
- Independence
- A commitment to lifelong learning

Professional Curiosity
- Maintains awareness of professional literature and research
- Seeks involvement with professional organizations
- Advocates for the profession

Problem solving

Ability to
- Manage projects
- Manage workflows
- Think critically
- Sustain attention to detail
- Conduct assessments and evaluations
- Contribute to holistic visioning and strategic planning efforts

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Appendix: Acronyms/Initialisms Used

AACR2 = Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, 2nd edition

AAT = Art & Architecture Thesaurus

ALA = American Library Association

BIBFRAME = Bibliographic Framework Initiative

CCO = Cataloging Cultural Objects: A Guide to Describing Cultural Works and Their Images

DACS = Describing Archives: A Content Standard

DCRM = Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials

DDC = Dewey Decimal Classification

EAD = Encoded Archival Description

FRBR = Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records

III = Innovative Interfaces, Inc.

LC = Library of Congress

LCC = Library of Congress Classification

LCGFT = Library of Congress Genre/Form Terms for Library and Archival Materials

LCMPT = Library of Congress Medium of Performance Terms for Music

LCSH = Library of Congress Subject Headings

MARC = MAchine Readable Cataloging

MeSH = Medical Subject Headings

MODS = Metadata Object Description Schema

NACO = Name Authority Cooperative of the PCC

OCLC = Online Computer Library Center

PCC = Program for Cooperative Cataloging

RBMS = the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), a division of ALA

RDA = Resource Description and Access

RDF = Resource Description Framework

SuDocs = Superintendent of Documents

TGM = Thesaurus for Graphics Materials

VRA Core = Visual Resources Association Core Categories

WMS = WorldShare Management Services

XML = Extensible Mark-Up Language

XSLT = Extensible Stylesheet Language Transformations