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THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
LIBRARY SERVICES
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May 1, 2008

Dear Colleagues,

The Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control submitted its final report, *On the Record,* to me on January 9, 2008. I have distributed the document to three groups within the Library of Congress for analysis and comment. I expect to respond formally to the report in early June.

On the Record contains more than one hundred recommendations aimed at the Library of Congress, other specific organizations and entities, and to the broader library community. In the words of the members of the Working Group, they envision "a future for bibliographic control that will be collaborative, decentralized, international in scope, and Web-based…change will happen quickly, and bibliographic control will be dynamic, not static." The group urged the readers of the report to view it as a " 'call to action' that informs and broadens participation in discussion and debate, conveys a sense of urgency, stimulates collaboration, and catalyzes thoughtful and deliberative action." The many recommendations suggest ways in which the necessary systemic change can take place.

When the Library of Congress issues its response, we will be focusing on how it will position itself to work in this new, networked, and collaborative environment, not simply on single recommendations. We recognize that any cataloging code (AACR2 or the proposed Resource Description and Access--RDA) is but a part of this environment.

It may seem counterintuitive that we issue a joint statement with our colleagues from the National Agricultural Library and the National Library of Medicine on RDA before we issue a full response to *On the Record,* but we do so because the international Joint Steering Committee and the Committee of Principals continue their work, and because so many librarians are asking about the national libraries' plans to implement the proposed code.

We are pleased to report that we three libraries have worked together to establish an approach to the consideration of RDA in the attached joint statement.

We ask that you bear in mind that it is the entire bibliographic system that needs to be considered and reworked, and the cataloging code is only one small piece of the work that lies ahead.

Sincerely,

Deanna B. Marcum
Associate Librarian for Library Services

Joint Statement of the Library of Congress, the National Library of Medicine, and the National Agricultural Library on *Resource Description and Access*

May 1, 2008

Leaders of the Library of Congress (LC), the National Library of Medicine (NLM), and the National Agricultural Library (NAL) met on March 10, 2008 to discuss the recommendation from *On the Record: the Report of the Library of Congress Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control* to "suspend work on RDA."

The group agreed that the Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA's work on *Resource Description and Access* (RDA) is an important international initiative that has been underway for several years 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 the library resources more accessible and useful to users. The participants also agreed that their decisions whether or not to implement this new standard must be made jointly. Further, participants agreed that LC, NLM, and NAL have collective leadership responsibilities to assist the U.S. library and information community to remain relevant and vital in an increasingly digital future. Key to this role is providing a broad assessment and commitment to RDA if they believe this standard will further national strategic goals for improved bibliographic control and access.

Colleagues from NLM and NAL are most concerned that a systematic review of RDA has not yet been possible and, given the potential magnitude and broad impact of the changes, such a review is essential. While draft chapters of RDA have been available, a clear, concise, and cohesive understanding of the overall impact of the entire standard is needed. Until the completion of the rules and the availability of the RDA online tool, reviewers will not be able fully to assess their impact on:

- Description, access, and navigation practices for a broad array of users and types of materials

- Current and future electronic carriers and information management systems to support RDA goals

- Estimated costs for implementation and maintenance during a time of flat, even reduced, budgets

The three national libraries agreed on the following approach: First, we jointly commit to further development and completion of RDA. Second, following its completion, a decision to implement the rules will be based upon the positive evaluation of RDA's utility within the library and information environment, and criteria reflecting the technical, operational, and financial implications of the new code. This will include an articulation of the business case for RDA, including benefits to libraries and end users and cost analyses for retraining staff and re-engineering cataloging processes.

Together, we will:

- Jointly develop milestones for evaluating how we will implement RDA

- Conduct tests of RDA that determine if each milestone has been reached; paying particular attention to the benefits and costs of implementation

- Widely distribute analyses of benefits and costs for review by the U.S. library community

- Consult with the vendor and bibliographic utility communities to address their concerns about RDA

Included among the tests that will be developed to assist in formulating implementation decisions:

- Usability testing with cataloging staff, i.e. librarians and technicians, experienced and newer staff from the three national libraries in consultation with representatives from the U.S. library community (including OCLC and library vendors) about its participation in the process

- Testing of records for a broad array of materials created during usability studies to determine compatibility with existing record sets and ensuring records are usable and understandable for our end users

- Testing the feasibility of integrating this new cataloging standard into all relevant technology systems

The three institutions agreed that these steps will be followed and, if there is a decision to implement RDA, that the implementation would not occur before the end of 2009.

The collective resolve is to complete the development of RDA, to conduct appropriate tests that will inform and involve the broader U.S. library community as to the utility of the code, and to ensure a product that is useful, usable, and cost effective. The Library of Congress will continue to work with its international colleagues on the Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA and the Committee of Principals and keep them apprised of the evaluation progress and outcomes as the three national libraries, representing their constituents, undertake the tests outlined above.