To: Simon Edwards, Chair, RDA Committee of Principals

From: Robert Rendall, Chair, ALA/ALCTS/CaMMS Committee on Cataloging: Description and Access

Subject: ALA comments on RDA Governance Review

Introduction

ALA welcomes the review of RDA strategies and governance undertaken by the Committee of Principals. We thank the CoP for the opportunity to respond to the issues raised.

ALA generally endorses the strategic priorities identified by the CoP, particularly those related to international recognition and adoption of RDA. We recognize that these priorities require changes to the governance structures of RDA. The following comments address the relationship between the strategic priorities and the governance structure, as well as the role that ALA might play within a revised governance structure.

Strategies and Governance for RDA

The Committee of Principals proposes an ambitious vision for RDA development that involves outreach to potential partners within the cultural heritage community, as well as within the wider community of the World Wide Web. Such outreach must be based on a realistic assessment of the interests of those communities. Many of them already have their own data models and content standards. While they may be interested in *aligning* (rather than *adopting*) element sets and data models, they may not have any interest in applying RDA instructions. The linked-data community is primarily interested in resources (elements) and properties (relationships), and is unenthusiastic about committing to anything that implies a single data model. Many of these communities make their standards freely available, and are hostile to any business model that ties support for standards development to the marketing of products.

This suggests a number of conclusions. First, "adoption" of RDA may not be a realistic objective in all cases. It might be more fruitful to invest energy in collaborative efforts with interested partners to articulate relationships between RDA and other content standards, vocabularies, models, and element sets. The collaboration between the JSC and the ISBD Review Group follows this path, and collaborations with other resource description communities might find this approach more productive. The nature of the governance structures that arise from this sort of collaboration are likely to be very different from governance structures that arise from adoption of RDA as a standard.

Second, it needs to be recognized that RDA has become a complex set of resources. RDA, like AACR, was developed as a set of instructions, but as RDA was implemented as an online product and as various components of an RDA data model began to emerge, the text of RDA is now surrounded by a network of related standards (translations, element sets, mappings, etc.).

While all of these components form a part of the emerging RDA data model, they also have a sort of independence in that they exist as distinct resources on the web and can be used separately in linked-data applications. Different potential partners have different interests in adopting particular aspects of RDA, and therefore in participating in the maintenance of different components of RDA. In particular, there will be much wider interest in using and maintaining the RDA element sets than there will be in adopting RDA instructions.

This suggests that RDA governance may need to become significantly more complex. There will be an increasing need for overall coordination of all the different components of the RDA standard. To an extent, the Committee of Principals will need to assume that role (and may need to be significantly restructured in order to do so). However, the Committee has delegated responsibility for the content of RDA to the Joint Steering Committee, which will therefore also need to take on a coordination role. The work of the JSC may need to rise to a higher level of generality, with the more detailed development tasks being delegated to working groups or other bodies working under the direction of the JSC. The members of the JSC might need to have a broader expertise and perspective than is currently the case, both individually and collectively, and this might mean that additional expertise and perspectives (of a broad nature) might need to be represented — whereas there might be less need for specific areas of expertise. All of this suggests that RDA governance structures need to become complex in order to deal with the complexity of the RDA standard.

To summarize, ALA welcomes adjustments to the governance structure designed to encourage participation in the development of RDA by new constituencies. However, it must be recognized that the interest of many potential partners is alignment with, rather than adoption of, RDA, and that opportunities for collaborative development are likely to occur with regard to specific components of the RDA standard, rather than with the total package. Both governance structures and business models should reflect these realities.

Constituency system

ALA believes it can testify to the strength and effectiveness of the current constituency system of governance for RDA. ALA represents the largest and most active body of practitioners currently involved in using and developing RDA. The ALA representative to the JSC is supported by two groups: the Committee on Cataloging: Description and Access (CC:DA) and the Subject Analysis Committee (SAC). CC:DA is made up of 9 voting members, 12 liaisons from ALA groups, and 12 liaisons from non-ALA groups. Most of the groups represented are themselves constituencies, with liaisons from still more groups. Many of the groups represented either directly or indirectly are international (if not global) in scope (for example, the Council of East Asian Librarians, the Dublin Core Metadata Initiative, the Music Library Association, OCLC, the Program for Cooperative Cataloging, and the IFLA Cataloguing Section). ALA can thus call on the expertise of a varied constituency. This system provides access to the RDA development process to a wide variety of individuals and organizations, allowing them to participate in the process by reviewing proposed revisions and initiating revision proposals. The system has been effective; ALA has been one of the main contributors of revision proposals to the JSC. ALA's

history of intense involvement in the development of AACR2 and RDA allows its representative to provide a strong historical understanding that can balance the new voices and perspectives being brought to the JSC by newer constituencies.

The constituency system not only assures that capable individuals come together at the Joint Steering Committee to make decisions, but also that these individuals are supported by a structure that brings to bear the collective expertise of the community of practicing catalogers within their constituency. The impossible breadth of expertise and understanding that a JSC representative theoretically needs to have in order to function effectively can only be provided with the support of a broad range of experts within the constituency represented.

The success of AACR and RDA has been that the standard responds to the experience and needs of practicing catalogers on a continuing basis. The constituency structures and policies (such as open discussion of issues) have assured the widest possible consultation. The collective group expertise represented by the current JSC members is the primary source of revision proposals, which in turn are vetted and modified by that same collective expertise. This is something that selection of individual JSC members based on their personal knowledge, skills, and expertise would not be able to achieve without a considerable effort.

ALA recognizes that the hierarchical structure of the current system can create obstacles for development of RDA in specialized areas, and supports the continued efforts to create JSC Working Groups that can bring together specialists to work on specific issues. However, we believe that the members of the Joint Steering Committee must have a broader perspective than just "maps" or "law" or "music." We see the representatives as playing a "gatekeeper" role, evaluating how particular proposals fit in with RDA as a whole. Having proposals move through a representative, who reviews and edits documents for consistency, saves time for all involved. The constituency system provides a structure that can be easily explained and followed consistently and predictably.

The current composition of the JSC results in creative tensions that may be worth preserving in some form in the future:

- Policy specialists and Practitioners
- Generalists and Specialists
- Anglo-American tradition and Other traditions
- Historic perspectives and New perspectives

ALA would strongly prefer to see the constituency governance model continued in a modified form. We are not convinced that allowing the JSC to grow to ten or twelve members or even more is necessarily impractical. Should consolidation of representation be necessary, more limited representation would need to be balanced with new mechanisms that would allow members of constituencies not directly represented on the JSC to feel that the development process is still responsive to their concerns.

ALA would be reluctant to support governance changes that would limit the effectiveness of its own participation in the development of RDA to an appreciable extent. ALA hopes that the range of communities and expertise we represent and the long history we have with the development of AACR2 and RDA justify our continued participation on the Joint Steering Committee.