To: Renate Behrens, RSC Chair
CC: Anne Welsh, RSC Secretary
From: Martin Lüpold, Chair of the Archives Working Group
Subject: Annual Report of the Archives Working Group, 2026

**Background**
The RSC Archives Working Group was formed in 2025, and although originally conceived as a Task and Finish Working Group, it was approved by the RDA Board as an Advisory Working Group in January 2025 RSC/Minutes/500-507 Item 504.1.2). It submitted an interim report in December 2025 which was published as RSC/Chair/2026/1.

**Introduction**
The Archives Working Group's Terms of Reference are set out at RSC/Chair/2025/11. Despite its status as an Advisory Working Group, Task 5 uses language more appropriate to a Task and Finish Working Group when it asks the group to "Provide a final report to the RDA Board and the RSC in December 2026. The RSC Secretary will prompt the Working Group Chair for this." We have taken this to mean that in our annual report we should attempt to answer the questions set out in Task 1, and so this annual report is submitted with the aim of complying with this requirement.

**Questions Researched**
This is the final report to RSC reporting progress on the following **questions to be researched** according to the Terms of Reference (RSC/Chair/2025/11 Section 4.1) :

" 1. Are there institutions that are currently using RDA to document archival materials? Are there institutions that are using retrieval systems that search metadata prepared using RDA for library materials and another standard for archival materials? What are the challenges facing these institutions?
2. Does, or can, RDA provide sufficient instructions and tools for archivists seeking to describe archival collections that are organised according to the principle of provenance and respect des fonds?
3. Does, or can, RDA provide sufficient instructions or tools for archivists to record the custodial history of documents according to archival traditions?
4. Is there a possibility for establishing an alignment between RDA and Records in Context (RIC), the new standard by the International Council on Archives Experts Group on Archival Description (EGAD)?
5. Are there standards bodies with which it would be useful for the RSC to establish (a) protocol(s)? "

**Answers**

**1. Reach out to institutions and the community**

**1.1. Survey**
The Working Group conducted an online survey (Google form) during 2026 to reach out to institutions currently using RDA to document archival materials or interested in RDA.
The survey was disseminated using different mailing-lists as well as individual e-mail addresses.

The survey received 25 responses from libraries, archives, universities, and cultural heritage institutions in Switzerland, Austria, Australia/New Zealand, Israel, and the United States. Responses include both institutional and individual perspectives, and at least one institution appears more than once. Findings should therefore be treated as directional rather than representative.

**1.2. Preliminary results from the survey (15.9.26)**
The main findings are presented here.

RDA is being used across a wide range of materials: Archives, authority data, personal papers, autographs

- Archives: 18 responses (72%)
- Authority data: 15 (60%)
- Personal papers: 12 (48%)
- Autographs: 10 (40%)

RDA is also being applied to photographs, audiovisual materials, manuscripts, music materials, digital objects, and three-dimensional objects.

RDA is usually used alongside other standards.

MARC was reported by 20 respondents (80%), while EAD/XML was reported by 10 (40%). Many institutions use both library and archival systems, particularly library management systems together with ArchivesSpace.

Frequently mentioned companion standards included: DACS, ISAD(G), RNAB, RiC, DCRM standards, HAN rules.

This suggests that RDA is generally functioning as part of a standards ecosystem rather than as a complete archival description standard.

RDA works best for high-level descriptive and authority-related elements.
Among 20 substantive responses, the most frequently identified strengths were:

- Title: 14 responses
- Provenance/name of creators: 14
- Level of description: 11
- Scope and content: 11
- Administrative or biographical history: 9

- Conditions governing access: 9

Respondents particularly value RDA for collection-level records, creator information, titles, scope notes, and integration with library discovery systems.

The main weakness is support for archival hierarchy and aggregation.

A preliminary coding of the open-text responses suggests that approximately 13 respondents raised concerns related to hierarchical, aggregate, or part-whole description. Common issues included:

- Multi-level archival description
- Relationships between collections, series, files, and items
- Aggregations and unique resources
- Inheritance of information through a hierarchy
- Expressing relationships between agents, activities, records, and instantiations

Several respondents argued that the WEMI model is better suited to published or replicated resources than to unique archival aggregations.

Views on the sufficiency of RDA are mixed, but skepticism is substantial.

Of the 18 respondents who answered this question:

- 9 considered RDA insufficient, limited, or not usable on its own
- 6 gave a positive or mostly positive assessment
- 3 were unsure

The positive assessments generally referred to collection-level description, authority data, or use with internal guidelines. The negative assessments focused on archival hierarchy, unique resources, aggregate description, and the need to rely on DACS, RNAB, ISAD(G), or other standards.

Exchange with portals and aggregators is common but technically uneven.

Nineteen respondents reported exchanging data with archive portals or metacatalogues. Examples included Swisscollections, Archives Portal Europe, Trove, Kalliope, ArchiveGrid, WorldCat, Online Archive of California, and regional finding-aid portals.

The most common exchange formats were MARC/MARC XML and EAD/XML. Benefits include greater discoverability and cross-searching, but respondents also reported:

- Manual or semi-manual workflows
- Flattening of hierarchical information when converted to Dublin Core
- Differences between local metadata standards
- Difficulty representing detailed box and folder information in collection-level MARC records

The responses point to five practical priorities:
**1. Create crosswalks and concordances** between RDA, DACS, ISAD(G), RNAB, RiC, MARC, and EAD.

**2. Provide an archives-specific implementation guide** with clear examples, use cases, and explanations of when to use RDA versus a companion archival standard.
**3. Improve support for hierarchical and aggregate description**, including part-whole relationships, nested descriptions, inheritance, and unique resources.
**4. Clarify guidance for difficult elements**, especially access conditions, dates, titles, extent, carrier types, archival history, and processing information.
**5. Support training and system implementation**, particularly for cataloguers who do not have both library-cataloguing and archival-description backgrounds.

The survey does not show broad support for replacing archival standards with RDA. Instead, it suggests a more pragmatic model: RDA is useful for collection-level records, authority data, discovery, and interoperability, but most respondents still depend on archival standards for detailed hierarchical description.

The strongest opportunity appears to be improving coordination between standards. A well-designed concordance, supported by practical examples and software-oriented mappings, could reduce duplication and confusion while preserving the flexibility of archival description.

There might be institutions that are working in an RDA environment but do not see RDA as the main reference. Rather, certain formats (MARC) and archival standards serve as reference. However, clearly there is interest in the question. This is demonstrated by people who are interested but who are not using RDA and therefore were reluctant to answer the survey.

### 1.3. Contacts with the community

The chair presented the work of the Working group at the Kalliope workshop at the State Library in Berlin (October 2025) and was in contact with the RNAB community ("Resource - Cataloguing with Authority Data in Archives and Libraries" serves as an unofficial RDA application profile in the RDA DACH region).

## 2. RDA and the principle of provenance and respect des fonds

The Working Group finds that the necessary RDA elements exist but that there is very little guidance in the Toolkit. To describe "archival collections that are organised according to the principle of provenance and respect des fonds", certain elements are needed:

**2.1** To document the **provenance**, the element "Creator agent of work"[1] is used. Among the "narrower elements" of "creator", "creator of archives" is missing.

[1] http://rdaregistry.info/Elements/w/P10065 or https://access.rdatoolkit.org/Content/Index?externalId=en-US_ala-6277a869-961d-379f-8ae8-7ec159052a26

**2.2** Recording the **"respect des fonds"** means documenting how the fonds has been treated with regard to the original order. The element "System of organization"[2] is used. The description of this element mentions that this element can be used to describe "an archival resource" but no further explanation is given.

This element is at the "work" level. According to the Collections model, the information should be recorded at manifestation level. This needs reflection.

**2.3** Furthermore, the **hierarchy** or the links between the different parts of an archival fonds (record, record set, record part in RiC) must be described. RDA includes the "hierarchic finding aid" element as a separate work but does not explain how such a finding aid could be modeled using RDA.

In practice, the following elements are used to this purpose:
- The "related work (of work)"[3] (or "related work of RDA entity"; MARC 773) element does not mention an archival context.
- Likewise, in the "Series statement"[4] (which indicates that a manifestation is part of a series; MARC 490/830), there is no mention of an archival context.

**3. RDA and the custodial history**
To document this element, the element "custodial history of item"[5] is used. The working group finds that the necessary RDA element exists but that guidance for archival contexts is missing in the Toolkit. Furthermore, this element is at the "item" level. According to the Collections model, it should be at the manifestation level. This needs reflection.

**4. Establishing an alignment between RDA and Records in Context (RIC)**
The goal of an alignment between RDA and RiC is to enable institutions to describe archives in a library environment in accordance with RDA. The working group finds that there may be multiple views on this question and different answers to it, and that communities and regions might prefer different solutions.

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[2] http://rdaregistry.info/Elements/w/P10084 or https://access.rdatoolkit.org/Content/Index?externalId=en-US_ala-fb1c4477-5dcb-3a87-9316-67f486314a97

[3] http://rdaregistry.info/Elements/w/P10198 or https://access.rdatoolkit.org/Content/Index?externalId=en-US_ala-6d59d341-e10b-3a49-a076-807d014be546

[4] http://rdaregistry.info/Elements/m/P30106 or https://access.rdatoolkit.org/Content/Index?externalId=en-US_ala-60344275-5627-3f0e-9a61-438b6d27a5fa&highlight=series&highlight=statement

[5] http://rdaregistry.info/Elements/i/P40026 or https://access.rdatoolkit.org/Content/Index?externalId=en-US_ala-bacfb41d-9379-3b1c-bf1a-c0cb428b63f4

Possible solutions differ in several respects: Is an alignment binding or not (rules vs. recommendations or guidance), and where is the alignment and the guidance stored (in the Toolkit, elsewhere)?

**4.1 The different levels for an alignment**

Before discussing different answers, it is interesting to consider at what level an alignment could be established: At the levels of principles, conceptual models, cataloguing standards, ontologies, application profiles, encodings/formats? In particular, aligning the ontology level (RDA Registry and RiC-O) could be interesting. However, an alignment does not have to be a simple mapping, concordance or crosswalk, but could align the two standards at a more theoretical level.

While the advantage of a mapping at the level of formats, e.g., between MARC and EAD is obvious, it is not so obvious at the level of the respective conceptual models.

**Table: At what altitude are we working?**

*Source: Archives Working Group, Behrens 2026.*[6]

| Level | Libraries | Archives |
|---|---|---|
| Principles | IFLA ICP | RiC-FAD |
| Conceptual model (high-level) | IFLA LRM (formerly FRBR, FRAD, FRSAD) | RiC-CM (formerly ISAD(G), ISAAR(CPF), ISDIAH, ISDF) |
| Basic standard | RDA | RiC (consisting of 4 parts: FAD, CM, O, AG/application guidelines) |
| Ontology | RDA Registry | RiC-O |

[6] Renate Behrens, *The state of RDA in Europe and the world*, February 2026, slide 15, URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0PHn3UnUnXQ (30.10.26)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Customised applications | ISBDM[7], DCRMR[8], MGDs[9], Policy Statements, Application profiles (e.g., RNAB) | None yet |
| Encodings / import/export formats | MARC / Bibframe / RDA Ontology / RDF... | Encoded Archival Standard (EAS - SAA) / EAD 4.0 |

In the following, we briefly explain how the two standards compare at the different levels:

**Principles:** The ICP mainly presents the entities, attributes and relationships needed for a bibliographic description and underlines the importance of access points, all of them needed for searching a catalogue. RiC-FAD, on the contrary, explains the history of recordkeeping and of the principle of provenance, thus the importance of records and of contexts. The two documents are not directly comparable.

**Conceptual models:** The conceptual model behind or above RDA is the Library Reference Model (IFLA LRM). It describes the 11 entities (including WEMI) and their possible relations, and it aligns user tasks with these entities, attributes, and relationships. RiC-CM explains the 17 entities (including record resource). The main contrast is between the WEMI and the record resource stacks; furthermore, RiC-CM includes certain entities which are specific for recordkeeping (e.g., rule, activity, mandate). RiC-CM is somewhat less abstract (for instance, it includes examples) than IFLA LRM. In general, as these documents describe different professional worlds, an alignment on that level does not make sense.

**Basic standards:** While RDA is represented in the Toolkit, RiC as a basic standard consists of several parts (PDF files). Thus, this level is not suitable for being aligned. However, *guidance* on how archives can be described in a library environment should be on that level. (In RiC-AG, there is a section about combinations with other standards, see below section 5).

**Ontologies:** The two ontologies are directly comparable.

**Application profiles:** The situation here is heterogeneous in the library world. The RiC-AG (Application Guidelines) are a general guideline and not a set of mandatory or recommended elements. Thus, this level is not suitable for being aligned. But this level opens the way for alternative solutions. For instance, the RNAB rules declare that the description of a resource contains properties from all WEMI levels.[10]

[7] https://www.iflastandards.info/ISBDM/
[8] https://rbms.info/dcrm/dcrmr/
[9] https://www.loc.gov/aba/rda/mgd/
[10] RNAB (2022), p. 3 (https://d-nb.info/1271740966/34)

**Encoding/formats:** Mappings between library and archive formats exist. It would be interesting to reflect whether some useful mappings are missing. As this report refers to RDA, the format level will not be studied here.

### 4.2 List of existing mappings and alignments

A number of mappings already exist. Common mappings relate standards to formats, or formats to formats. It must be noted that several of the existing mappings connect to the Original Toolkit and should be updated in accordance with the Official Toolkit. The DACS to RDA mapping comes closest to what an alignment between RDA and RiC could look like.

**Table: Examples of mappings with RDA**

| Mapping | Link |
|---|---|
| Alignments with RDA | https://www.rdaregistry.info/Aligns/ |
| RDA (Original Toolkit) to MARC Bibliographic Mapping | https://original.rdatoolkit.org/document.php?id=jscmap2 |
| MARC21 to EAD | https://www.loc.gov/ead/tglib/appendix_a.html |
| MARC to RDA | https://marc2rda.info/wiki/doku.php?id=start |
| MARC to RiC | https://github.com/wildit/marc2ric |
| DACS to RDA (Original Toolkit) mapping | https://saa-ts-dacs.github.io/dacs/09_appendices/03_appendix_c_crosswalks.html |
| DACS, EAD, MARC21, MODS, and ArchivesSpace Mappings | https://guides.library.yale.edu/c.php?g=934566&p=7294052 |

### 4.3 Answers

#### 4.3.1 An alignment is not necessary

Some members of the working group believe that mappings at the format level (e.g., MARC to EAD) make more sense than an alignment of the conceptual models. In this view, RDA and RiC are two separate worlds. It is like screws and nails - both can be used to fix something, but in different contexts. While a mapping between MARC and RiC is nothing extraordinary and makes sense (see table above), it still seems unclear how WEMI and the archival hierarchy can be aligned. The record set complex, going back to ISAD(G), is still one of the most important relationships in archival description. While the WEMI levels together make up the description of a book, the record set complex describes several resources, and every single archival description is on only one level. While it is possible to describe a record using RDA, one must ignore the WEMI levels. Even with the RDA

Collections Model in mind, the situation remains unclear. In this view, the existing mappings of encoding standards are sufficient.

### 4.3.2 A mapping between the ontologies RDA Registry and RiC-O

It seems to make sense to align the RDA Registry and the RiC-O[11]. The advantage of this solution is that no changes in the Toolkit must be made. Instead, the Alignment can simply be integrated or linked. In the semantic web world, not every element needs to be part of every ontology. Therefore, missing elements in one of the ontologies can be replaced by elements from other ontologies.

The working group tried to align RDA Registry and RiC-O for an example archival description. While many of the necessary elements exist in RDA, they come from different WEMI levels.

Table: Example alignment between RDA Registry and RiC-O (draft)

| MARC21 Field | MARC21 Indicators and Subfield | RDA element property | RDA level | RiC-O property |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 110 | 2_ \|a Schweizerische Aluminium AG \|0 (DE-588)275819-2 \|e Aktenbildner \|4 cre | "has creator agent of work" | Work | isCreatorOf |
| 245 | 00 $a Zusammenstellung der Konzernleistung für die Banken der Alusuisse Gruppe: Dokumentation | "has title of work" | Work | hasOrHadTitle |
| 264 | _0 $c 1984 | "has date of production" | Manifestation | hasCreationDate |
| 300 | __ $a 1 Mappe | | | hasExtent |
| 351 | __ $c Dossier=File | tbd | | tbd (Type) |
| 490 | 1_ $a Firmenarchiv Alusuisse. b, Historisches Archiv (Akten ausserhalb Altregistratur). F, Finanzielles. 1, Fremdfinanzierung $v 1 | "has series statement" | Manifestation | isOrWasPartOf |
| 830 | _0 $a Firmenarchiv Alusuisse. b, Historisches Archiv (Akten ausserhalb Altregistratur). F, Finanzielles. 1, Fremdfinanzierung $v 1 $w (HAN)000273433DSV05 | "related work (of work)" | Work | isOrWasPartOf |
| 856 | 41$u http://dx.doi.org/10.7891/e-manuscripta-51994 $z Digitalisat in e-manuscripta | tbd | | tbd (Instantiation) |
| Holding | $$b A125 $$c 125PA $$j SWA PA 600 b F 1-1 $$n CH | "has identifier for item" | Item | hasOrHadIdentifier |
| Physical item | Status/Barcode/Material type/Notes (box number A4 0216) | | | |

### 4.3.3 An application profile

[11] https://www.ica.org/standards/RiC/RiC-O_1-1.html

"An **application profile** specifies the entities, elements, and vocabulary encoding schemes that are expected in a set of metadata that meets the functions and requirements of an application that uses the metadata."[12]

It could make sense to add an application profile to the Toolkit explaining which elements can be used for archival descriptions and how. For an application profile for archival material, all the necessary RDA entities and elements must exist, and the recording method must be defined. There are several examples of how this could be implemented:

- The Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (DCRMR)[13] is an example of an application of RDA, it is available online and is accompanied by the RMBS policy statements in the Toolkit. **Policy statements** describe the best practice of institutions on how to record certain elements but do not offer a complete set of entities and elements for resource types.
- While to date, no application profiles are shown in the Toolkit, some exist in the German/French language RDA DACH standard (itself an application profile of RDA), for instance for music and images.[14]
- Furthermore, the RDA DACH standard offers **guidance for recording some specific resource types**, for instance rare books (Alte Drucke).[15] This guidance concentrates on the most important elements and how to record them, but does not offer a complete set of entities and elements.
- The RNAB standard could serve as the basis for an application profile in the RDA DACH.

To conclude: At the level of customised applications, several ways exist for aligning RDA and RiC: An application profile in the Toolkit, regional applications in the form of policy statements, alignments and guidance outside the Toolkit. The working group considers that there might be different solutions for different regions and communities.

### 4.3.4 Support the RDA Collections Model

The RDA collections model[16] elaborated by the Technical Team is an attempt to describe collections and their finding aids. The manifestation level is the most important level in this model, as it makes it possible to overcome the difficulties of the WEMI stack for archives. The working group finds that the Collections Model could help to align RDA and RiC, but it needs guidance and exemplification to broaden its understanding.

## 5. Standards bodies with which it would be useful for the RSC to establish (a) protocol(s)

RDA is often used together with other archival standards, e.g. of DACS or RNAB.

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[12] https://access.rdatoolkit.org/Guidance/Index?externalId=en-US_ala-591ca278-2807-399b-9530-6b44171e6ccc

[13] https://rbms.info/dcrm/dcrmr/

[14] https://sta.dnb.de/doc/RDA-AP

[15] https://sta.dnb.de/doc/RDA-R

[16] https://www.rdatoolkit.org/sites/default/files/uploads/Collections%20Model%20in%20RDA.pdf and https://www.rdatoolkit.org/sites/default/files/rsc/RSC-TechnicalWG-2021-2%20part%203.pdf

Therefore, the standards bodies behind archival standards could be interesting partners for giving guidance on how their standards could be implemented in the RDA world.

The working group finds that the Expert Group on Archival Description (EGAD) of the International Council on Archives (ICA) and the Society of American Archivists Standards Committee's Technical Sub-Committee on DACS could be relevant bodies. The working group finds that collaboration on the working level is more important than a formal protocol.

**5.1 EGAD, contribution to part 4.8 of the RiC Application Guidelines:**
The RSC could contribute to part 4.8 of the RiC-AG.[17] We propose a text for that section, saying basically that:

- "Provenance" and "the respect du fonds" can be respected and implemented by using certain RDA elements such as creator.
  - The WEMI model is not an obstacle to using RDA for archives. The Collection Model is a solution stating that the manifestation level is central. Furthermore, there are several implementation scenarios for the WEMI model.
- The current text in RiC-AG version 0.1 from October 2025 reads as follows:
- "The library community is organized by the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA). They have set up a committee that standardized the Library Reference Model (LRM), a model that covers all aspects of bibliographic data.
- Also relevant is the Resource Description and Access (RDA) standard, a package of data elements, guidelines, and instructions for creating library and cultural heritage resource metadata that are well-formed according to international models for user-focused linked data applications."

**5.2. Society of American Archivists Standards Committee's Technical Sub-Committee on DACS:**
Here, an update of the RDA-DACS mapping (see above section 4.2) could be a starting point.

[17] https://ica-egad.github.io/RiC-AG/combining_ric_with_other_standards.html#other-kinds-of-cultural-heritage-objects