

To: Renate Behrens, RSC Chair
CC: Anne Welsh, RSC Secretary
From: Chris Holden, Technical Team Liaison Officer
Subject: Soft-deprecated elements related to Manifestation: material

Introduction to soft-deprecated elements

During the 3R project, 118 elements were identified as unnecessary refinements of another element, or as redundant because they were incorporated into another element. These elements were included in Official RDA to support legacy cataloging practices, but were “soft-deprecated.” These elements have the following text and option in the Prerecording section in the RDA Toolkit:

The following option is recommended.

OPTION

*Record details or other information as an unstructured description of [Entity]:
[element]¹*

The full list of soft-deprecated elements is available as an alignment from the [RDA Registry](#). The Toolkit’s Guidance section on [soft-deprecated elements](#) states that “The RDA Steering Committee will review the soft deprecated [sic] elements in due course to determine if they should be retained.” In 2023, the RSC conducted a [survey](#) in order to gauge community usage of the soft-deprecated elements. The results were inconclusive, as many respondents either were not aware of the soft-deprecated elements, or had not made specific decisions regarding the implementation of RDA elements.

The fact that the survey results showed that cataloguers were largely unaware of the soft-deprecated elements demonstrates an issue with Official RDA. It is not ideal to have a large batch of elements existing in a liminal state, neither fully integrated into RDA nor fully deprecated, with little guidance in the Toolkit itself other than an option to use another element instead. Additionally, the nature and timeframe of the 3R project meant that decisions on the soft-deprecated elements were made outside of the standard proposal process, and were lacking in community input. The 2023 survey, and subsequent follow-up among some members of the cataloguing community, indicated that some types of soft-deprecated elements may be more valuable to catalogers than others.

Taking all of this into account, the RSC is interested in making final decisions on these elements, fully deprecating many of them while retaining some and removing their soft-deprecated status.

¹ Some elements contain a version of the Option that reads “Do not use this element; use [Entity]: [element] instead to record a value.”

To that end, the Technical Working Group has prepared a series of proposals for either retaining or fully deprecating the soft-deprecated elements. The elements can be largely divided into six main groups.

1. Soft-deprecated elements relating to Manifestation: **material** (RSC/TechnicalWG/2026/1)
2. “Details” elements (RSC/TechnicalWG/2026/2²)
3. Resource-to-resource digest, critique, and review elements (RSC/TechnicalWG/2026/3)
4. Soft-deprecated elements specific to content and carrier types (RSC/TechnicalWG/2026/4)
5. “Note on” elements (Under preparation)
6. “Parallel” elements (Under preparation; see RSC/TechnicalWG/2025/1³)

In these proposals, the Technical Working Group will advocate for retaining the elements discussed in proposal 1, while fully deprecating the elements discussed in proposals 2, 3, and 4. The reasoning for each of these decisions will be made in their respective proposals.

The Technical Working Group is currently discussing the “note on” elements for a future proposal in which some of these elements may be proposed to be retained while others are proposed for full deprecation.

The theory and history of the parallel elements were tackled in discussion paper [RSC/TechnicalWG/2025/1](#), which was discussed at the January 2026 meeting RSC/Minutes/555-584 Item 571⁴; the RSC will evaluate the feedback from the affected communities and decide on a path forward for the parallel elements at a later date.

Elements related to Manifestation: material

RDA contains the following soft-deprecated elements:

[applied material](#)

[base material](#)

[emulsion on microfilm and microfiche](#)

[mount](#)

² Note from RSC Secretary: The proposals are being published in order, and will be available from [Technical Working Group Proposals and Discussion Papers | ALA RDA Toolkit](#) as soon as they are.

³ Note from RSC Secretary: At time of publication, RSC/TechnicalWG/2025/1/Decisions has not been published, but it will be available from <https://www.rdatoolkit.org/rsc/rsctechnicalwg20251-0> as soon as possible.

⁴ Note from RSC Secretary: RSC/Minutes/555-584 will be published at <https://www.rdatoolkit.org/rsc/RSCminutes> as soon as they are approved.

Each of these four elements contains an instruction under Prerecording that reads: “Do not use this element; use Manifestation: **material** instead to record a value.”

Each of these elements also has an accompanying “details” element that will be discussed in RSC/TechnicalWG/2026/2: Manifestation: **details of applied material**, Manifestation: **details of base material**, Manifestation: **details of emulsion on microfilm and microfiche**, and Manifestation: **details of mount**. Each one of these “details” elements contains an instruction under Prerecording that directs the cataloger to the respective broader element: Manifestation: **applied material**, Manifestation: **base material**, Manifestation: **emulsion on microfilm and microfiche**, and Manifestation: **mount**.

If both sets of elements were fully deprecated, that means that the information recorded in these “details” elements would be moved up twice to broader elements— for example, Manifestation: **details of applied material** would be recorded under Manifestation: **applied material** but Manifestation: **applied material** would be subsequently recorded under Manifestation: **material**.

Fully deprecating the “details” elements and moving them up two levels raised some concerns in the cataloguing community. For this reason, we propose retaining these four elements (applied material, base material, emulsion on microfilm and microfiche, and mount), allowing subtyping of “material” with appropriate conditions and policy statements for each subtype. The four “details” elements related to these four “material” elements will be proposed for full deprecation in RSC/TechnicalWG/2026/2.

Impact:

The impact of these changes would be minimal. All current elements and options discussed here would remain in the Toolkit, along with accompanying policy statements. The only change would be these elements would be officially considered part of RDA, and the Toolkit would no longer explicitly recommend the option to use another element instead.

Recommendation 1:

Remove the following elements from the alignment of soft-deprecated elements in the RDA Registry, and remove the prerecording instructions in the Toolkit recommending the cataloger to use manifestation: **material:**

- [applied material](#)
- [base material](#)
- [emulsion on microfilm and microfiche](#)
- [mount](#)

Recommendation 1.1: [Manifestation: applied material](#)

Remove the element from the alignment of soft-deprecated elements in the RDA Registry. Remove the following statement from [this Prerecording option](#):

Marked-up copy only:

~~The following option is recommended.~~

OPTION

Do not use this element; use Manifestation: **material** instead to record a value.

Recommendation 1.2: [Manifestation: base material](#)

Remove the element from the alignment of soft-deprecated elements in the RDA Registry.

Remove the following statement from [this Prerecording option](#):

Marked-up copy only:

~~The following option is recommended.~~

OPTION

Do not use this element; use Manifestation: **material** instead to record a value.

Recommendation 1.3: [Manifestation: emulsion on microfilm and microfiche](#)

Remove the element from the alignment of soft-deprecated elements in the RDA Registry.

Remove the following statement from [this Prerecording option](#):

Marked-up copy only:

~~The following option is recommended.~~

OPTION

Do not use this element; use Manifestation: **material** instead to record a value.

Recommendation 1.4: [Manifestation: mount](#)

Remove the element from the alignment of soft-deprecated elements in the RDA Registry.

Remove the following statement from [this Prerecording option](#):

Marked-up copy only:

~~The following option is recommended.~~

OPTION

Do not use this element; use Manifestation: **material** instead to record a value.