To: Renate Behrens, Chair, RDA Steering Committee
CC: Anne Welsh, RSC Secretary
From: Chris Holden, Technical Team Liaison Officer
Subject: Formal response to RSC/TechnicalWG/2026/6/Summary

The Technical Team Liaison Officer and the members of the Technical Working Group would like to thank all RSC members for taking the time to think about this issue and submit detailed responses. The issue of parallel elements and their place in the modern cataloging landscape is a complicated one, and we appreciate the effort from all RSC members and communities to examine these elements.

We would like to respond to a few points that were raised in the formal responses:

Predominance and equivalence

The varied responses from different RSC members demonstrate the ambiguity of the parallel elements as they are currently defined. The Examples Editor's response notes that parallel elements are important for situations in which "a single language predominates" on a manifestation, particularly through layout or typography. EURIG's response, on the other hand, indicates that they see "no connotation of primacy in the principle of parallel elements, but rather the opposite," and that the parallel elements indicate equivalence.

The difference in these responses raises an interesting point – the parallel elements have been used by communities in both ways. A parallel title might represent a non-predominant form of the title that is given lesser prominence on the manifestation, or it might represent a form of the title that is given equal prominence on a manifestation. This difference in interpretation poses a problem to RDA's principle of internationalization, making it unclear if a parallel title is being recorded due to the layout and typography of the manifestation, or due to the choice of the cataloging institution's preferred language.

The Technical Working Group believes that the functionality of both forms of parallel elements can be achieved using other tools in RDA, and members of the group have volunteered to demonstrate this using submitted examples. In the Technical Working Group's previous discussion paper on the topic, RSC/TechnicalWG/2025/1, we aimed to demonstrate through practical examples that community practice need not change with the full deprecation of the parallel elements. The application of string encoding schemes can ensure continuity in practice, and even clarify the issue of the ambiguity of parallel elements.

Reticence at using Community Resources

Some responses expressed reticence at the instructions for parallel elements being relegated to Community Resources. The Technical Working Group struggles to see this as an issue; rather,

keeping these instructions within the Toolkit would allow easy linking to these instructions using policy statements. While the instructions would not be part of official RDA, they nonetheless would live under the same roof as official RDA instructions, and catalogers would not be forced to consult another resource to access them.

Many of the responses indicate a desire to use parallel elements in a string as part of a structured description with other manifestation elements; the Examples Editor indicates that these elements are used to "accurately record layout and typography" when elements may be scattered in various places across a manifestation being described. In this case, the Technical Working Group finds the move to Community Resources appropriate—the parallel elements are being deployed in this scenario as part of a string encoding scheme to insert them into a string with other RDA elements. The application of a specific string encoding scheme is a community choice best suited to Community Resources.

Inadequacy of manifestation statement elements

Some responses have mentioned that the manifestation statement elements are inadequate for accurately recording how a manifestation represents itself. The Examples Editor writes that "On maps and still images, for example, such statements may be scattered throughout a manifestation. It is difficult to imagine how and in what order to record these statements, particularly when parallel values are present."

The Technical Working Group acknowledges that certain communities may wish to apply their own string encoding scheme to RDA elements rather than record a manifestation statement for these specific reasons. However, we again stress that this is a choice for a specific community to use a string encoding scheme, and RDA proper should not lock all of its users into a specific string encoding scheme.

Again, we would like to refer to our previous discussion paper, RSC/TechnicalWG/2025/1, in which we provided examples of how this information can be recorded using either manifestation statements or string encoding schemes. The examples showed how SESs can be applied with little to no change in practice, and referenced current documentation such as the LC-PCC Metadata Guidance Documents, and the National Library of New Zealand RDA Guidance, to demonstrate how communities are already documenting these decisions to apply string encoding schemes to display structured data in RDA.

Commitment to ISBD Consolidated

EURIG's response mentioned RDA's commitment to harmonization with the ISBD Consolidated standard, which includes parallel elements. While RDA currently is committed to this harmonization, RDA's compatibility with ISBD does not mean that there is going to be a one-to-one correspondence in RDA for each ISBD element. The alignment of ISBD and RDA says as

much, stating that "Harmonization is achieved if the data is functionally interoperable; that is, data from both sources supports the functional requirements of each standard. Harmonization does not imply that the content is identical, so variation in content should be expected, although not sufficiently different to have a significant effect." ISBD already has other elements, such as Dependent Title of Title Proper, that are not present in RDA at the same granular level, but can still be used in RDA.

The Technical Working Group's previous discussion paper RSC/TechnicalWG/2025/1 also includes a discussion of how the deprecation of parallel elements would fit in with harmonization to ISBD Consolidated. Unlike ISBD, RDA contains no instructions on how to display or present bibliographic data. The paper states that: "The ISBD standards for display and presentation can still be retained even while RDA interprets some manifestation information as elements that are not parallel information. This allows different implementations of RDA; multiple titles proper could be recorded, and then assembled into an ISBD-compliant SES [string encoding scheme] if desired."

Finally, it is the Technical Working Group's understanding that the ISBD Consolidated standard is not going to be further developed by the ISBD Review Group. Instead, work continues on the ISBD for LRM project, meant to synchronize ISBD with the IFLA-LRM model. At some point in the near future, IFLA may approve the full ISBD for LRM, and which point the RSC and IFLA will liaise to determine appropriate next steps. The Technical Working Group brings this up only to remind communities that ISBD Consolidated was developed in a pre-LRM world, and steps are being taken to synchronize the standard with LRM; the RSC cannot assume that other standards such as ISBD will remain static.

Use Across Varied Communities

Many responses, including those of the Examples Editor, EURIG, and the Translations Team Liaison Officer, indicated that parallel elements are used across a wide number of cataloging communities. The Technical Working Group acknowledges that parallel elements have a long and complex history of being used in many different contexts. In some ways (as discussed in the "predominance and equivalence" section), this complicates matters.

The existence of the soft-deprecated elements was first reported to RDA-L in February 2021, at which point an alignment was added to the RDA Registry between these soft-deprecated elements and appropriate substitutes. It was always the intention to examine these elements in more detail, and it was made public that these elements would be examined at a later date with full deprecation being an option. A survey was conducted in 2023 regarding the soft-deprecated elements, and these elements were discussed at various RSC meetings between 2023 and 2025. A discussion paper on this topic, RSC/TechnicalWG/2025/1, was discussed last November. The Technical Working Group has done its best to provide plenty of warning for these proposed changes, and a commitment to keep the parallel instructions within the Toolkit (in Community

Resources) as an acknowledgement that many communities might wish to continue to consult these instructions.

Conclusion

The proposal to fully deprecate these elements is not meant to introduce change for the sake of change, or to make cataloging more difficult, but to fulfill the original promise for RDA as an implementation of the LRM model. LRM does not include the concept of parallel elements. Other standards, such as ISBD, are also going through a similar shift (see the "Commitment to ISBD Consolidated" section).

Many of the objections to our proposal are principled and raise valid points about disruptions to current practice. However, we feel that many of these objections have to do with how bibliographic data is displayed specifically in structured descriptions of elements that are stringed together. RDA is a standard for recording data, and has minimal instructions for the display or presentation of its data; this is relegated to external string encoding schemes. The Technical Working Group has absolutely no objection to communities implementing a string encoding scheme that treats RDA elements as parallel elements and uses ISBD Consolidated punctuation. However, we believe that parallel data recorded in this way should be defined by the string encoding scheme, not by RDA itself.