

Transitioning to the Next Generation of Metadata

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In this report, Karen Smith-Yoshimura, longtime facilitator of the OCLC Research Library Partners Metadata Managers Focus Group, synthesizes six years (2015-2020) of group discussions and what they mean for the future of library metadata. The firm belief that metadata underlies all discovery regardless of format—now and in the future—permeates all these conversations. However, there is growing awareness that library metadata can be better.

We are transitioning from MARC records to sets of shareable, linked components and eliminating anachronistic abbreviations not understood by machines. The developing processes will expand potential audiences for catalogers' work.

This report traces the impact this transition may have on library services, posing such questions as: Why is metadata changing? How is the creation process changing? How is the metadata itself changing? What impact will these changes have on staffing requirements, and how can libraries prepare?

The future of linked data is also tied to the metadata that libraries, archives, and other cultural heritage institutions have created and will provide the context for linked data innovations as “statements” associated with those links. The impact will be global and will describe inside-out and facilitated collections, inspiring new offerings of “metadata as a service,” and influencing future staffing requirements.

OCLC Research is one of the world's leading centers devoted exclusively to the challenges facing libraries in a rapidly changing information technology environment. OCLC Research works with the community to collaboratively identify problems and opportunities, prototype and test solutions, and share findings through publications, presentations, and professional interactions.

How is metadata changing and what can you do to prepare?

This report is organized into the following sections, each representing an emerging trend identified in the Focus Group’s discussions:

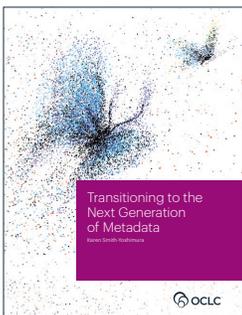
- The transition to linked data and identifiers: expanding the use of persistent identifiers as part of the shift from “authority control” to “identity management.”
- Describing the “inside-out” and “facilitated” collections: challenges in creating and managing metadata for unique resources created or curated by institutions in various formats and shared with consortia.
- The evolution of “metadata as a service”: increased involvement with metadata creation beyond the traditional library catalog.
- Preparing for future staffing requirements: the changing landscape calls for new skill sets needed by both new professionals entering the field and seasoned catalogers.

Group members emphasized that a shift in culture is needed: from pride in production alone to valuing opportunities to learn, explore, and try new approaches to metadata work. Metadata specialists must understand that improving all metadata is more important than any individual’s productivity numbers. This culture shift requires buy-in from administrators to support training programs for staff to learn new workflows for processing multiple formats and to view metadata specialists as more than just “production machines.”

Focus Group members—and others involved in these efforts—are eager to unleash the power of metadata in legacy records for new and different interactions and uses by both machines and end-users in the future. Consistent metadata created according to past rules or standards need to be transformed into new structures to help make this happen.

KEY FINDINGS

- Format-specific metadata management based on curated text strings in bibliographic records understood only by library systems is nearing obsolescence.
- Traditional metadata management is record-centered, expensive to produce, and has historic size limitations.
- Metadata is no longer created by library staff alone; it is now also created by publishers, authors, and other interested parties.
- The next generation of metadata will be more focused on entities rather than record-based descriptions of collections.
- New skill sets will be needed for new professionals and seasoned catalogers, driven by the changing information technology landscape.



Download this free report at oclc.org/nextgen-metadata-report.



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