



# REIMAGINE DESCRIPTIVE WORKFLOWS



## A Community-informed Agenda for Reparative and Inclusive Descriptive Practice


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The **Reimagine Descriptive Workflows project** convened a group of experts, practitioners, and community members to determine ways of improving descriptive practices, tools, infrastructure, and workflows in libraries and archives.

The report *Reimagine Descriptive Workflows: A Community-informed Agenda for Reparative and Inclusive Descriptive Practice* synthesizes the findings from this convening, related research, and ongoing operational work in the field to help chart a path forward in this work.

This report contextualizes the challenges facing the library and information field in inclusive and reparative metadata work and offers a framework of guidance that suggests actions and exercises that can help frame institutions' local priorities and areas for change.

Work on reparative and inclusive descriptive practices is underway in the libraries and archives field, but it tends to be siloed. Reimagine Descriptive Workflows sought to address this challenge by creating a collective, community-centered effort for reforming descriptive systems and approaches to chart a path toward anti-racist and inclusive descriptive practices at scale and driven at a community level.



**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.

# A framework of guidance to reimagine descriptive workflows

The framework for reimagining descriptive workflows supports institutions in evaluating how and where to apply effort in making fundamental shifts in culture and mindset.

**Acknowledge to amend.** To repair relationships and cultivate trust, publicly acknowledge harm caused by participation in systems that uphold racism.

**Commit to the long game.** Shift budget allocation, staffing, workflows, and performance assessment to sustain operational workflows changes.

**Prioritize a human-centered approach.** Reimagine relationships between people, institutions, and collections, resisting the urge to revert to emphasis on efficiencies.

**Support new values.** Recognize, value, and budget for when metadata needs to be remediated, repaired, or handled with more care.

**Slow down to move it forward.** Review existing descriptive processes to avoid taking swift action that may have unintended consequences.

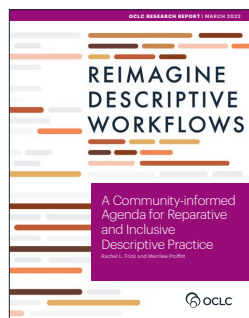
**Promote respectful, reciprocal, community codesign.** Engage with communities whose identity and culture are reflected in collections as equal stakeholders in metadata creation and maintenance.

**Hold generous spaces.** Invest in professional development that prepares staff to adapt workflows to a more consultative, community-centered approach and promote workplace culture change.

**Create systems of support.** Build structures of support and mentoring relationships that provide reciprocal benefit for the people involved in this work.

## KEY FINDINGS

- To radically reimagine descriptive workflows is to address systemic changes to transform the profession at its core.
- Metadata that forces users to search with or encounter harmful terms negatively impacts the community-building work and reputation of institutions.
- The urgency to address past and existing harmful practices must be balanced with efforts to promote trust, continuous learning, and iterative effort.
- Reparative and inclusive metadata work is ongoing. Stewarding collections data will require ongoing refinement to practice.



**Download the free report at [oclc.org/reimagine-workflows-report](https://oclc.org/reimagine-workflows-report).**

Learn more about the challenges facing the library and information field in inclusive and reparative metadata work and find resources to support your organization's efforts.



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