

Review of the RLG Best Practice Guidelines for EAD 2002
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Providing best practice guidelines for an audience that is infinitely various is a immense challenge. RLG has provided an excellent, high-level application of Encoded Archival Description 2002 for repositories looking to implement the standard. The implementation recommended takes full advantage of the power of EAD to provide depth and three-dimensional meaning to archival finding aids. For institutions just starting out on implementation and for those migrating from Version 1.0 to 2002, these guidelines will provide a contextual starting point in understanding larger interpretations of the standard.

RLG has placed an emphasis for its application of EAD on retrieval.¹ The three goals listed at the beginning of the document demonstrate this viewpoint: the facilitation of interoperability, imposition of basic uniformity, and the inclusion of elements and attributes most useful for retrieval in a union index. The choices made throughout the guidelines exhibit the commitment to these goals and the vision for their achievement.

The guidelines have an overall organization that is conducive to comprehensive examination and reference. The table structure for expressing element and attribute application is easy to understand and navigate. Introductory material is systematic, and inclusive examples for some sections provide model applications for more difficult aspects of the dtd. For instance, the section on date normalization provides examples for a variety of different kinds of dates for easy reference while implementing the standard in an institution.

The elements and attributes are discussed in the context of a nomenclature that includes Required, Mandatory, Mandatory if applicable, Recommended, and Optional. It is clear, with this nomenclature, that RLG has given a great deal of consideration to the application of EAD for institutions looking for that level of guidance. For institutions already experienced in the application of EAD, these guidelines help to provide an overall view of other repository applications to better understand individual EAD applications in a union environment.

One notable aspect of the guidelines is the emphasis on the *encodinganalog* attribute. RLG provides crosswalking information on Dublin Core, MARC 21, and ISAD(G) for any elements for which they would be appropriate. This makes it easy for institutions to include *encodinganalog*s even if they do not intend to take full advantage of them at that time. It is commendable that RLG includes

¹ RLG EAD Advisory Group. *RLG Best Practice Guidelines for Encoded Archival Description* <http://www.rlg.org/rlgead/bpg.pdf> [Accessed: August, 2002.].

these analogs within the document, rather than relying solely on the <i>EAD Tag Library</i> to aid in their application.

RLG should be commended as well for the inclusion of the item level description section. Although few institutions are able to provide this level of detail in their finding aids, it is nice to have some guidelines that deal with the possibility. Institutions may find that they have to apply this level of description only rarely, and documented methods provide an arena for coherent application. Institutions can easily rely on the RLG best practice guidelines during the few and far between times that it is necessary to provide this level of detail.

There are, however, some areas of concern about these guidelines. The guidelines themselves represent an intense application of EAD. Is this application attainable by institutions? For instance, they indicate that all dates should be normalized according to the ISO 8601 standard for enhanced retrievability. While date normalization is a very worthy objective for filtering mechanisms in retrieval, the question of practicability is still open. Date normalization is tedious, labor intensive, and not easily automated. What would be the cost/benefit ratio in requiring date normalization across an entire finding aid? Perhaps selective application of this normalization would have been a more appropriate expression of the desired outcome.

In connection with this problem is the larger consequences of not adhering to the RLG guidelines in every aspect. What impact would, for instance, applying date normalization to the collection level information only have? Would this affect future interoperability? The impact of the high-level guidelines is to make implementation more difficult for smaller institutions. Those who would benefit most directly from inclusion in union indexes may not have the staff, expertise or technological familiarity to provide this kind of application. Are there direct ramifications of deviating from the RLG guidelines? And to what extent is deviation measured? Providing information about adherence guidelines would be useful in understanding where RLG envisions EAD to fit into larger visions of union indexing and interoperable projects so that an individual institution can make an educated decision about the implications of non-adherence.

Finally, the use of a variety of standards throughout the guidelines is commendable, however, hyperlinks or citations to the standards or application guidelines for those standards would be useful complimentary information. For instance, several new attributes created in 2002 include application notes indicating an ISO standard. A reference section would provide users with a road map for expressive standards recommended in the guidelines.

Overall, the RLG best practice guidelines is an excellent document for EAD implementers. Institutions implementing EAD would be remiss in not referring to the guidelines, as both a model for best practice guidelines and coherence with a national standard. Efforts such as these provide an interpretive community from which EAD can be discussed and implementations developed.