

MIT Open Access Articles

Corporate Bodies: Access Points and Authority Control

The MIT Faculty has made this article openly available. **Please share** how this access benefits you. Your story matters.

Citation: Abrahamse, Ben. 2021. "Corporate Bodies: Access Points and Authority Control." *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, 59 (2-3).

As Published: 10.1080/01639374.2020.1854914

Publisher: Informa UK Limited

Persistent URL: <https://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/142421>


Version: Author's final manuscript: final author's manuscript post peer review, without publisher's formatting or copy editing

Terms of Use: Article is made available in accordance with the publisher's policy and may be subject to US copyright law. Please refer to the publisher's site for terms of use.





Corporate Bodies: Access Points and Authority Control

Ben Abrahamse 

MIT Libraries, Cambridge, MA, USA

ABSTRACT

The concept of authorship is central to how libraries organize their collections. But libraries do not only collect resources created by individuals, they also collect documents issued by organizations. Library catalogers use the concept of a “corporate body” to treat organizations as authors for the purpose of making their documents discoverable to users. This essay looks at the key features of establishing authorized access points (AAPs) and applying authority control for corporate bodies. It examines how practices with regard to corporate bodies have changed over time and considers the changes catalogers might expect to see in the future.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received September 2020
Revised November 2020
Accepted November 2020

KEYWORDS

Authority control; *Resource Description and Access* (RDA); corporate bodies; cataloging; cataloging standards

Introduction

The concept of authorship is central to how libraries organize their collections. But libraries do not only collect documents that were created by individuals. Be they newsletters or law codes, annual reports or actuarial tables, materials created by organizations appear in the collections of virtually every library. It is the job of catalogers to make these documents as discoverable and accessible by library users as documents with individual authors. The idea of the “corporate body” serves as a way for catalogers to treat institutions, governments, and other organizations as authors for the purpose of making their work discoverable.¹ In this essay I will discuss the concept of a “corporate body” as it relates to library catalogs: how corporate bodies are represented as access points in catalogs, and how information about corporate bodies is organized to maintain the accuracy and usefulness of those access points.

What is a corporate body?

A corporate body can be virtually any kind of organization that creates, or is significantly related to the creation of a work.² The category is quite broad and includes some surprising things such as ships, conferences, expeditions, and performing groups. Size is not a consideration; a corporate body can be

CONTACT Ben Abrahamse  babraham@mit.edu  MIT Libraries, 77 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02137, USA.

© 2020 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC

as large as a department of the Federal Government or as small as a performing duo. Controversially perhaps, a corporate body need not even really exist in order to be entered into the catalog. It must only have a name, and that name should appear somewhere on a work in the catalog.³

In order to maintain this useful fiction that an organization can in some sense behave like an individual with respect to creating resources, catalogers have relied on the use of access points and authority control to establish the name of a corporate body as a fixed, unique string in a catalog's alphabetical author index.⁴ This fixed string—called the authorized access point (AAP)—can be added to the authority records for works associated with that organization, just as one would record an individual author on the record for their novel. The AAP for a corporate body can be added as the main or only author of a work, or as a supplemental access point to a work for which a primary author has already been recorded; perhaps most commonly it is used as an additional access point for a work that has no identified main author, but is entered into the catalog under its title.⁵

Authorized access points now serve to make works discoverable to users through keyword search but they were designed for, and are perhaps best suited to, alphabetical indexes. The logic of their use is quite straightforward: a user knows the name of an organization, looks it up in the index, and finds all of the documents in the catalog that are associated with the organization in question. Of course, things are not always that simple. For example, many organizations have multiple forms of their name: their official name (which appears perhaps on their charter), a more common form of the name (which might appear as an author's affiliation on a title page), and an acronym or other shortened form of their name. Which should users choose to find the right documents? Or worse: should users be required to look in all three places, and then piece their results together?

For this reason, AAPs for corporate bodies are typically reinforced by a separate set of structured metadata called an authority file. The authority file is a collection of records running parallel to the bibliographic file. Each record in the file corrals together the various names of a particular organization, singles out the name that is most readily recognized by your average user, and uses this name as the basis for the AAP. Of equal importance, the names that are not identified by the cataloger as preferred can be used to create variant access points, which are typically rendered in an alphabetical index as “see references,” directing the user looking for resources related to that corporate body to “see” the results in a different part of the index.

Over the years, the practice of creating and maintaining these authority records has become increasingly sophisticated, and libraries have used them as places to record richer and more varied information about the organizations whose documents they collect, such as their geographical location,

relevant chronological dates, and even the domain or “subject” in which they operate. For the most part this has been a salubrious development for the catalog, as such additional information makes it easier for users and catalogers alike to identify particular organizations by attributes such as their geographic location or founding dates. However, it should be remembered that the essential purpose of the authority record is not to provide a historical or biographical account of an organization, but to ensure that works related to or about it are made discoverable to users of the catalog.

Key features of corporate body access points and authority records

As suggested above, the purpose of access points in a catalog is to enable a user to discover the agents (individuals or corporate bodies) associated with a given resource in a library’s collections, as well as to discover all resources associated with a particular agent. This is accomplished through the use of Authorized Access Points (AAPs) and Variant Access Points (VAPs). Each AAP is unique in the catalog, and identifies a single corporate body; when two organizations with the same name are entered into the authorities file, the AAP for one (or both) is qualified, or made unique, through the addition of representative information. VAPs, by contrast, are essentially signposts that point from a variant name, to the AAP itself. Uniqueness is thus not a requirement of VAPs—you can have several identical VAPs, each pointing to a unique AAP, without causing confusion.

In addition to being unique, an AAP must be identifiable to the user. That is to say, the access point string must represent the corporate body in a way that is more or less immediately recognizable to the user; if the name alone is not sufficient for users to identify the agent, the access point must be modified or restructured in such a way as to make identification possible. The access point must be unique in the catalog or authority file. Since the primary use case of access points and authority records is to enable users to browse alphabetical indexes, each access point must be distinguishable in some way from the others. Otherwise, users would be unable to separate the resources associated with one, from the resources associated with the other.⁶

Satisfying these two requirements with respect to corporate bodies poses particular challenges. Their corporate nature means they behave differently from individuals, and so access points and authority records for corporate bodies differ from those for individuals in a few key respects.

Choice of name

Organizations typically have more, and more diverse appellations than do individuals. Often they will have an official form of the name that is distinct from a shorter and more recognizable form. The use of acronyms, or

of acronym-like names made out of the syllables of the body's name is quite common. Because corporate body names include common parts of speech such as conjunctions and prepositions, it is not uncommon for the same type of name to appear in slightly different permutations on different resources—"and" versus "&," for example, or "of" instead of "for," or for the same words to appear in a different order (e.g. "Department of Mathematics" versus "Mathematics Department"). In order to manage this complexity, current cataloging instructions and policy statements provide fairly specific guidance for identifying the preferred name, "the name by which the corporate body is commonly identified."⁷ That is to say, not necessarily the fullest, shortest, or official name of the body, but the name that is most likely to appear on the documents in the collection (and, by extension, the most likely to be in the user's head when they approach the catalog).

The first step in identifying the preferred name for a corporate body is to gather together relevant bibliographic sources from which the name will be taken. All access points, and the authority metadata that underlies them, are derived from citable public resources; policy statements issued by the Library of Congress (LC) and the PCC Name Authority COoperative (NACO) require the recording of these sources in a standardized manner in authority records.⁸ When multiple sources are available (which is typically the case), current cataloging instructions direct catalogers to prefer sources of name in the following order: first, names appearing on preferred sources of information (title pages, usually) that have been or are being entered into the catalog; then, names appearing on other resources related to the corporate body, but not being entered into the catalog (such as the body's website, internal documents, etc.); finally, names from other sources that refer to the body, such as reference works, or adjacent websites and resources.⁹ Only one source of information is required to establish a corporate body, though it is not uncommon to see two or more sources supporting a name. For example, an authority record may cite an affiliation statement from the title page of a work in the catalog as the source of the preferred name, and the organization's website or internal documents as the source of additional variant names and other relevant information about the corporate body.¹⁰

In addition to letting the sources guide the decision which form of name to choose as preferred (and hence the basis of the AAP for that corporate body), *Resource Description and Access* (RDA) includes instructions to adjudicate specific situations in which multiple forms of an organizations are known to the cataloger, such as differences in spelling (prefer names appearing on earlier sources to later sources), or the name in different languages (prefer the official language of the body or, if that is unknown or if it is an international body, prefer the form in the language of the cataloging agency).¹¹

RDA provides for a number of specific cases where organizations are better known to the world by a “conventional name” than by the name that typically appears on resources associated with it.¹² The most important of these “conventionally named” corporate bodies is a government, or any organization that is part of a government. For these, the conventional form of entry is not the official name of the government or the name as it appears on documents in the catalog, but the AAP for the geographic area over which that government has jurisdiction, or if it is part of a government, the name of the corporate body entered subordinately to (see below) that geographic area.¹³

Examples of AAPs for governments and parts of governments

Massachusetts

(*not* Commonwealth of Massachusetts)

United States. Department of Health and Human Services

(*not* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)

Long Beach (Calif.). City Planning Commission

(*not* Long Beach City Planning Commission)

In most cases where catalogers must choose between different forms of a corporate body name,¹⁴ the ones that do not get picked as the preferred name can be used on the basis of VAPs, which enable users to discover corporate bodies through cross-references in the alphabetical index.¹⁵

Subordinate entry

Perhaps the greatest source of complexity in the process of managing access points for corporate bodies stems from the fact that, unlike individuals, they often exhibit hierarchical relationships to other corporate bodies. Governments have ministries and departments; academic institutions have departments, laboratories, and research centers; churches have dioceses and parishes. Vice-versa, laboratories can be parts of research institutes; committees can be appointed by departments; and exhibitions can be held by associations. Organizations often exhibit multiple levels of hierarchy, with sub-sub-organizations nested inside sub-organizations like so many Russian dolls. Rarely do top-level organizations issue works on their own. Rather, most resources that catalogers run across were issued by the smaller organizations that constitute the larger whole.

To manage this complexity, corporate body access points are often established subordinately. This simply means that the access point for the

corporate body consists of two parts: the AAP of the top-level (or subordinate) organization first, followed by the preferred name of the subordinate or related organization that the access point refers to.¹⁶ The Department of Examples at Exemplary University would be represented by the AAP: **Exemplary University. Department of Examples**. Use of the subordinate form accomplishes two important things. First, it ensures that the corporate body is represented by its AAP with the organizational context that users need to identify it. There are hundreds of academic departments in the world, but the one we are interested in is that which belongs to this particular university. Secondly, and related to the first, the use of subordinate entry serves to organize the alphabetical file in a more useful way. A user browsing the alphabetical index will be gratified to see all the various departments of Exemplary University collocated together, subarranged alphabetically.

Before turning to the question of when, and how, the access point for a corporate body that is part of another corporate body is established, it is important to take a pause and reflect on the purpose of that access point and the authority data that supports it. It is not necessarily to create a model in metadata that precisely reflects the organizational structure of the entire or “top-level” corporate body in full. Rather the focus remains on the purpose of bibliographic metadata, which is to enable discovery, selection, and access or retrieval of resources created by or about the corporate body. The complete organizational hierarchy of a particular corporate body will probably not appear in any catalog’s index, only those constituent bodies that have produced resources that the library has collected.

While the rules for determining subordinate entry are complex, it is a topic of such importance for corporate bodies that it is worth a few moments to examine them further. Administrative subordination, the fact that one organization belongs to, or is closely related to, a larger one, does not on its own mean the access point will be established as a subordinate body. Rather, the basic assumption is that a corporate body with a distinctive and unique name should be established on its own (or “directly”) and subordination is only required in those specific circumstances where direct order would make identification of the body difficult or impossible.¹⁷ Another way of looking at this is that any corporate body is presumed to be eligible to stand on its own in the index. The cataloger’s job is to identify those instances where direct entry is insufficient to facilitate identification of the body in an index.

The rules for identifying those circumstances where a corporate body should be established subordinately can be divided into formal rules (involving the form and features of the corporate body’s name itself) and categorical rules (that is, if a corporate body belongs to one of several

predetermined categories).¹⁸ RDA outlines four wholly formal cases for subordinate entry and two cases that involve a mix of formal and categorical criteria. Finally, it provides a number of categories of corporate body that should always be established subordinately.

The first two cases, which I shall call Types 1 and 2, are those where the name of the body includes words that imply either inclusion or subordination to a higher body. The logical differences between these two cases are subtle but it is not crucial for those differences to be distinguished. The presence of any words such as “Department,” “Section,” “Bureau,” or “Committee” will lead to the assignment of subordinate entry.¹⁹ Type 3 is a case where a corporate body is known, or appears from the sources to belong to a larger organization, whose name does not contain words that imply subordination, only a general indication of function (e.g., “Research Institute”), or indicate a numbered or lettered, geographic, or chronological division of the higher body. Type 4, the final entirely formal case, is related to Type 3, but applies to those corporate bodies whose names do not themselves imply a corporate body at all, but simply a field of study or endeavor. In these cases, were these corporate bodies established directly, without reference to their corresponding superior bodies, they would not be easily identified by users.

Examples of subordinate headings identified by formal criteria (Types 1–4)

Aerospace Corporation. Civil Programs **Division** (Type 1)

British Engineering Standards Association. South African **Branch** (Type 1)

Banco de Santander. **Dirección** General de Planificación y Estudios (Type 2)

American Library Association. Public Relations **Committee** (Type 2)

Amateur Softball Association of America. **North Central Region** (Type 3)

American National Standards Institute. **Subcommittee X3L2** (Type 3)

Cornell University. **Institutional Planning and Analysis** (Type 4)

The next two cases for assigning subordinate entry combine formal and categorical criteria. Type 5 applies to corporate bodies that fall into the category of academic/research-based institutions, and whose names include only an organizational label and a field of study or research. Type 6 excludes government bodies (for which, see above); it consists of corporate bodies with names that include the entire preferred name of the top-level body of which they are a part. This case does not, importantly, include all corporate bodies whose name includes some form of the top-level body’s name, such as an acronym or shortened form.

Examples of subordinate headings identified by formal and categorical criteria (Types 5–6)

Massachusetts Institute of Technology. **Laboratory for Electromagnetic and Electronic Systems** (Type 5)

d'Arbeloff Laboratory for Information Systems and Technology (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) (not Type 5, i.e., Massachusetts Institute of Technology. d'Arbeloff Laboratory for Information Systems and Technology, because the name includes a word (“d'Arbeloff”) that is not a field of study or research)

University of California, Berkeley. **Center for African Studies** (Type 5)

American Philosophical Society. **Museum** (Type 6)

Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology. **Annual Meeting** (Type 6)

Beyond the formal criteria stated here, subordinate entry is also used for various categories of corporate body, such as legislative bodies, courts, or religious bodies. When a corporate body belongs to one of these types, it is recorded subordinately according to the instructions provided.

Alphabetical list of types of corporate body entered subordinately

Ad hoc military court (11.2.2.14.11)

Administrative organ of the Catholic Church (11.2.2.14.17)

Armed forces of a government (11.2.2.14.12)

Constitutional convention (11.2.2.14.10)

Council of a religious body (11.2.2.14.15)

Court of a jurisdiction (11.2.2.14.11)

Delegation to an international or intergovernmental body (11.2.2.14.14)

Diplomatic missions (embassies, consulates, etc.) (11.2.2.14.13)

Government official (11.2.2.14.8)

Legislative body (11.2.2.14.9)

Papal diplomatic mission (11.2.2.14.18)

Religious official (11.2.2.14.8)

Religious province (11.2.2.14.16)

In this essay we have looked at the two types of criteria—formal and categorical—in the traditional order, with the formal in the lead and the list of specific categories requiring separate treatment bringing up the rear. But in practice, efficiency-minded catalogers often start by determining

whether the corporate body they are looking at falls under one of those specific categories of corporate body, for if it does they can stop there and establish the access point according to the specific instructions provided. If it does not fall into any of these categories, they can then proceed to analyzing the preferred name of the corporate body and determining whether it satisfies any of the formal criteria for subordinate entry. If none of these cases applies to the corporate body it is entered directly, without being subordinated to a higher body.

When corporate body names change

Another key feature of corporate bodies is that their names, as well as their shape and function, change over time. While this is of course true of individuals as well, the frequency and complexity of change that corporate bodies can exhibit has led catalogers to treat changes to corporate bodies differently than to individuals. Outside of a few special cases,²⁰ when an individual's name changes, the most current name is preferred, and earlier names are tracked as variants. This approach is avoided with corporate bodies. Instead, when the name of a corporate body changes, catalogers create a new record for the newly named body and record a specific relationship between the "predecessor" and "successor" bodies.²¹

We have already discussed the concept of a VAP for a corporate body, and how it can be rendered in an alphabetical index as a cross-reference (specifically, a "see reference," which instructs users to look under a different form of the name for the list of related resources). By contrast corporate bodies are related to other corporate bodies through "see also" references. This is also the case when a corporate body changes its name: it is split into two bodies and the two are related via this type of cross-reference. When deployed in an index, a "see also" informs the user that they will find resources listed under this corporate body but should "see also" other, related forms of the corporate body to get more relevant results.

Example of a corporate body undergoing change, reflected in headings and cross-references

Lawrence Scientific School

See also (successor): Harvard University. Graduate School of Applied Science

Harvard University. Graduate School of Applied Science

See also (predecessor): Lawrence Scientific School

See also (successor): Harvard University. Graduate Schools of Applied Science

Harvard University. Graduate Schools of Applied Science

See also (predecessor): Harvard University. Graduate School of Applied Science.

This example demonstrates a few important features of how corporate bodies are connected to each other, in order to account for change over time. Relationships are recorded horizontally rather than hierarchically.²² There is no attempt to create a single authority that would account for a single academic institution under various guises; rather, each time the name changes, the old record is “closed off,” and a new one created, and the two are linked together with reciprocal cross references. This way of modeling change enables corporate body authority records to accommodate other and perhaps more complicated ways that a corporate body can change: splitting into two, for example, or merging with a previously unrelated corporate body to form a new one.

A second feature of this example is that cross-references between corporate body authority records should always be reciprocal. Since it is impossible to predict which link in the chain of related corporate body names a user will approach their search with, cross references need to enable users to start at any point and navigate via cross references to any other point.²³

Finally, while this discussion has presented the way relationships among corporate bodies through the lens of its implementation in an alphabetical index, these relationships, including cases where a corporate body changes its name, can support other useful implementations. So catalogers tend to record “see also” references along with more specific information about the type of relationship that exists between the two related bodies, such as “predecessor” and “successor.” This helps to manage changes in name, but can also be used to record other relationships that can obtain among corporate bodies.²⁴ RDA provides a more complete list of relationships as an appendix, and they are increasingly being looked to as the key to future transformations of authority data.²⁵

To sum up, these are the key features of corporate body authority records: the choice of which name to identify as the basis of the AAP is determined by how that name appears in the resources in a library’s collections; corporate bodies can be established “subordinately” to higher or related corporate bodies in certain circumstances; and finally, corporate bodies can change, and when they do, those changes are reified in the authority file through the creation of new, related corporate bodies. Without doubt there are other specific instructions and practices that relate to corporate bodies—conferences and conference-like entities have a number of specific instructions, and there is more to be said about government bodies than can reasonably be fit into this essay. But these three features distinguish the treatment of corporate bodies from that of individual authors.

History and future of corporate body access points and authority metadata

The concept of corporate authorship is not new to libraries. A few of the “91 Rules” of Antonio Panizzi—generally considered to be the earliest

modern cataloging code in the Anglo-American tradition—are devoted to what we might now call corporate bodies, most importantly, Rule 9:²⁶

IX. Any act, resolution, or other document purporting to be agreed upon, authorized, or issued by assemblies, boards, or corporate bodies (with the exception of academies, universities, learned societies, and religious orders, respecting which special rules are to be followed) to be entered in distinct alphabetical series, **under the name of the country or place from which they derive their denomination**, or for want of such denomination, under the name of the place whence their acts are issued.²⁷

This rule illuminates much of the logic that catalogers would apply to the problem of corporate authorship through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The approach is mainly categorizing and geographic in focus. Corporate bodies (the term is clearly not used here as an umbrella term for “organizations that issue documents,” but rather as a specific type of organization that we might now call a “corporate board”) are divided up into different categories according to their natures—assemblies here, learned societies over there—and each treated according to specific rules. These instructions guide catalogers toward organizing corporate bodies by geographic location first, then alphabetically.²⁸

This approach was suited to the technology of the day, where catalogs were almost exclusively static, published monographs, and the use of cross referencing was minimal. The setting out of a print catalog enabled, perhaps even required, a system of organizing entries in hierarchical fashion rather than a more “horizontal” alphabetical approach more suited to unit-level approaches such as card catalogs and digital records. It also could be said to reflect a world in which geographical location played a more salient role in the identification of organizations than it does today.

But the problem with setting up categories for organizations is that they are unstable. It is difficult enough “to carve nature at its joints” when the things being carved are natural; it becomes virtually impossible to maintain a complete categorization of something so culturally and historically specific as named organizations of human beings. So we see the ALA’s 1908 *Catalog Rules, Author and Title Entries* sets out, in 17 pages, to define three major categories of corporate body (Governments, Societies, and Institutions or Establishments), with specific instructions covering fifty different types of corporate body.²⁹ With the 1949 edition of the ALA rules, the instructions for corporate bodies have grown to 89 pages, with four major categories (Governments, Societies and institutions, Religious societies and institutions, and Miscellaneous) under which are arranged 85 different types of corporate body ranging from legislative bodies (rule 74) to agricultural experiment stations (rule 106) to cemeteries (rule 148).³⁰

As the twentieth century wore on, changes in library technology continued to impact how cataloging was being performed. The rise of the catalog

card, and subsequently the online catalog, meant no longer were catalogs closed, static (and inevitably out of date) affairs, but rather dynamic collections of bibliographic records, to which new entries could be added at will. This meant catalogers could no longer completely rely on hierarchical methods to organize indexes; but it also enabled much more robust and flexible use of cross-referencing. The process became less about finding the one ideal place under which to file a corporate body, and more about collecting the most likely places a user would look and identifying one of those as primary.

The 1967 *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules* (AACR) can be viewed as a response to the categorizing approach of earlier codes. The drafters of AACR sought to limit the number of categorical decisions required to establish “headings” (as they were called) for corporate bodies. They did this in two ways. First, by providing explicit instructions for the choice of name based on sources available to the cataloger, the rules sought to focus the task of establishing corporate bodies on the inspection of available bibliographic evidence, rather than categorization.³¹ Second, they provided instructions on determining how to treat subordinate and related bodies based primarily on the forms of name themselves, rather than the type of body those names are applied to. These rules, which set out six criteria for subordination, are virtually the same ones we see in RDA today.³² This helped to limit, though not completely dispose of specific instructions for various categories of corporate body.

The primary role of geography as an organizing principle for corporate bodies diminished gradually. The ALA rules of 1908 exempt “societies” from geographic entry, as well as some “institutions” that begin with proper nouns (examples provided, in the capitalization conventions of the day, include “Harvard university” and “Smithsonian institution”).³³ This is followed by the 1948 edition, which, though collapsing “societies” and “institutions” into a single category, sets forth one general rule for societies, that they should be filed under the first significant word of the name, with cross-reference provided “from the place where its headquarters are established,” and another for institutions, which maintains geographic entry except for names beginning with proper nouns or adjectives, titles of honor, or numerals.³⁴ With AACR the distinction between “institutions” and “societies” is not preserved, and geographic entry is limited to government bodies alone.

The second edition of AACR (1978) provided additional depth and nuance to these rules, but did not introduce major shifts in their approach; nor, in many ways, were the procedures substantially changed in the transition from AACR2 to RDA in 2013. What RDA introduced was not so much new ways of establishing corporate bodies, as new language to talk about that process. Here again technological developments play an outsize

role: the 20th century card catalog has given way to the 21st century online catalog, which like the transition from print to card presents new challenges and opportunities. So much of the focus of RDA is on relabeling existing concepts: “headings” become “access points,” cross-references become “relationships,” and the concept of corporate body is placed within a logical framework of “entities,” all of which point toward modeling the data of the catalog in a way that will make it familiar and, one hopes, more interoperable with the internet and Semantic Web.³⁵ At the time of writing the official release of the revised edition of RDA is set for December 2020. Based on the currently available beta, it does appear as if the same development will hold true, at least with respect to corporate bodies: shifts in the language used to describe the data, but the underlying process by which the name of a corporate body is converted into a usable AAP remaining essentially untouched.

The real change that the future holds in store for corporate body access points and authorities lies not in the rules as of yet, but in potentially seismic shifts in the way catalogers think about “authority work” as a coherent system of rules and practices designed to guide users, chiefly via alphabetical indexes, to documents associated with those corporate bodies. The implementation of RDA instructions for authorities enabled catalogers to record much richer representative information about corporate bodies,³⁶ which has encouraged a shift away from viewing authority data for corporate bodies (or, for that matter, anything requiring authority control) as chiefly related names or strings to be recorded and arranged in order that they will index properly and provide necessary cross-references, and toward viewing them as logical entities, or clusters of relevant, identifying data about organizations in the real world. If taken to its conclusion, this has the potential to displace the current, bedrock principle of identifying corporate bodies through unique names, in favor of systems that deploy stable, but essentially arbitrary identifiers (such as uniform resource identifiers, or URIs) in the background, to maintain the logical separation of corporate bodies.

We are still living in a world in which alphabetical indexing remains the dominant system for organizing authority data, even as catalogs and other discovery tools have begun to move away from indexes as the primary means of user discovery. But it is not difficult to imagine future scenarios in which the index has been displaced not only for users, but for curators of cataloging data as well. In one potential future, the demand to create and maintain a representative, static, and unique string as the “authorized access point” for a corporate body no longer applies whatsoever; the cataloger’s job will be to collect and evaluate names, along with other relevant bits of information, but the work of assembling unique access points will

be performed by discovery and retrieval systems that are smart enough to create unique headings on-the-fly, based on various information sources that are relevant to the user. Another possibility, perhaps less radically different from our own, will be that catalogers will continue to create and curate access points as we do today, but not with the goal of maintaining alphabetical indexes, but as useful, human-readable identifiers of document sets that can be retrieved and manipulated by users (and algorithms) through a variety of means.³⁷

Conclusion

Regardless of what possibilities the future holds, libraries will continue to have a need to represent resources created by, or significantly related to, organizations of all sorts. The process of identifying and managing these organizations as corporate bodies is thus an important skill for catalogers and other librarians who work with a library's bibliographic metadata. This process requires the critical use of catalogers' faculties and judgment, to assemble relevant sources of evidence, evaluate and select the most likely form of name by which the organization is represented in those sources, and place that name into the context of a (theoretically) universal alphabetical index. There is an inherent tension between the first two steps, in which the focus is on identifying how organizations look in the "real world," and the last, in which the focus shifts to determining how that organization might best be identified by users when it is arranged cheek-by-jowl with numerous other organizations, whose only relationship is a similarity in their names. When placed into the context of the alphabetical name file, names alone are not always enough; but how far can catalogers go, in the service of "organizing the file," before they obscure an organization's name entirely? The instructions and best practices that we have explored in this essay can perhaps be best understood as a systematic way of mediating that tension.

Notes

1. Abbreviations used in references: RDA, *Resource Description and Access: RDA Toolkit* (Chicago: ALA Publishing, 2012), <https://original.rdatoolkit.org/> [subscription required]; NPM-4, *NACO Participants' Manual*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: Program for Cooperative Cataloging, 2020), <https://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/naco/documents/NACOParticipantsManual-20200708.pdf>; DCM-Z *Descriptive Cataloging Manual Appendix Z* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2006, continuously updated), <https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/dcmz1.pdf>; SHM *Subject Headings Manual* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2008), <https://www.loc.gov/aba/publications/FreeSHM/freeshtm.html>.

2. RDA definition of corporate body is, “An organization or group of persons and/or organizations that is identified by a particular name and that acts, or may act, as a unit.” RDA: glossary.
3. As with all things in cataloging there are some exceptions to this. Corporate bodies can be established for use as subject headings even if they have produced no collectable documents (see SHM H-430). Likewise there are situations involved establishing corporate bodies subordinately to other bodies (for which, see below) that require catalogers to establish the superordinate body, even if that body has itself issued no documents (see NPM-4: 12–14).
4. “Authority control” is defined as, “The procedures by which consistency of form is maintained in the headings (names, uniform titles, series titles, and subjects) used in a library catalog or file of bibliographic records through the application of an authoritative list (called an authority file) to new items as they are added to the collection.” Joan M. Reitz, *ODLIS: Online Dictionary of Library and Information Science* (Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 2004), https://products.abc-clio.com/ODLIS/odlis_about.aspx.
5. For instructions on determining where the access point belongs on the bibliographic record see RDA 19.2.1.1.1, “Corporate bodies considered to be creators.”
6. RDA 8.2.
7. RDA 11.2.2.3.
8. NPM4: 70–83; DCM-Z: introd.: 5–6, 670: 1–11.
9. RDA 11.2.2.2.
10. On the use of websites as sources for corporate body authority data see Qian Jin, “Is the Current Way of Constructing Corporate Authority Records Still Useful?” *Information Technology & Libraries* 29, no. 3 (2005): 270–82.
11. Note here that there are no specific instructions telling catalogers to prefer the fuller form of a name to an organization’s acronyms. Rather, the question is best determined through examining how the name appears in available sources. There are cases (think AFL-CIO, or UNESCO) where an acronym or acronym-like name better identifies the relevant organization than the fuller form. See also RDA 11.2.3.5, which recommends providing the full form of the acronym (or vice versa) as a variant access point when the acronym is the preferred name.
12. RDA 11.2.2.5.1-3.
13. RDA 11.2.2.5.4.
14. The exceptions to this have primarily to do with pseudo-variants that “normalize” to the same string.
15. See NPM-4, 59 and following.
16. In cases where organizations have multiple levels of subordination, the AAP usually only reflects the topmost and bottom-most levels; intermediate levels of subordination are recorded as variants. See RDA 11.2.3.7, third example block, “Name as Subdivision of Authorized Access Point for Immediately Superior Body”; see also NPM-4: 60–61.
17. An example of an organization that has been established directly, even though it is administratively part of a larger organization would be the Library of Congress (NPM4: 32).
18. RDA 11.2.2.14, “If a name of corporate body belongs to one or more of the types listed ... or if it is a type of body listed ..., record the name of the subordinate or related body as a subdivision of the higher or related body.” (Emphasis added.)

19. The Program for Cooperative Cataloging/Library of Congress policy statement (LC/PCC PS) to 1.2.2.14.2 provides a list of words that “imply administrative subordination” in several common languages.
20. See, e.g., RDA 9.2.2.8, “Individuals with more than one identity.”
21. The LC/PCC PS to RDA 11.2.2.5 seeks to limit the practice of creating new corporate body authority records when the change to an organization’s name fits a few well-defined patterns of “minor difference”, such as the change in representation of a word (“and” vs. “&”), or the change in a preposition, such as “of” or “for.”
22. See NPM-4: 63–65.
23. NACO guidelines have loosened the requirement for strict reciprocity among authority records for relationships among corporate bodies; see, for example, PCC Standing Committee on Training, “PCC Guidelines for the Application of Relationship Designators in NACO Authority Records” (Washington, DC: Program for Cooperative Cataloging, 2018); guideline 9. (<http://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/rda/PCC%20RDA%20guidelines/PCC%20SCS%20SCT%20Relationship%20Designators%20in%20NACO%20Authority%20Records-2018-11.docx>). I would argue however for the basic and important relationship of a corporate body name change, reciprocal cross references should always be recorded.
24. The specifics of how these relationships are recorded in the current standard encoding format (MARC) are outside of the scope of this essay but see DCM Z-1: 5XX, “See Also From Tracings – General Information,” and NPM-4: 63–66.
25. RDA Appendix K.4. See also PCC Guidelines for the Application of Relationship Designators in NACO Authority Records (2016).
26. The significance of this rule in “laying the foundation for our corporate body entries” was first recognized by Julie Pettee in her foundational 1936 paper, “The Development of Authorship Entry and the Formulation of Authorship Rules as Found in the Anglo-American Code.” *Library Quarterly* 6 (1936); reissued in Michael Carpenter and Elaine Svenonius, eds., *Foundations of Cataloging: A Sourcebook* (Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1985): 72–89 (hereafter referred to as *Foundations*).
27. British Museum, *The Catalogue of Printed Books in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1841); reprinted in Carpenter and Svenonius, *Foundations*, 4. Emphasis added.
28. Academies and learned bodies separated out by Rule IX for special treatment are covered in Rule XXX, which specifies a separate heading, ACADEMIES, under which individual academies are arranged, again according to geography. See Pettee, 81.
29. *Catalog Rules: Author and Title Entries*. (Chicago: American Library Association, 1908), 17–33.
30. *ALA Cataloging Rules for Author and Title Entries* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1949), 126–214.
31. Jin, 74–75.
32. *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1967), 106–43.
33. ALA 1908, 24–25.
34. ALA 1948, 149–57.
35. Barbara B. Tillet, “Authority Control: State of the Art and New Perspectives,” *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 38, no. 3/4 (2004): 23–41. doi 10.1300/J104v38n03_04

36. As the cases is stated in NPM-4: 15, “RDA fully embraces the growing importance of entity identifiers and identity management. It dramatically expands the content of authority descriptions beyond the AACR text strings that characterized name authority records previously.”
37. See, e.g., Elaine Svenonius, *The Intellectual Foundations of Information Organization* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009): 43–50, on “author sets” and a set-theoretical approach to cataloging.

Notes on contributor

Ben Abrahamse is a Cataloging and Metadata Librarian at the MIT Libraries. He earned his MLIS from the McGill University School of Information Studies in 2008.

ORCID

Ben Abrahamse  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6596-0289>

Bibliography

- A.L.A. *Cataloging Rules for Author and Title Entries* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1948).
- Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*, 2nd ed., revised (Chicago: American Library Association, 1988) (revised through 2005).
- Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1967).
- Carpenter, Michael, and Elaine Svenonius, eds., *Foundations of Cataloging: A Sourcebook* (Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1985).
- Catalog Rules: Author and Title Entries* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1908).
- Descriptive Cataloging Manual Appendix Z* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2006, continuously updated).
- Jin, Qian, “Is the Current Way of Constructing Corporate Authority Records Still Useful?” *Information Technology & Libraries* 29, no. 3 (2005): 270–82.
- NACO Participants’ Manual, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: Program for Cooperative Cataloging, 2020). <https://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/naco/documents/NACOParticipants’Manual-20200708.pdf>.
- PCC Standing Committee on Training, “PCC Guidelines for the Application of Relationship Designators in NACO Authority Records” (Washington, DC: Program for Cooperative Cataloging, 2018), <http://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/rda/PCC%20RDA%20guidelines/PCC%20SCS%20SCT%20Relationship%20Designators%20in%20NACO%20Authority%20Records-2018-11.docx>.
- Pettee, Julie, “The Development of Authorship Entry and the Formulation of Authorship Rules as Found in the Anglo-American Code.” *Library Quarterly* 6 (1936).
- Reitz, Joan M., *ODLIS: Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science* (Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 2004), https://products.abc-clio.com/ODLIS/odlis_about.aspx.
- Resource Description and Access: RDA Toolkit (Chicago: ALA Publishing, 2012) (continuously updated). <http://access.rdatoolkit.org> [subscription required].
- Subject Headings Manual (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2008). <https://www.loc.gov/aba/publications/FreeSHM/freeshtm.html>.

Svenonius, Elaine, *The Intellectual Foundation of Information Organization* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).

Tillet, Barbara B., "Authority Control: State of the Art and New Perspectives," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 38, no. 3/4 (2004): 23–41. doi doi:[10.1300/J104v38n03_04](https://doi.org/10.1300/J104v38n03_04)