Technical Subcommittee on Descriptive Standards (TSDS)
Annual Report, 2009 Society of American Archivists Meeting

From September 2008 to August 2009, TSDS worked to review and promulgate standards related to archival description. Our primary activities consisted of commenting on the public draft of RDA, revising the charge of the EAC Working Group, requesting a revision to EAD, and contributing to the revision of the Standards Committee mission and charge. As part of that reorganization, the Standards Committee, with our approval, agreed to dissolve TSDS.

RDA

In December, TSDS submitted comments on the public draft of *Resource Description & Access* (RDA) to ALA's Committee on Cataloging: Description and Access. The bulk of our comments focused on how RDA will be applied in the context of collection-level cataloging of archival materials. In addition to comments regarding specific rules, we had larger questions about how archivists will apply some of RDA's FRBR characteristics to archival materials.

EAC Working Group

Early in the year TSDS approved and submitted to SAA Council a revised charge for the Encoded Archival Description Working Group. The group's charge was extended to encompass additional EAC standards beyond EAC-CPF (Corporate Bodies, Persons, and Families), which is being presented at the annual meeting. The Working Group will continue its work by developing EAC-Functions, based on the ICA's *International Standard for Describing Functions* (ISDF), and additional EAC standards as appropriate.

EAD Revision

In February TSDS unanimously agreed that it is time to begin work on a revision to Encoded Archival Description. We sent a formal request to the EAD Working Group, which they will take up at the annual meeting. Among the reasons we gave for a revision to EAD were the need for interoperability with EAC-CPF; an opportunity – given the experience of the developers of the Archivists' Toolkit and Archon – to improve EAD's ability to function within a relational database; and to consider requests for opening up EAD to namespace interoperability, such as allowing portions of EAD to be embedded in other schemas or allowing other schemas to be embedded in EAD.

Standards Committee Mission and Charge

During the past year, TSDS continued to participate in discussions about how to improve and clarify the standards process within SAA. We helped the Standards Committee draft a revised mission and charge, as well as updated procedures for the review and approval of SAA standards and the endorsement of external standards.

The revised mission of the Standards Committee, which is intended to encourage a more active group, is as follows:

> *The Standards Committee is responsible for initiating and facilitating the development of standards and best practices, providing review and comment on standards and best practices relevant to archival theory and practice, educating the archival community about the value and role of standards and best practices, and partnering with related information management professional organizations on standards and best practices of mutual concern and interest.*

Structural changes to the Standards Committee include the following: members will increase from 6 to 9; TSDS will be dissolved; all SAA standards will have a standing subcommittee reporting to Standards (i.e. the EAD and DACS Working Groups will become subcommittees); and SAA standards will have a mandatory 5 year review cycle. Furthermore, the revised standards development procedures better define what is meant by standards vs. best practices.

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In order to assure a smooth transition, as chair of TSDS I submitted recommendations to the Standards Committee that two current members of TSDS join the expanded Standards Committee; that the Standards chair appoint a committee member to serve as a descriptive standards coordinator and monitor relevant activity in the profession; that current ex officio TSDS members now serve with Standards; that the EAD and EAC Working Groups now report to Standards; and that Standards continue to pursue TSDS's primary agenda items, the approval of EAC-CPF as an SAA standard and the revision of EAD.

The final versions of the revised Standards Committee charge and related procedures were submitted to SAA Council for consideration and were accepted in principle at their meeting on Monday, August 10th. Final revisions will be made by September 15th. The next step will be to revise the charges of the EAD and DACS Working Groups, which will lay the groundwork for revisions to both of those standards and ensure the development of new talent within SAA capable of maintaining those standards over time.

In the future, the Standards Chair or a designated committee member will report on descriptive standards activities within SAA.

Respectfully submitted by Michael Rush, Chair, TSDS, August 2009.