

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
February 5-6, 2024
Virtual Meeting/Chicago IL**

**Standards Committee: Statement on the Adoption of Records in
Context (RiC)**

(Prepared by: Jodi Allison-Bunnell and Lara Michels, Standards Co-Chairs)

The Standards Committee has concerns about the call for immediate adoption of Records in Context (RiC) and recommends that its component groups (specifically the Technical Subcommittee on DACS [TS-DACS] and the Technical Subcommittee on Encoded Archival Standards [TS-EAS]) have the opportunity to review and consider the full form of RiC before considering full adoption. We are asking for Council's endorsement of the statements proposed by TS-EAS and TS-DACS. We also request that, on behalf of the Standards Committee and its component groups, SAA leadership converse with counterparts at the International Council on Archives (ICA) about the need for increased communication, transparency, and responsiveness to feedback on RiC.

BACKGROUND

Since 2012, the International Council on Archives' Expert Group on Archival Description (EGAD) (<https://www.ica.org/en/about-egad>) has been developing a new standard: Records in Context (RiC). RiC is to replace ISAD(G), ISAAR(CPF), ISDIAH, and ISDF.

RiC has four component parts:

- Records in Contexts-Foundations of Archival Description (RiC-FAD) (<https://www.ica.org/en/records-in-contexts-foundations-of-archival-description>), first published as Introduction to Archival Description in 2016, re-released in 2021, and revised to Foundations of Archival Description in December 2023.
- Records in Contexts-Conceptual Model (RiC-CM) (<https://www.ica.org/app/uploads/2023/12/RiC-CM-1.0.pdf>). RiC-CM is a high-level conceptual model that focuses on intellectually identifying and describing records, the agents that created, used, or are documented in them, and the activities pursued by the agents that the records both facilitate and document. RiC-CM was published in late 2023.
- Records in Contexts-Ontology (RiC-O) (<https://www.ica.org/en/records-in-contexts-ontology>). RiC-O is a specific implementation of RiC-CM formally expressed in the World Wide Web Consortium standard Web Ontology Language, OWL.2 RiC-O provides the archival community with the ability to make archival description available

using the techniques of Linked Open Data (LOD) employing a conceptual vocabulary and structure that is specific to archival description. As a specific implementation, it conforms to the high-level RiC-CM, though includes greater detail required by implementation as an ontology. RiC-O 0.2 was released in February 2021 and is compliant with RiC-CM 0.2.3. A harmonized/modularized version has been released and is available at <https://github.com/ICA-EGAD/RiC-O/tree/master/ontology/current-version> .

- Records in Contexts-Application Guidelines (RiC-AG). RiC-AG, when completed, will provide practitioners and software developers with concrete guidance and examples to assist them in implementing RiC-CM and RiC-O in records management systems. ***Work on this third publication will begin after the release of stable versions of RiC-CM and RiC-O.*** (emphasis ours)

A number of standards created and maintained by SAA—notably DACS, EAD, and EAC-CPF—have the standards that RiC replaces (ISAD(G), ISAAR(CPF), ISDIAH, and ISDF) as their fundamental frameworks. Thus, the emergence of RiC is of fundamental importance to SAA’s standards for archival description.

The Standards Committee has concerns about how RiC has emerged. While we appreciate both the expertise and work that is embodied in the new standard, we also feel that it has emerged from ways of working that are not consistent with the nature and aspirations of SAA as an organization. Our colleagues on the TS-EAS and TS-DACS have expressed themselves well in the attached statements, but we will summarize the issues thus:

- RiC has been delayed for so many years that it’s been hard to predict when it would be released. This has left Standards and its component groups without the ability to plan for the implementation of RiC.
- As it has completed its work on RiC, EGAD has not communicated consistently or transparently with its counterpart group in the United States, the Standards Committee. Questions have been ignored, and well-considered feedback has elicited no response. Standards has received the same (brief) information that the rest of the archival community has received, with no opportunities to engage at a deep level, to collaborate, or to understand the direction that RiC was taking.
- Retiring ISAD(G), ISAAR(CPF), ISDF, and ISDIAH rather than updating and maintaining them in lockstep with RiC risks leaving the international archival community without concrete practical guidance.
- TS-EAS is in the middle of a revision. The pressure applied by members of EGAD last summer at the TS-EAS meeting that they immediately adopt RiC without (at that time) a full release of the conceptual model or (at this time) application guidelines are unreasonable.

- TS-DACS anticipates harmonizing DACS with RiC-CM at least to some extent. It wishes to proceed deliberately, analytically, and with input from users especially in the areas where DACS and RiC-CM don't comfortably correspond. Its first priority is to ensure that DACS continues to serve the community as a content standard. TS-DACS has compiled a mapping to lay the groundwork for further investigation. It defers beginning major work on RiC harmonization until the project of aligning DACS with the Principles is nearing its conclusion.
- We have heard nothing about how RiC will be maintained, by what body, and on what schedule. The Standards Committee needs this information in order to plan its work.
- The Standards Committee has expressed its commitment to transparent and open processes in its way of conducting business (<https://www2.archivists.org/governance/handbook/section7/groups/Standards/Procedures-Review-Approval-SAA-Developed-Standard>) and will continue to facilitate those processes. "Fostering an open and inclusive culture of creativity, collaboration, and experimentation across the association" is a core value of SAA.¹ We understand that ICA and EGAD may not have the same level of commitment to transparency and communication on an organizational level, and we do not wish to dictate the operations of another organization. But we need to ask that, going forward, EGAD make a better effort to communicate with its U.S. counterpart, the Standards Committee of SAA.

RECOMMENDATION

The Standards Committee and its component groups (TS-EAS and TS-DACS) recommend that the Society of American Archivists delay any integration of RiC into its standards apparatus until the full release of the Application Guidelines and opportunities to fully consider the substance and impacts of RiC.

To that end, we ask that SAA leadership endorse the statements proposed by the TS-DACS and TS-EAS groups:

TS-DACS Statement (from the group's attached Council item):

Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS) is a content standard maintained by the Society of American Archivists' Technical Subcommittee on DACS (TS-DACS) based on standards developed by the International Council on Archives (ICA), in particular the General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD(G)) and the International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families (ISAAR-CPF).

ICA has retired ISAD(G), ISAAR(CPF), ISDIAH, and ISDF as of the 1.0 release of the Records in Contexts (RiC) suite of standards: Foundations of Archival Description (RiC-FAD), Conceptual Model (RiC-CM), Ontology (RiC-O). A fourth part, Application Guidelines (RiC-AG), is planned. TS-DACS is hesitant to plan for implementation before

¹ <https://www2.archivists.org/governance/strategic-plan/2023-2025>

the standard has been fully completed and this crucial piece of guidance for practitioners has been provided.

RiC-CM is a major contribution to the landscape of archival standards, defining for the first time the entities that constitute the realm of archival description. DACS complements RiC by offering guidance for composing descriptive records, and doing so with a broad focus on any material that a repository might collect, both of which RiC explicitly considers out of scope. DACS will continue as the Society of American Archivists' content standard distinct and separate from RiC and regardless of the extent to which RiC may be adopted by the Society of American Archivists in the future.

The DACS development cycle currently under way focuses on harmonizing DACS with the Statement of Principles and will proceed on course, deferring any consideration of RiC to a subsequent revision cycle. TS-DACS will take under consideration strengthening the alignment between DACS and RiC-CM based on input from the archival community and in consultation with other SAA subteams, representatives of companion standards, and external organizations including ICA-EGAD, as stipulated by the SAA bylaws. It will do so transparently and in the spirit of seeking consensus and hearing all voices pursuant to SAA's strategic goals.

TS-EAS Statement of Alignment (from the attached Council item):

The standards maintained by the Society of American Archivists' Technical Subcommittee on Encoded Archival Standards (TS-EAS) are XML-schemas based on models developed by the International Council on Archives (ICA). Encoded Archival Description (EAD) has its origin in the General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD(G)), while Encoded Archival Context for Corporate Bodies, Persons, and Families (EAC-CPF) has its origin in the International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families (ISAAR-CPF). The current revision to the EAD standard is currently being undertaken by TS-EAS based on the requirements of the Society of American Archivists' standards maintenance schedule and policies and are not tied to the recent release of Records in Context (RiC) and its different parts. For this reason, the upcoming release of the new version of EAD will continue to be based on ISAD(G), taking the published version of Records in Contexts (RiC) into account but not at this point fully aligned. The same standpoint that was made for the revision of EAC-CPF.

With the RiC Conceptual Model now finalized and approved by ICA we anticipate that future versions of the standards maintained by TS-EAS will take the RiC Conceptual Model into account to make sure the EAS standards can be used for expressing the RiC-CM and following the requirements of the Society of American Archivists' standards maintenance schedule and policies. Our revisions or maintenance to standards will also include diverse voices and a space where everyone feels welcomed, valued, and respected, no matter who they are or where they come from.

TS-EAS is keeping close connections to the ICA Experts Group on Archival Description as a related standards body.

Last, we ask that SAA leadership meet with the ICA leadership to discuss how, going forward, the EGAD could operate in a manner that is more consistent with modern archival practice: transparently, with clear and regular communication with both the Standards Committee and component groups, and with the types of accessible and open comment periods that are essential for a diverse membership organization. This conversation should be complemented by (or include) a conversation between the leadership of EGAD and Standards.

Impact on Strategic Priorities:

Adoption of this recommendation, and taking action to communicate with ICA at its highest levels, is consistent with Strategic Priorities 3.1, 4.1, and 4.3.:

- 3.1. Identify the need for new standards, guidelines, and best practices and lead or participate in their development.
- 4.1. Facilitate effective communication with and among members.
- 4.3. Foster an inclusive association and profession through educational and leadership opportunities.

It also reflects SAA's Core Values of openness and inclusion.

Fiscal Impact:

There is no fiscal impact of Council's endorsement of the three recommendations above.