

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
May 18-20, 2022
Chicago, Illinois**

**Standards Committee: TS-DACS Major Revision –
11.1 Dates of Existence
(Prepared by Kira Dietz, Co-chair)**

BACKGROUND

The Technical Subcommittee on *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (TS-DACS) has submitted a proposed change to DACS, 11.1 Dates of Existence. While not a large change, it is enough to impact current usage and has been submitted to the Standards Committee as a major change. As such, Standards has reviewed the proposal, discussed it, and recommends that the Council approve the change.

[Link to documentation provided by TS-DACS](#)

DISCUSSION

This change has been requested for several reasons:

- Instructions for recording approximate dates are incompatible with EAC-CPF and the current version of RDA.
- DACS 11.1.1 is far more prescriptive than DACS 2.4. Given the removal of Part III, this prescriptiveness now seems out of place.
- Precluding the use of @notBefore and @notAfter prevents recording potentially valuable date information. EAD3 now also contains equivalent tags, but these are not forbidden by the more flexible rules in DACS 2.4.
- The use of the word "year," rather than "date," in the 11.1.1 instructions conflicts with the examples given in the same section.

A marked-up version of the proposed changes is available in the documentation provided by TS-DACS, as are the comments and feedback provided on the DACS GitHub site. This change directly affects 11.1.1, 11.1.2, and 11.1.3 (referring to individuals); it does not impact the 11.1 sections for corporate bodies or families.

Implementation of this change will remove the barriers to creating authority records using DACS and EAC-CPF and RDA and allow for improved/more precise dating of even approximate

materials. In addition, this change is backwards compatible and will not make existing descriptions out of compliance.

This change can be updated quickly on the GitHub and [public site](#), and can be incorporated into a future print edition of DACS with minimal effort by the TS.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the SAA Council approve the proposed revisions to *Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS)* (Appendix).

Support Statement: SAA Council approval of these revisions will allow DACS to better reflect the implementation of a required element (11.1 Dates of Existence), and improve its use for approximate dates for individuals.

Impact on Strategic Priorities: In general, these revisions do not have an impact on strategic priorities. However, it does reflect a desire to support Goal #3 by providing faster updates to existing technical subcommittee-managed standards.

Fiscal Impact: No known fiscal impact.

Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACCS) major change proposal

25 March 2022

DACS element to change:

- 11.1 Dates of Existence

Proposed change:

- Updates instructions in 11.1.1 for recording approximate dates in archival authority records to accommodate use of '@notBefore' and '@notAfter'.
- Adds an example of using this language.
- Further improves flexibility and resolves inconsistency between rules and examples by changing "year" to "date" in 11.1.1.

Type of change:

- This is a major change, as it alters “how an element is defined to the point at which it would affect practical use.”

Justification for proposed change:

- Instructions for recording approximate dates are incompatible with EAC-CPF.
- DACS 11.1.1 is far more prescriptive than DACS 2.4. Given the removal of Part III, this prescriptiveness now seems out of place.
- Precluding the use of @notBefore and @notAfter prevents recording potentially valuable date information. EAD3 now also contains equivalent tags, but these are not forbidden by the more flexible rules in DACS 2.4.
- The use of the word "year," rather than "date," in the 11.1.1 instructions conflicts with the examples given in the same section.

Impact of proposed change:

- This change removes a barrier to creating archival authority records using DACS and EAC-CPF.
- This change allows for more precise dating.
- No existing description would fall out of compliance due to this change.

Proposed Change

(Additions in green, deletions in strikethrough)

11.1 Dates of Existence (Required)

11.1.1 Record dates associated with the entity being described. Record dates in terms of the calendar preferred by the agency creating the data. Record dates in the following formats:

- Record exact dates in [year] [month] [day] format.
- Indicate a probable date by adding a question mark following the ~~year~~ **date**.
- If the ~~year~~ date is uncertain but known to be either one of two ~~years~~ **dates**, record the date in the form [~~year~~ **date**] or [~~year~~ **date**].
- ~~— If the year can only be approximated, record the date in the form *approximately* [year].~~
- **If the date can only be approximated, record the date in the form *approximately* [date].**
Alternatively, record earliest possible or latest possible dates.

11.1.2 For a person, record his or her date of birth and/or date of death. Where exact dates are not known, record approximate dates.

1742 November 12-1802 December 27

not after 1920-not before 1971

11.1.3 For a person, if both the date of birth or date of death are unknown, record floruit (period of activity) dates. If specific years of activity cannot be established, record the century or centuries in which the person was active.

GitHub Comments

[milesnimer](#) commented on Feb 19, 2021

The guidelines in 11.1.1 were originally based on RDA date entry conventions, some of which have been superseded at this point, with the examples focused on human-readable values rather than normalized dates. If there is interest in maintaining compatibility with RDA, some adjustments may be needed in DACS for their updated rules (see https://access.rdatoolkit.org/Content/Index?externalId=en-US_ala-70924ad2-277f-3cd6-b2ad-332d0945e346). The current version of DACS also generally does not include coding examples. Is there still work being done to develop a compendium of encoding examples for each element, or is TS-DACS intending to integrate them back into the text? In the case of @notBefore, using the term "approximately" as a textual prefix would not necessarily preclude its use in record encoding. For example:

```
<existDates> <dateRange> <fromDate notBefore="1801">approximately 1801</fromDate>
<toDate standardDate="1877-08-29">1877 August 29</toDate> </dateRange> </existDates>
```

[michelsd](#) commented on Feb 19, 2021

[@milesnimer](#) I don't have a subscription to RDA, so I cannot access the link you included.

TS-DACS has not been working on adding encoding examples to existing rules during my time on the subcommittee (2017-present).

I see your point that it is reasonable to interpret 11.1 as only requiring approximately as a textual prefix, but I don't know why we would want to require it in your example. What benefit does it serve?

The broader issue that you're bringing up is the lack of distinction throughout DACS between how data should be encoded and how it should be displayed. For example, the year/month/day format is essential for encoding, but is unfamiliar to most end users of archival description.

[milesnimer](#) commented on Feb 22, 2021

As an optional or alternative guideline, I have no objection to this proposed addition as long as it does not preclude the use of the term "approximately" for approximate dates.

[gwiedeman](#) commented on Dec 10, 2021

Addresses [#19](#)

[katyrawdodn](#) commented on Feb 11

>As an optional or alternative guideline, I have no objection to this proposed addition as long as it does not preclude the use of the term "approximately" for approximate dates.

[@milesnimer](#) I'm following up on comments on proposed changes here, and wanted to make sure you feel that your concern has been addressed?

The suggested alteration to [11.1.1](#) is to replace the language "If the year can only be approximated, record the date in the form *approximately* [year]" with "If the date can only be approximated, record the date in the form *approximately* [date]. Alternatively, record earliest possible or latest possible dates" - and add an example to 11.1.2 with "not before [date]" and/or "not after [date]" language. The option to use "approximately" would still remain. [@michelsd](#) can correct me if I'm wrong about this!