

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
November 14–16, 2016  
Chicago, Illinois**

**Component Group Funding Request (FY17):  
Funding to Support DACS Principles Revision Draft**

**(Prepared by the Technical Subcommittee on Describing Archives:  
A Content Standard and Submitted on October 10, 2016)**

The Technical Subcommittee on Describing Archives: A Content Standard (TS-DACS) requests that \$22,675 be included in SAA's FY 2017 (July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017) budget to support an in-person meeting to prepare a draft revision of DACS Statement of Principles.

**BACKGROUND**

The descriptive rules in DACS are based on a series of principles about the nature of archival holdings, the relationship between arrangement and description, the nature of archival description, and the creators of archival description. At the time that these principles were drafted, these principles were considered to be a set of generally accepted and foundational principles guiding archival description.

However, the principles that foreground DACS have not been revised since the first edition of DACS was released in 2004. DACS principles came out of a particular period of compromise born of work on the CUSTARD project, and had not been substantively amended from that group's work.<sup>1</sup> However, archival theory and practice have changed significantly since then. In light of recent discourse within the profession around diversity and inclusion, transparency of archival interventions, an international conceptual model for archives, and extensible processing for backlog management, the subcommittee thinks it prudent to discuss with the community the changing nature of both our theory and practice. The goal of this effort is to assess whether changes in archival theory and practice in the past 12 years are adequately reflected in the DACS principles.

Revising the principles in the next year will coincide with the International Council on Archives' (ICA) Expert Group on Archival Description (EGAD) putting forth Records in Context (RiC) that will tie together the four ICA standards. Indeed, DACS is the US implementation of ISAD(G), and as the ICA standards evolve, so must DACS. TS-DACS

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<sup>1</sup> Personal communication with Bill Landis, member of original DACS creation group.

work on revisiting the DACS principles will situate the particular US instantiation of archival descriptive standards in conversation with this larger international perspective.

To evaluate the adequacy of the current DACS principles, TS-DACS gathered a group of experts representing diverse perspectives at the 2016 Annual Meeting of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) in Atlanta. Participants at this meeting came to resounding consensus that many of the principles do not speak to current thinking or practice in the field. As we discuss in more detail below, we concluded that the DACS principles do indeed need revision.

Building on the momentum generated at the Annual Meeting, TS-DACS proposes a four-day working meeting to be held in the spring of 2017 where leading experts in archival description, including members of TS-DACS, will gather again to build upon our conversations in Atlanta. We believe that four days, with prior preparation, is enough time to produce a full draft revision to the Statement of Principles that reflects evolutions in archival theory and practice. We will then share this draft widely within the archival community (in accordance with the normal DACS revision process) to provide an opportunity for all who use DACS to engage in the discussion about the proposed changes to the principles that guide our understanding of archival description.

## **DISCUSSION**

In June 2016, TS-DACS initiated a conversation with leading experts of archival description. Participants were asked to review one of eight principles in the DACS Statement of Principles addressing the following questions:

- a. How well does this principle reflect core archival values?
- b. Is this principle articulated clearly and concisely, without compromising any nuance it should contain?
- c. Does this principle reflect archival description as it is practiced (or as you feel it should be practiced)?

The responses were compiled in Google Drive and commented on by the Subcommittee as well as the experts group of participants prior to the SAA Annual Meeting.<sup>2</sup> In Atlanta, we held a half-day meeting where the experts and the Subcommittee engaged in a lively discussion concerning each of the principles and the aforementioned questions.

Each expert was given 10 minutes to present thoughts on their assigned principle, taking into consideration feedback generated in Google Drive. A short discussion followed. Overwhelming support was generated for a revision to a majority of the principles and in some cases a complete rewrite.<sup>3</sup> In addressing our three questions, it became apparent that the principles do not always reflect core archival values *as they are today*, are not

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<sup>2</sup> See text here: [https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B6OllzWqP\\_-nc3ZLLU13VnhTZEU](https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B6OllzWqP_-nc3ZLLU13VnhTZEU).

<sup>3</sup> See minutes of meeting here:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1beVlojHKjkZ3UpFv6NvQqiH28a9PaaET7MihKDRbVls>.

clear, are not easy to teach, and (perhaps most damning) following these principles as written would not necessarily produce good and efficient archival outcomes.

The Statement of Principles was written in 2004 and has not been revised since. Bill Landis, a member of the committee to write the Statement of Principles, provided historical context for the group. Understanding this context, it became apparent that in addition to revision, TS-DACS also wanted to prompt discussion on what may be missing from the principles. We encouraged Subcommittee members and invited guests to help us outline gaps in descriptive principles. These gaps fell into three main categories: transparency of archival interventions, consideration to the validity of our users' needs, and further guidance on describing creators, donors, and subjects of records.

While momentum has grown for a revision to the principles, the shape and direction of that revision has not yet fully formed. It is clear to us that more thought, dialogue, and work are needed. The ability to hold a face-to-face meeting about the DACS principles would provide participants the opportunity to step away from their day-to-day work and use dedicated time and space to have focused, in-depth discussions. Because we believe that these changes are needed soon, and because we do not desire to participate in a long, drawn-out process, the participants will also utilize the meeting to develop a complete draft of the revised DACS Statement of Principles. This will require dedicated, focused work, but we believe that TS-DACS and our set of invited participants are up for the challenge.

When asked to continue participation in the revision process, invited guest Mary Caldera described her desired outcome: She would like to see “DACS principles that reflect the realities and ethical aspirations of today's archival practitioners and users.” TS-DACS could not agree more.

We expect to produce a draft revision of the Statement of Principles at the end of the four-day work meeting, revisions that do indeed speak to our practice as well as our ambitions. TS-DACS will lead a communication campaign that will aim to reach the widest possible audience of practicing archivists to engage community conversations about the revised principles. After community input is considered and, as appropriate, incorporated into the draft, TS-DACS will send it to the Standards Committee for discussion.

### **DACS Principles Revision Participants**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Role</b>
Maureen Callahan	Smith College	Co-Chair, TS-DACS
Adrien Hilton	Harvard University	Co-Chair, TS-DACS
Carrie Hintz	Emory University	Co-Chair, Standards Comm
Elise Dunham	University of Illinois	Member, TS-DACS
Adriane Hanson	University of Georgia	Member, TS-DACS
Sue Luftschein	University of Southern California	Member, TS-DACS
Cassie Schmitt	Orbis Cascade Alliance	Member, TS-DACS
Hillel Arnold	Rockefeller Archive Center	Invited Guest

Mary Caldera	Yale University	Invited Guest
Jillian Cuellar	University of California	Invited Guest
Audra Eagle Yun	University of California	Invited Guest
Gretchen Gueguen	Digital Public Library of America	Invited Guest
Bill Landis	Yale University	Invited Guest
Michelle Light	University of Nevada	Invited Guest
Dennis Meissner	Minnesota Historical Society (Ret)	Invited Guest
Mario Ramirez	University of California	Invited Guest
Dan Santamaria	Tufts University	Invited Guest

## **FUNDING REQUEST**

TS-DACS requests that funding in the amount of \$22,675 be included in SAA's FY 2017 (July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017) budget to support a DACS Statement of Principles Revision Draft. These funds will support a four-day meeting for 17 attendees at the University of California, Los Angeles.

### TRAVEL

Irvine (1)	\$0	
Los Angeles (3)	\$0	
New York City (3)	\$1260	\$420 per RT flight
Boston (2)	\$820	\$410 per RT flight
Erie (1)	\$350	RT flight
Hartford (1)	\$420	RT flight
Atlanta (2)	\$800	\$400 per RT flight
Chicago (1)	\$370	RT flight
Minneapolis (1)	\$360	RT flight
Las Vegas (1)	\$150	RT flight
Seattle (1)	\$200	RT flight
<i>SUBTOTAL</i>	<i>\$4730</i>	

### HOTEL

UCLA Hilgard House Hotel (14 people for 5 nights) <sup>4</sup>	\$13,065	\$201 (includes tax) per night per person
<i>SUBTOTAL</i>	<i>\$13,065</i>	

### MEALS

Breakfast and dinner (14 people for 5 days)	\$2,600	\$40 per day per person
<i>SUBTOTAL</i>	<i>\$2,600</i>	

### UCLA CATERING

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<sup>4</sup> Participants from Los Angeles will not need accommodation; however, travel from Irvine would be impractical for four days, and we would like to provide accommodation for this participant at the meeting.

4 days morning coffee/refreshments	\$600	\$150 (standard rate serves 20 people)
4 days boxed lunch or buffet (17 people for 4 days)	\$1,280	\$20 per day per person
4 days afternoon coffee/refreshments	\$ 400	\$100 (standard rate serves 20 people)
<i>SUBTOTAL</i>	\$2,280	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$22,675</b>	

**Support Statement:** The Statement of Principles in DACS have not been revised since 2004. Given the changes in evolving professional practice, including shifts away from physical arrangement, changes in technology, new discourse around diversity and inclusion, and a call for increased transparency of archival intervention, the principles are due for a substantial review. These revisions will also take into account the International Council on Archives’ emerging Records in Context (RiC) Conceptual Model for archival description to help align US and international approaches to archival description. TS-DACS proposes to re-convene a group of experts in archival description for an in-person meeting to draft a revision of the principles and to foster a dialogue with the archival community regarding the proposed revisions.

**Relation to SAA Strategic Plan:** Revising the DACS Statement of Principles cuts across all four strategic goals outlined by SAA for 2014-2018, but the project is particularly aligned with the following:

- 1.3. Provide leadership in ensuring the completeness, diversity, and accessibility of the historical record.** As part of the discussion on revising the principles, the committee and the experts group considered areas where the principles were lacking. These gaps included: transparency of archival interventions in arrangement, description, and appraisal, considerations to the validity of our user needs, and further guidance on describing creators and donors. We wish to deploy the great body of archival thinking since the Statement of Principles were composed that addresses diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (or lack thereof) in the profession, in records, and in users. We believe that our description of archives (and the principles that govern that description) can be a mirror to ourselves as professionals. This revised set of principles will reflect our professional mission to collect, steward and serve the full diversity of human experiences.
- 3.1. Identify the need for new standards, guidelines, and best practices and lead or participate in their development.** With the publication of More Product, Less Process in 2005 and the adoption of archival management systems and electronic record access systems, practice across the profession has changed dramatically since DACS was first composed.<sup>5</sup> A greater value has now been placed on providing

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<sup>5</sup> Meissner, Dennis, and Mark A. Greene. “More Application While Less Appreciation: The Adopters and Antagonists of MPLP.” *Journal of Archival Organization* 8, no. 3–4 (July 1, 2010): 174–226. doi:10.1080/15332748.2010.554069.

programmatic access to all materials rather than detailed access to few materials. This change prioritizes the role of aggregation in archival description, which, as the experts group discussed, is imperfectly and confusingly described in DACS principle 7. We believe that this is an area ripe for further examination, a place where DACS could guide the field rather than merely comment on it.

Related, Records in Contexts (RiC) makes it clear that archival description can and should go beyond a hierarchical presentation in order to more meaningfully represent complex relationships between creators, records and the institutions that house them. A linear output much like we see with EAD will in the future be only one of many contexts in which archival collections are discovered and interacted with. The underlying foundation of the Statement of Principles in DACS implicitly, and at times, explicitly, rests on a hierarchical model. It is important that the US archival community keep pace with newer technologies that allow for myriad conceptions of our descriptions. TS-DACS can lead the archival community by taking on a principles revision.

- **3.2. Foster and disseminate research in and about the field.** Through the documents and discussion generated at the annual meeting, we have made a contribution to archival theory. This will be condensed and consolidated in the revised principles. However, following the discussion in Atlanta, it was clear that the profession would benefit from access to this material, as it represents an exploration of current trends, teaching, learning, and thinking. We envision a possible special issue of an archival journal examining these shifting ideas. Alternatively, a white paper that included the extrapolated content from the work meeting would present to the larger community vital information about the field.

**Fiscal Impact:** TS-DACS is requesting \$22,675 for full funding of a four-day work meeting to produce a draft revision of the Describing Archives: A Content Standard's Statement of Principles. The estimated staff time is associated with handling logistics and reimbursements and will be approximately 20 hours.