

**To:** Renate Behrens, Chair, RDA Steering Committee  
**CC:** Anne Welsh, RSC Secretary  
**From:** Robert L. Maxwell, NARDAC representative to RDA Steering Committee  
**Subject:** Response to RSC/TechnicalWG/2024/2/rev – Proposal to revise definitions of aggregate, aggregating work and aggregates guidance

NARDAC supports clarifying the aggregate concept in RDA, but does not believe the proposed redefinitions and reorganization go very far toward greater clarity. We believe that the proposal raises serious questions about the overall presentation of the aggregate concept in RDA, which might warrant a greater overhaul than a simple revision of definitions and rearrangement and modification of particular instructions.

Regrettably, therefore, NARDAC cannot support this revision proposal as written. However, if RSC approves the proposal, NARDAC has some comments and suggestions.

**Recommendation 1.** Revise the Glossary definition of aggregate.  
New definition proposed: *A manifestation that embodies multiple expressions.*

The introduction to this recommendation claims that the definition of aggregate can be modified to cover the case of only one expression being embodied. We believe that almost no catalogers will understand this to be the case from the proposed revision. It is very hard to interpret the phrase “multiple expressions” to include the concept of “one” expression. “Multiple” means more than one.

NARDAC proposes this definition, if the recommendation is approved: *A manifestation that is the result of a plan to embody multiple expressions.*

**Recommendation 2.** Revise the Glossary definition aggregating work.  
New definition proposed: *A work that is a plan to select and arrange expressions of one or more works and embody them in an aggregate.*

NARDAC agrees on the need for the revision to improve clarity but proposes this definition if the recommendation is approved: *A work that is a plan to select and arrange expressions of one or more works resulting in their embodiment within an aggregate.*

**Recommendation 3.** We recommend that the name of the recommendation be changed to “Revise the Guidance chapter for aggregates”

The recommendation:

- Revises and rearranges the text to reflect:
  1. Revision of definitions as per recommendations 1 and 2
  2. De-emphasis of *aggregating expression*
  3. Provision of additional guidance on kinds of aggregates
  4. Provision of additional guidance on the role of recording representative expression attributes as values of the aggregating work

- Proposes a new order for Table of Contents

Aggregate manifestations  
 Collection aggregate  
 Augmentation aggregate  
 Parallel aggregate  
 Aggregating works  
 Aggregating expressions  
 Describing an aggregate

NARDAC prefers to retain the current order of the guidance chapter with aggregating expressions placed before aggregating works in order to maintain WEMI hierarchy, in this case manifestation-expression-work.

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- The proposal revises the definition of aggregate manifestations (p. 7 of proposal)

*An aggregate is a manifestation that embodies multiple expressions. The distinct expressions that are aggregated may realize one or more works. An aggregate also embodies one and only one aggregating expression that realizes one and only one aggregating work that is the plan for selecting and arranging the expressions that are embodied in an aggregate.*

Because we believe the proposed changes in this paper are a bit unclear regarding multiple expressions, if the proposal is approved by RSC, NARDAC suggests the addition of one line to this the definition:

*A manifestation of an issue of a successive aggregating work may embody one expression.*

- The proposal revises *Aggregating expressions* (p. 8 of the proposal, relocated to follow *aggregating works*)
  - NARDAC does not agree that removing content that helped catalogers understand the model (such as “a title page and page headings and numbering in a printed volume aggregate may be treated as the content of the aggregating expression”) is an improvement. RDA normally provides agencies with choices to make about the application of RDA, rather than removing guidance.

- Perhaps it would be better to keep the existing wording and add more to the "Describing an aggregate" section explaining that the aggregating expression does not need to be described.
- The phrase "it is not necessary" in this section does not provide sufficient context – not necessary for what? How does this relate to minimum description, coherent description, effective description, or well-formed RDA?

Appendix. General comment on the difficulty of teaching RDA's aggregates concept from Shawne Miksa, NARDAC's Library Science Education Representative.

The phrase "is a plan" is used throughout the Official RDA and is, at best, too generic to make sense. From a teaching standpoint, students will immediately ask what this means—what is the 'plan' (it is not the same as "plan" as defined in the Glossary) and who is 'planning' to do something?

There is some explanation in the "Describing a work" section under Guidance that implies it is the creator that is planning—this should be conveyed more clearly.

We are not dealing with resources that are being planned or with anything that is "a plan to," rather we are describing the products or results of that "plan"—a resulting single work, an aggregated expression, aggregating work, etc. So, why use this language?

Guidance > Resource description > Describing a work

Describing a work

...

... The conceptualization by a creator of the intellectual or artistic content of a work may include any of the following plans:

A plan to aggregate the content of other works

A plan to divide the content into two or more parts

A plan to change the content over time

...

Why not simply state:

... The conceptualization by a creator of the intellectual or artistic content of a work may result in any of the following:

An aggregation of the content of other works

A division of the content into two or more parts

A change of the content over time

...

On the whole, clarity would be greatly aided by the addition of copious diagrams and examples. People learn in different ways—for example, I am a visual learner and greatly depend on diagrams or illustrations to help me make sense of the melting pot of concepts at play in RDA. I have created many flowcharts and diagrams for my students and receive a lot of positive feedback. The one question I

constantly get asked in my course is “Can you give us an example?” when it comes to rules interpretation. There are never enough examples.

See [https://access.rdatoolkit.org/Guidance/Index?externalId=en-US\\_topic\\_hfh\\_gkp\\_sjb](https://access.rdatoolkit.org/Guidance/Index?externalId=en-US_topic_hfh_gkp_sjb) for examples of embedded images on a Guidance page. It is entirely possible to support visual learners. NARDAC is willing to volunteer to produce some images.