

To: RDA Steering Committee

From: Renate Behrens, RSC Chair

Subject: Religions in RDA Working Group, 2025

This document sets out the membership, terms of reference, and specific tasks for the Religions in RDA Working Group. It supersedes [RSC/Chair/2024/4](#), converting its status from Task and Finish Working Group to Advisory Group (the new class of Working Group approved by the Board in its December 2024 meeting).

The purpose of the Religions in RDA Working Group is to support the improvement of the RDA standard by reviewing the guidance and instructions (in all RDA entities) and making recommendations to move RDA toward unbiased and inclusive treatment of world religions. A specific and more immediate goal is to expand the non-Christian coverage in RDA. RSC concerns include the emphasis given to Christianity and books of the Bible and the lack of attention to other religious texts.

The primary deliverables are likely to be discussion papers to raise issues for consideration by the RSC. Proposals, though more specific, could also be submitted. Because this is a very broad charge, it is expected that this group would make broad recommendations and perhaps outline a plan for moving forward. Follow-up Working Groups could address implementation details (for recommendations approved by RSC).

Consider what is appropriate for RDA as an international standard and what is appropriate as guidance for a specific community. For example, some specific instructions found in original RDA (e.g., authorized access point for religious work) are now found in Community refinements in the official Toolkit.

1 Background

Some work was begun in this area with the report ‘Western and Christian Bias in the 3R Toolkit’ ([RSC/Minutes/Public/159-204](#) Appendix Item 166)

2 Membership

David Roth, Israel, Chair, 2023- (formerly Co-chair 2023 and Working Group member, 2022-2023)

Guido Bee, Germany
Geneva Blackmer, USA
Kjerste Christensen, USA
Patrick Harrington, USA

Charlene Chou, RSC Wider Community Engagement Officer, *ex officio*

3 Terms of Reference

The Working Group operates within [RSC/Operations/3](#), the general terms of reference for RSC Working Groups. As an Advisory Working Group, the Religions in RDA Working Group will continue working until the RSC determines that it has made all the amendments possible to render RDA more international in content and to remove the longstanding Christian-centric focus of instructions inherited from AACR2 and earlier standards.

4 Tasks

1. Review the documents listed in Section 5, Reference Sources.
2. Review the official Toolkit for known areas where instructions address resources or agents related to religions. The Community Resources area is an evolving part of the Toolkit that contains materials specific to communities (at the moment, primarily legacy Anglo-American instructions) and is not considered part of base RDA. Review the original Toolkit when helpful.
3. Consider where best general, internationally applicable instructions about religious resources and agents should be placed and how they should be framed, and what is more appropriate for community-specific information and instructions.
4. Prepare discussion papers or proposals (or both, broken into manageable pieces, if needed) for RSC review.

A discussion paper may request RSC feedback on issues or options, ask questions and/or suggest possible next steps. Discussion papers typically precede formal proposals to choose among multiple possibilities, or if the path isn't clear.

A proposal should have specific implementation recommendations for elements and/or guidance, including for the RDA Registry (new or re-defined elements, semantics, hierarchy) and for RDA instructions (guidance, principles, conditions and options).

Either document may identify problem areas where further consultation is needed and provide recommendations for next steps where feasible. More information is available in [RSC/Operations/4](#) and [RSC/Operations/5](#), and proposals that can be considered models are on the [2023 Documents page](#).

Questions may be sent to the RSC at any time from the working group chair to the RSC Chair.

5. Provide progress reports to the RSC, ideally four weeks before each meeting, *viz*:
 - i. 10 March for the April meeting
 - ii. 16 June for the July meeting
 - iii. 20 October for the November meeting.
6. Provide a formal report to the RSC in December 2025.

5 Reference sources

- [Western and Christian bias in the 3R Toolkit RSC/Minutes/Public/159-204 Appendix Item 166](#)
- [RSC/Minutes/Public/159-204 Item 166](#)

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From the [2019 RSC meeting minutes, Santiago, Chile \(RSC/Minutes/Public/159-204\)](#):

166 Western and Christian Bias in the 3R Toolkit Report

166.1 The RSC thanked Ahava Cohen and her colleagues for preparing this report Behrens noted that Western and Christian bias has been a longstanding issue. The commitment that the RSC made to not leave anything behind when moving forward from AACR2 was raised by Oliver as a contributing factor. Kate James pointed out that absence of content doesn't necessarily mean bias; it may mean "not applicable." Behrens suggests that RDA must find a way to be as neutral as possible because augmenting the standard with needed detail for all religions and cultures is not possible; this could be left for application profiles or focused policy statements. There was some discussion of terminology, including the idea of "Western culture" and "bias." There was a suggestion

that “focus” was a better term. Dunsire confirms that this paper is very timely and is an aspect of re-focusing RDA as an international standard. Amey believes it is not possible to be neutral; it is important to acknowledge this bias and find a way to move ahead.

- 166.2 Some detailed aspects of the report, such as books of the Bible, dates for the year a degree is granted, and definition of the term “letter” were debated. There is an issue with citing Encyclopedia Judaica, which Kate James volunteered to follow up. The report noted some small editorial problems that could be fixed now, like the “that is” list following “local places of worship” in preferred name of corporate body and the use of “etc.” There are also some things in the report that are not accurate. The RSC may wish to follow up and ask for more explanation in certain areas, such as *variant name of RDA entity*. There seem to be a mixture of issues contained in the report, including training and application profile issues.

ACTION ITEM: Dunsire and Barnhart will review the CMS to make editorial changes for local places of worship and “etc.” and other editorial problems highlighted in the report.

ACTION ITEM: Kate James will consult an LC colleague about citing Encyclopedia Judaica.

- 166.3 Discussion led to consideration of the Resources tab, which needs to be overhauled. Locating the Books of the Bible vocabulary encoding scheme there does not send a neutral message. This tab could be set up to share multiple vocabulary encoding schemes for communities.

ACTION ITEM: The Core Team will find a way to make Books of the Bible less prominent in the Resources tab.

- 166.4 The RSC concluded that expertise is needed from the communities to address the larger issues in this report. There is sufficient workload to consider establishing a task-and-finish Working Group to deal primarily with the religion topics. This would include addressing books of the Bible, the lack of other religious texts, and places in RDA that single out Christianity. Looking at JSC documents may also be useful. A Working Group will be discussed further in conjunction with developing the RSC action plan.

ACTION ITEM: The RSC will consider setting up a working group to examine the treatment of religious works in RDA. This will be discussed further when setting up the three-year operational plan.