

# Arca Migration Admins Meeting – Subject Metadata

May 8, 2024

Meeting Slides:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/16OeFu3q2Cj5iEgq2ZSHEzJTEQzaqDEDb-DtzCpanNul/edit?usp=sharing>

## 1. Why are we meeting today?

- Historically, Arca has allowed a free-for-all approach to subject metadata
- In the new environment, there is an opportunity to make good use of taxonomies so we may want to be more mindful of how we're all structuring our data
- Example -- In our current platform, we have the following geographic subject headings for the DTES neighbourhood of Vancouver:
  - a. Downtown Eastside (1 record)
  - b. Downtown Eastside (Vancouver, B.C.) (1 record)
  - c. Downtown Eastside, Vancouver, BC (12 records)
  - d. Downtown-Eastside (Vancouver, B.C.) (5 records)
- These headings would each become a separate term in the Geographic Location taxonomy when carried into the new environment. If more than one of these terms exist in a single Arca site, users clicking on the heading as written in (a) would not see any records with the heading as written in (b), (c), or (d).
- The value of a shared approach is twofold:
  - a. Common practice means easier maintenance – you as admins will have an easier time reviewing and cleaning your subject metadata if you have a sense of what it *should* look like
  - b. Common terms means easier searches across Arca – the benefit of being part of the Arca Community of Practice is the access to our province's incredible digital resources; we want to make it as easy as possible for visitors to find your objects, and cleaner metadata can facilitate that
- **Important to note: No single approach or recommendation will ever be mandatory.** No matter the outcome of today's discussion or what we decide for next steps, we will never expect sites to convert all existing subject values to align with any one vocabulary or standard, and members are welcome to continue using local vocabularies as needed and as best suited for your user communities.
- However, several members have expressed that they would appreciate guidance in this area, including best practices for subject heading formatting specifically.

## 2. Reviewing subject fields in the new environment:

- Keywords (plain text; repeatable or can also be a string delimited however you like)
- Subject Topic (linked to Subject taxonomy)
- Subject Name Person (linked to Person taxonomy)
- Subject Name Organization (linked to Corporate Body taxonomy)
- Geographic Subject (linked to Geographic Location taxonomy)
- Temporal Subject (linked to Temporal taxonomy)
- Coordinates
- Various classification fields (including LCC, DDS, etc.)

## 3. Questionnaire responses

- 20 responses of 30 total sites. Of the respondents:
  - 13 are using some kind of vocabulary for subject metadata
  - 2 follow a local metadata guide for formatting but no formal vocabulary
  - 2 do not control subject fields (no formatting guides OR vocabularies applied)
  - 4 do not typically add subject metadata to records (but perhaps would like to start!)
- What vocabularies are currently being used in Arca's subject fields?
  - Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)
  - Art and Architecture Thesaurus (AAT)
  - First Nations House of Learning (FNHL) Subject Headings
  - Getty Thesaurus of Geographic Names (TGN)
  - Homosaurus
  - Thesaurus for Graphic Materials (TGM)
  - Association of Manitoba Archives Indigenous Subject Headings
  - Medical Subject Headings (MeSH)
  - Local vocabularies (unspecified)
  - Author-supplied keywords
- Concerns with developing or adopting shared recommendations
  - Inflexibility
  - Metadata remediation work to revise existing values
  - Ethics
  - Usefulness
  - Complexity with self-submission
  - Consistency across collections and formats

- If we were to develop shared recommendations, any initial suggestions to contribute?
  - Formatting guidelines – by far the most common suggestions were for specific formatting conventions (e.g., no blank spaces before or after dashes in hierarchical subject headings)
  - Developing a unified schema
  - Encouraging use of LCSH for shared expectations, but not as the only option
  - Finding a method that facilitates index searching
  - Sharing cleanup work on a rotational basis

#### 4. Discussion

- It was again emphasized that recommendations or best practices, if developed, would never be mandatory
  - As the name suggests, the recommendations would exist so that sites looking for additional guidance with metadata cleanup or structuring would have somewhere to look that may also align with fellow Arca members
- Some admins expressed concern around changes to subject headings and whether it would make them incompatible with their ILS
- Many members expressed a greater willingness to develop best practices with the knowledge that nothing would be mandatory
- Many members were in agreement that LCSH might be helpful for getting started and creating a foundation for formatting, but certainly not as the exclusive source for subject headings
  - Several members noted the many limitations of LCSH and potential for harm in some of the language
  - Suggested local vocabularies included the [Association of Manitoba Archives' Indigenous Subject Headings](#) (developed as an alternative to LCSH pertaining to Indigenous communities, peoples, cultural practices, etc.) and [Homosaurus](#) for 2SLGBTQIA+ content
- Consensus: Cleaner subject metadata is ideal and we should develop some kind of documentation for shared recommendations. The Arca Admin Centre will put out a call for suggested recommendations and we will proceed with a vote to decide what should be added to a best practices document.
- Q from admin: Some of our headings combine multiple types of information, like geographic and temporal. Should these be broken up for the Temporal Subject and Geographic Subject fields in the new environment, or can we keep the entire heading in Subject Topic?

- A: That is up to you, and may also depend on the outcomes of this meeting. What would make the most sense for the users browsing your data? If we develop shared recommendations that contain a suggested approach for these cases, you may choose to adopt that practice.

## 5. Next steps

- The Arca Admin Centre will put out a call for suggestions to add to best practices documentation
- Arca Admins will submit via webform suggestions for best practices, covering areas like formatting and recommended vocabularies
- The Admin Centre will compile the submissions and put them to all Admins for a vote
- The selected recommendations will be added to a draft best practices document, to be circulated for revision among all Admins
- A final copy of the recommendations will be added to the [Arca Documentation site](#)