

## **The Development and Future of the *Cataloguing Code of Ethics***

### **Abstract**

The *Cataloguing Code of Ethics*, released in January 2021, was the product of a multi-national, multi-year endeavor by the Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee to create a useful framework for discussion of cataloging ethics. The six Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee members, based in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada, recount the efforts of the group and the cataloging community leading up to the release of the *Code*, as well as provide their thoughts on the challenges of creating the document, lessons learned, and the future of the *Code*.

### **Keywords**

Cataloging ethics; Cataloguing ethics; Cataloguing Code of Ethics; Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee; Ethics; International collaboration

### **Introduction**

In January 2021, the Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee (CESC), a US-UK-Canadian collaboration sponsored by the American Library Association (ALA), the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), and the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA-FCAB), released the *Cataloguing Code of Ethics* after a two-year consultation process involving cataloging practitioners and library and information studies (LIS) educators.

The *Cataloguing Code of Ethics* was informed by the expertise of the cataloging community of practice and the work of those who challenged and continue to challenge the cataloging status quo, such as Sanford Berman, Hope Olson, and Melissa Adler, just to name a few. The *Code* also provides the cataloging community with a framework for discussion of ethical issues that may be encountered throughout the library cataloging ecosystem. These issues include, but are not limited to, problematic subject descriptions and classification, the extent and accuracy of agent information in authority records (such as gender labels), the accessibility (financial, intellectual, etc.) of cataloging standards, and the fairness and diversity of the cataloging workplace environment.

Drawing on the diverse perspectives of the six CESC members, this paper describes the origins, process, outputs, and outcomes of this collaboration. The authors will consider lessons learned from the project and provide their thoughts on how work on the *Cataloguing Code of Ethics* (hereafter referred to as the *Code*) can be seen as part of a continuum of sea change in library cataloging, as well as a call for action for catalogers to view their work through an ethical lens and advocate for positive changes in the profession.

## **Background**

### *The Need for the Cataloguing Code of Ethics*

Codes of ethics are “a hallmark of a true profession” that clearly state the principles most important to that profession.<sup>1</sup> Various library organizations, such as ALA and CILIP, have had professional codes of ethics for many years,<sup>2</sup> but a separate, cataloging-specific code of ethics has remained elusive. Though the aforementioned codes of ethics have certainly not *excluded* cataloging, some have pointed out that there are ethical issues that catalogers encounter in their

work which are not explicitly covered in general codes of ethics and that need to be emphasized and discussed.<sup>3</sup> Bair, for example, notes that catalogers' "special skills and knowledge sets them apart from the profession of librarianship in general"<sup>4</sup> and Brubaker argues that "the decisions we make in cataloging ... can have political and ideological implications."<sup>5</sup>

The former division of the ALA dedicated to library technical services and collections (ALCTS - the Association for Library Collections & Technical Services) did publish a supplement to the ALA code of ethics in 1994,<sup>6</sup> but it was not intended to be a stand-alone document, nor was it updated after subsequent revisions to the ALA code. Bair attempted a draft cataloging code of ethics in a 2005 article, but no person or organization chose to further her work.<sup>7</sup> Shoemaker praises Bair's efforts, but notes that Bair's draft code is often "lofty and uncompromising, using both tone and language that do not reflect the situations in which we work."<sup>8</sup> For example, Shoemaker points out that Bair's forceful use of language provides little flexibility and nuance, particularly for catalogers in work environments where they lack power and influence. Shoemaker concludes by challenging the cataloging community of practice to collaborate on a stand-alone cataloging code of ethics endorsed by professional organizations.

Shoemaker's challenge provided the momentum needed to jump start discussions on creating a cataloging code of ethics. At the ALA's Annual Conference in Summer 2017, the Cataloging and Metadata Management Section (CaMMS) of ALCTS hosted the CaMMS Forum, featuring Shoemaker herself and Hope Olson, author of the influential book, *The Power to Name*.<sup>9</sup> In the CaMMS session, the audience expressed clear interest in having a cataloging code of ethics, particularly one with heavy involvement from members of the cataloging community of practice and not produced secretively in closed groups. Shortly thereafter, in early 2018 at the ALA Midwinter meeting, CaMMS offered another forum for cataloging ethics discussion with

its session “Cooperatively Conscientious Cataloging” that “provided a venue for attendees to share their ideas and concerns about the process now under way to develop a code of ethics for the cataloging community.”<sup>10</sup> The “process now under way” mentioned in the quote above referred to discussions within ALCTS CaMMS about forming a task force or working group to explore ideas for creating a cataloging ethics document.

At this time, a formal request was received from the UK-based Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) Cataloguing & Indexing Group (now Metadata and Discovery Group - MDG) to collaborate on the creation of the *Code*. Those involved greeted the idea warmly and suggested including a Canadian cataloging community representative on the team. Thus, in early 2019, the newly formed Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee (CESC), comprised of three members representing the United States, two members representing the United Kingdom, and one member representing Canada, started meeting online through web conferencing sessions and emails to determine how best to proceed in creating a cataloging code of ethics.

### *Representation and Community Engagement*

Though all members of our respective professional library associations, we (the CESC) chose to work independently, but with the support of these associations. We wanted to retain the flexibility, transparency, and autonomy needed to create a document that we felt best represented the needs of various cataloging communities of practice. Among the six members of our group, the domains of public libraries, academic libraries, and library and information studies (LIS) programs were particularly well represented. A few members also brought in awareness of library communities concerned about language representation in predominantly English language

catalogs and the standardized use of culturally inappropriate subject terms used for Indigenous peoples and other already marginalized groups.

The social issues and politics affecting librarianship in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada are very different, and we identified those differences from the start, quickly recognizing what these various issues had in common: they all created challenging scenarios in which a conscientious cataloger had to decide on how best to describe an information resource.

### *Logistics*

Establishing meeting logistics that worked for everyone was key to collaborating. Our respective locations traversed three time zones (CT, ET, GMT), with a difference of six hours; for many of these meetings, the UK committee members graciously joined in their personal time in the early evening. We committed to meeting for an hour and half every two weeks for two and half years from January 2019 to July 2021, when it moved to a monthly meeting. Minutes were taken at each meeting and shared in a cloud folder for common access and easy reference. There was also a mix of personalities and communication styles among group members, notwithstanding the regional differences in English. We actively worked to listen deeply, making room for each other to share thoughts and observations of the need for a cataloging code of ethics. Time was made in meetings to get to know each other better so we could feel comfortable with being ourselves. A spirit of trust and camaraderie was established early on, creating a safe space for expressing disagreement, addressing concerns, and taking initiative.

One of the first decisions we made was to seek volunteers from the cataloging community of practice to serve on working groups. There would be no requirement for volunteers to be members of professional organizations in line with the principles of diversity,

equity, inclusivity and transparency that the *Code* would promote. We decided early on in the process that we alone, who are primarily white, cisgender women, could not produce a cataloging code of ethics that would capture the diverse voices and complexities of the community of practice. We hoped that six working groups, comprised of 10-20 international volunteers each, would guide our work through the production of reports that provided valuable background information, a literature review, and case studies for each of the six working group areas: classification; subject headings; staffing and working conditions; authority work; access scope & infrastructure; and resource discovery and accessibility. The working group topic areas were chosen based upon their prominence in LIS research literature related to ethics.

The call for working group volunteers went out in April 2019. The call asked volunteers to rank the six working group areas in order of their preference. We identified all known cataloging email lists (such as AUTOCAT, RADCAT, and CIG-E-FORUM),<sup>11</sup> a few library type-specific lists (such as LM\_NET and PUBLIB), and social media sites (such as the Facebook group Troublesome Catalogers and Magical Metadata Fairies) in the US, UK, and Canada to promote the call for volunteers. At the same time, we created a website to promote and support the work being done and to host the outputs.<sup>12</sup>

There were over 100 responses to the call, eventually resulting in 74 active members predominantly from the USA, Canada, and the UK, but also including colleagues from Australia, Israel, and Mexico who worked in national, academic, and public libraries as well as museums. Most of the respondents were assigned to work in the area of their choice. The working groups, made up of members living and working in multiple time zones, needed to learn how to use online communications channels so that their contributions could be captured and used to

produce the required deliverables. The groups were given a few months to produce a report for us summarizing their investigations and findings.

During our initial discussions regarding the working groups, we considered whether we should take an active leadership role in them. We eventually decided that engagement with the broader cataloging community would be more generative, empowering, and inclusive, as well as true to the aims of the *Code*. Therefore, each of the groups was led by a volunteer chosen by the members themselves, and we functioned as liaisons, communicating issues and questions from the working groups to the other CESC members and providing support to the group leaders. Prior to the call for volunteers, we also produced a guide for the working groups to clarify expectations and support their agency. This guide explained the goals and intended outputs (i.e., a report) and also included a working definition of cataloging ethics, a timeline, and a reading list (see Appendix B). It also outlined the role of the working group leader and contained a code of conduct, which we deemed critical for supporting teamwork. The reading list was the same one that we used to identify working group topics. The list of working group outputs for inclusion in the report encompassed the provision of suggestions, conclusions, evidence, bibliography, frameworks (if applicable), and any other information that the working group thought was helpful.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout the second half of 2019, the working groups worked autonomously online to produce their reports with a deadline of December 2019. We took these reports, which included substantial bibliographies, and decided to methodically analyze them to look for common themes and identify any outlying points. Based on these themes, we identified values to articulate as part of the development of a cataloging code of ethics. Aware of the need for context, and committed to making the *Code* as practical and accessible as possible, we elected to draft general statements

of ethical principles to apply in a wide range of cataloging scenarios at both the individual and institutional level. Prior to the release of the first draft, we consulted with a few colleagues from different library sectors and across geographical lines for their initial feedback.

Our original goal was to take the working group reports and produce a draft code of ethics for public comment by April 2020. The shutdown of much of the world in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted these plans. Nonetheless, we continued to work on the document during this time period and released the first draft of the *Cataloguing Code of Ethics* for public comment in June 2020. We were able to promote the *Code*, and the call for feedback, at an online event on June 10, 2020, hosted by ALCTS Competencies & Education for a Career in Cataloging interest group.<sup>14</sup> Comments and questions were collected until the end of August 2020. These were then used to create a second draft released for public comment in September 2020 and promoted at the CILIP MDG online conference on 10th September.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, each release of the draft was accompanied by promotion via the same channels as the call for volunteers. The feedback was robust for each round with 110 and 117 comments and questions received respectively for each draft.

After each draft was closed for comment, we analyzed the feedback for common themes. We wanted to ensure that the ethos of the comments was reflected in the draft revisions. We also noticed a number of comments that were out of scope. For example, some comments had to do with “how” to implement a code whereas other feedback signaled a perceived lack of empowerment and confidence by catalogers in raising ethical concerns within their institutions. With regards to outreach to the Canadian francophone community, the CFLA-FCAB board partnered with the cataloging section of Fédération des milieux documentaires (FMD) to translate the draft into French. Further feedback was then solicited and received from the



Canadian francophone community and other interested parties. We wrote a third and final draft of the *Code* in the remaining months of 2020 using the feedback provided. The final version was posted on the CESC website in January 2021 and is included in Appendix A of this article.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout 2021, we worked to promote the *Code* to the cataloging community of practice and obtain the endorsement of the *Code* by ALA's new division Core, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), and the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA-FCAB). ALA Core publicly endorsed the *Code* and posted it in its institutional repository in November 2021.<sup>17</sup> CILIP endorsed the *Code* in March 2022, formally announcing its decision in the online journal *Information Professional* in June 2022<sup>18</sup>. In Canada, the CFLA-FCAB approved the creation of a Code of Ethics for Cataloguers Review Working Group in July 2022 and issued a call for a Working Group chair with a three-year term beginning September 1, 2022 and ending August 31, 2025. It plans to hold regional consultation exercises after translating the *Code* into French. Each organization has its own unique structure, stakeholders, and culture within which we had to learn to navigate and negotiate.

From the time that the call for working group members was issued in summer of 2019 to the final version of the *Code* being released, we were highly active in promoting the work and soliciting feedback. We not only reached out to catalogers, but also sought to present at forums attended by public services administrators and managers, acknowledging the systemic support that is required to adopt a cataloging code of ethics and embed it in practice and policy. We also encouraged feedback and engagement with the *Code* by asking the cataloging community to submit use case studies demonstrating challenges faced and practical resolutions. It took two years beginning with the formation of the CESC for the final version of the *Cataloguing Code of*

*Ethics* to be realized, but the process and time taken was required to genuinely engage and gather input from the cataloging communities in three countries with deep colonial histories.

## **Challenges**

As with any group process, we encountered challenges in creating the *Cataloguing Code of Ethics*. Professional ethics are very close to, and sometimes indistinguishable from, personal moral codes, so we understood the value of involving as much of the international cataloging community as we could. We were surprised and excited by the number of volunteers willing to serve on the working groups. However, as we looked at where working group members were employed and the communities they might represent, it became clear that many worked in the United States, with the second largest group from the United Kingdom. After some discussion, we opted to extend the deadline to volunteer on a working group to hopefully increase our Canadian representation. Through targeted announcements to the Canadian community, we were able to increase Canadian membership in the working groups to ensure at least one Canadian participant in each group.

An unfortunate side effect of using Google products to conduct our work was that in the UK, several volunteers from public library authorities had to resign membership of their working group because their IT departments barred the use of Google as a collaborative platform due to perceived security issues.

Most of our volunteers, and all the CESC members, come from countries with interrelated colonial histories. In the second open comment period, and after the document was completed, we heard from a few cataloging community members that the *Code* has an Anglo-American bias. Despite our efforts to ameliorate bias in the document, some communities clearly

perceive a Western slant. We hope that wider international dissemination, possibly via the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), will result in a revised document that reflects a wider world view.

A significant obstacle was one that we have all faced globally since March 2020: the COVID-19 pandemic. The original goal was to release a first draft of the *Code* for comments in April of 2020, but the release was delayed until June 2020. The transition to remote work and the uncertainty and confusion of the early pandemic led to abandoning that self-imposed deadline. In the following weeks and months, we continued to work on the draft while also taking time at each meeting to check in with each other, sympathize, validate each of our struggles, as well as engage each other with compassion.

Finally, an unanticipated dilemma arose regarding the inclusion of case studies in the document. These were originally intended to be part of the *Code* itself with the cataloging community generally considering them a useful component. However, after receiving comments on the first draft, we felt that it would be best to separate the case studies from the main document so that they can be more easily updated and accumulated over time. This decision was founded on our recognition that the cataloging ecosystem is dynamic, so case studies might need to be updated by contributors. After much discussion, we decided to release the final document without case studies and to use a Google form to gather them from the community with the eventual goal of hosting case studies in a document on the CESC website.

We continue to actively solicit case studies and anticipate that more will be submitted as the community of practice becomes more aware of the *Code* and starts to embed it in cataloging policy and practice. However, with relatively few studies submitted to date, the future of this resource bank remains uncertain. Ultimately its fate lies in the hands of the community.

## **Lessons Learned and Future Opportunities**

Bumps in the road have led to lessons learned and opportunities for further development. Feedback at each step in the process highlighted the need for empowerment in addressing ethical issues in cataloging. Both in written feedback and in presentations or webinar settings, participants brought up specific scenarios that they wanted either the CESC or the *Code* to address. However, the *Code* is meant as a high-level framework for guiding decision-making. The intent was not to create a document that could address every ethically-fraught cataloging scenario, nor is it intended as an ethical checklist. Rather, it provides a lens for examining policy and practice within a particular cataloging context. The *Code* is to serve as a resource for those who recognize problems and want to find solutions; however, it was not intended to *be* a solution.

In addition to the specific scenarios, we observed that participants frequently referred to the tension between expected productivity and the additional time required to approach resource description work ethically. This is a common complaint across libraries - often underfunded, understaffed, and overworked, library workers in all disciplines struggle to complete tasks ethically, and this is especially true for catalogers. In addition to the impact of time constraints, a lack of resources and requisite knowledge contribute to less-than-ideal cataloging work. For example, catalogers who do not understand the language of the resources they describe must often sacrifice full, accurate, and enriched description because they lack time or resources, such as translation assistance, dictionaries, and controlled vocabularies. Based on this feedback, we believe that catalogers need to be empowered to talk to the stakeholders in their local

environment, including commercial record vendors who might be able to produce metadata to an agreed specification.

One way to accomplish this is to encourage the development of “soft skills” that facilitate self-advocacy, collaboration, negotiation, communication, and a willingness to engage outside of their department and with the wider cataloging ecosystem. Demonstrating the value of cataloging work can be challenging and time consuming, but is crucial to maximizing and realizing future opportunities within an organization. Advocacy can take many forms, from increased interdepartmental collaboration; participation in international cataloging networks, such as the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC), or national initiatives such as the Jisc Library Hubs and Plan M in the UK; or local, regional special interest networking groups leveraging existing shared interests or expenditure (e.g., purchasing consortiums or ILS user groups).

Conversely, it can be challenging for catalogers to press into places where they have not typically been included. While catalogers will benefit from developing advocacy skills, it is entirely possible that the institutional culture does not typically remember to include catalogers in decision-making regarding systems, resources, or metadata. This exclusion may be due to a lack of understanding and appreciation of the fundamental importance of cataloging work. In particular how metadata - regardless of whether it is created in-house or licensed from vendors - services the complete resources lifecycle from acquisition through to discovery and also facilitates collection development and management.

Another lesson learned from writing the *Code* is that perhaps in order to create more ethical cataloging outcomes, our approach to metadata creation and maintenance needs to change. Traditionally, this work is the realm of the degreed librarian or assistant, but catalogers also work for the companies that provide the cultural, public, education, and research sectors

with systems, resources, and metadata. Heightened engagement with library management, and collaborative working with community user groups, especially those who have been historically marginalized, could lead to a more ethical product. This need for community engagement has proven to be true for work on Indigenous knowledge organization community names and naming in the catalog.<sup>19</sup> There are also opportunities to work with the publishing industry that has been proactive in developing its own classification and categorization standards in pursuit of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). For example, Thema is an international standard and provides natural language terms that can aid the discovery of resources by, and for, underrepresented voices in the global community.<sup>20</sup>

In creating the *Code*, we also learned, or rather acknowledged, a common truth - you cannot please everyone. There was plenty of thoughtful and passionate criticism at every stage of public comment. However, we were encouraged on two fronts. One, many commenters and participants expressed their appreciation for the work done and valued not only the document itself, but the work taking place. Two, at both stages of public comment, the criticism was mainly centered around the introductory information and semantics, and not the content of the statements of ethical principles themselves. The latter observation confirmed for us that we were on the right track, even though framing the document proved challenging. In fact, between the two versions of the *Code* submitted for public comment, the statements of ethical principles did not change significantly. While the wording had changed, the ideas behind each of the statements remained stable. That may be because as we developed the statements of ethical principles, we had to acknowledge the broad influence a variety of factors and agents have on the creation and maintenance of metadata. Figure 1 indicates the various influences on the cataloger and cataloging work.

[Figure 1 near here]

Cataloging work is not done in a vacuum, but is affected by a number of factors, starting with the lived experiences and moral compass of the cataloger, represented in the innermost circle of Figure 1. Individual knowledge and experience (or lack thereof) can be a barrier to recognizing harmful cataloging policies and practices. Additionally, institutional policies and culture have an impact as catalogers must create and maintain metadata within the confines of institutional rules, budget allocations, the pervading cultural ethos, and existing power structures. Catalogers also have a responsibility to their user communities to craft, or source, metadata containing language that their users understand. This responsibility will facilitate intellectual and physical access to resources by or about those communities. Catalogers are also a part of the wider cataloging community of practice, a dynamic environment with standards created and updated at local, national, and international levels. These communities of practice offer authoritative guidance, but must be carefully considered as they are created by humans with their own sets of assumptions and lived experiences that may differ from those of the cataloger and the cataloger's user community. Finally, catalogers must navigate the cultural, legal, and commercial environments in which they work. Metadata is a global commodity and the standards used to create, disseminate, enrich, and maintain it transcend the borders of institutional policies and culture.

## **Conclusion**

Just as an inclusive cataloging record is not created in isolation, neither was the creation of the *Cataloguing Code of Ethics*. It is important to acknowledge that this work happened in a continuum - there was, as noted above, work preceding this, and (we hope) there will be more work to come. The *Code* is a living document that can - and should - change as the cataloging community reviews, adopts, and embeds it in policy and practice.

We are aware that we, the CESC, are not representative of the diversity within the profession, and acknowledge that there are others who need a seat, as well as a voice, at the table. It was important for the CESC to start this work, but it is equally important for others to continue it. We acknowledge that the privileged majority should start to redress the balance in favor of marginalized groups and communities. With this in mind, the original task force should not be the people responsible for updating and maintaining this document - this document is not ours, but a shared resource. This effort is a first, not a final one.

It is our hope that Canada endorses the *Code* and the CESC will present it to IFLA with the backing of Canada, the UK, and the US professional associations, requesting that the document become the basis for an international cataloging code of ethics. If this happens, we hope that IFLA would coordinate the creation and subsequent revision of the *Code* using their networks so that this would include an even wider community of practice than the CESC was able to reach.

As we developed the *Code*, we quickly realized that the principles have a universality for catalogers working not just in libraries but also in art galleries, archives, and museums (GLAM). We also acknowledge that libraries in particular have forged commercial partnerships with companies for the provision of systems, resources, and metadata, and these businesses often employ catalogers to facilitate the delivery of contracted services. Therefore, our commercial



partners should be encouraged to adopt the *Code* and support its development. Collaboratively we can use our business partnerships in pursuit of a common good, resulting in concerted efforts rather than divergent efforts with less impact. Engaging with commercial partners is a logical continuation of the efforts that have been made elsewhere, such as consultation of experts outside the library, both local and international when creating or updating metadata, as was done with the Red River College Indigenous Subject Headings Modification Project.<sup>21</sup>

There is also a realization within the library community that we can and should do more to promote best practices and principles of open metadata in the ecosystems that we help create, such as FAIR<sup>22</sup>. The growth of open access publishing platforms - providing more avenues for greater diversity, equity, and inclusivity (DEI) in publishing outputs - creates further opportunities for catalogers to advocate for the value of their skills and standards in pursuit of DEI, and to encourage recruitment from the communities that are underrepresented in the workforce.

We hope that others will take up the torch, both on a large and small scale, to apply the *Code* in their metadata work. Some have already started doing so, both informally (such as instructors and students including it on reading lists or citing it in classwork) and more formally, in published work. For example, Yon and Willey used the *Code* to evaluate one of their past metadata projects to determine if the work could have been done more ethically.<sup>23</sup> Others have mentioned the *Code* as justification or inspiration for more ethical cataloging standards and practices, such as OCLC's *Reimagine Descriptive Workflows* report<sup>24</sup> and the Trans Metadata Collective's *Metadata Best Practices for Trans and Gender Diverse Resources*.<sup>25</sup> It has also been included in some library institutional collection development policies.<sup>26</sup>

We also feel encouraged by efforts such as translations of the *Code* into other languages, including French, Greek, and Portuguese - not taken on by the CESC, but by other cataloging practitioners who see the value of this work and want to make it more accessible. It is this early engagement with and willingness to adopt the *Code* that encourages us to believe that it will continue to develop and inform policy and practice across geo-political boundaries. These efforts are a worthy tribute to all of the colleagues who were involved in the *Code's* creation and who, as the *Code* journeys on, will hopefully continue to lend their support.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Martin L. Garner, "Information Ethics," in *Information Services Today: An Introduction*, ed. Sandra Hirsh (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 368.

<sup>2</sup> Examples of professional codes of ethics for library workers are: American Library Association, "Code of Ethics," last modified June 29, 2021, <https://www.ala.org/tools/ethics> (accessed July 22, 2022), and CILIP, "CILIP's Ethical Framework," last modified October 2018, [https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.cilip.org.uk/resource/resmgr/cilip/policy/new\\_ethical\\_framework/cilip\\_s\\_et\\_hical\\_framework.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.cilip.org.uk/resource/resmgr/cilip/policy/new_ethical_framework/cilip_s_et_hical_framework.pdf) (accessed July 22, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Sheila Bair, "Toward a Code of Ethics for Cataloging," *Technical Services Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (2005): 13-26; Elizabeth Shoemaker, "No One Can Whistle a Symphony: Seeking a Catalogers' Code of Ethics," *Knowledge Organization* 42, no. 5 (2015): 353-57.

<sup>4</sup> Bair, "Toward a Code of Ethics for Catalogers," 14.

<sup>5</sup> Jana Brubaker, "Ambiguous Authorship and Uncertain Authenticity: A Cataloger's Dilemma," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (2002): 20.

<sup>6</sup> ALCTS, "Guidelines for ALCTS Members to Supplement the American Library Association Code of Ethics," last modified February 7, 1994, <https://www.ala.org/alcts/resources/alaethics> (accessed July 22, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> Bair, "Toward a Code of Ethics for Catalogers."

<sup>8</sup> Shoemaker, "No One Can Whistle a Symphony," 356.

<sup>9</sup> Hope Olson, *The Power to Name, Locating the Limits of Subject Representation in Libraries*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Carol Robenstine Miller, “CaMMS Forum: Cooperatively Conscientious Cataloging,” last modified May 14, 2018, <https://alcts.ala.org/news/2018/mw-camms-forum/> (accessed July 22, 2022).

<sup>11</sup> An example of one of the emails can be found here: <https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/wa-jisc.exe?A2=ind1904&L=CIG-E-FORUM&O=D&X=987F95129B88F00C5B&Y=janedan61%40gmail.com&P=2205>

<sup>12</sup> Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee, “A Code of Ethics for Catalogers,” last modified June 2022, <https://sites.google.com/view/cataloging-ethics/home> (accessed July 22, 2022).

<sup>13</sup> To view the final working group reports, please visit: <https://sites.google.com/view/cataloging-ethics/home/working-groups?authuser=0>

<sup>14</sup> Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee, “Cataloging Ethics: The Force Awakens,” ALCTS Competencies & Education for a Career in Cataloging Interest Group meeting, last modified June 10, 2020, [https://ala-events.zoom.us/rec/play/uJwpJbv9qz43G9ySswSDU\\_YrW9TpfaOs1XNM-vIJyUnnUCNRYFugNbNAY-vJ11TZLvvpSnPgOWu0s6oK?startTime=1591803735000&x\\_zm\\_rtaid=eB8YpgrzREuXv7oHn4LsdQ.1594496687834.008775092dc6beaf700635c7d59d9051&x\\_zm\\_rhtaid=889](https://ala-events.zoom.us/rec/play/uJwpJbv9qz43G9ySswSDU_YrW9TpfaOs1XNM-vIJyUnnUCNRYFugNbNAY-vJ11TZLvvpSnPgOWu0s6oK?startTime=1591803735000&x_zm_rtaid=eB8YpgrzREuXv7oHn4LsdQ.1594496687834.008775092dc6beaf700635c7d59d9051&x_zm_rhtaid=889) (accessed July 22, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> A recording of the session can be found at: CILIP Metadata & Discovery Group, “A Code of Ethics for Cataloguers: Committee Progress and Group Discussion,” last modified September 22, 2020, <https://youtu.be/2ZoOqHWYKB4> (accessed July 22, 2022.)

<sup>16</sup> Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee, “Cataloguing Code of Ethics,” last modified January 2021, [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1IBz7nXQPfr3U1P6Xiar9cLAkzoNX\\_P9fq7eHvzfSIZ0/edit#heading=h.32363oytf1yq](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1IBz7nXQPfr3U1P6Xiar9cLAkzoNX_P9fq7eHvzfSIZ0/edit#heading=h.32363oytf1yq) (accessed July 22, 2022). Also available in the American Library Association institutional repository at <https://alair.ala.org/handle/11213/16716>.

<sup>17</sup> Jenny Levine, “Core Endorses the Cataloguing Code of Ethics,” last modified November 10, 2021, <https://alacorenews.org/2021/11/10/core-endorses-the-cataloguing-code-of-ethics/> (accessed July 22, 2022).

<sup>18</sup> *Information Professional*, “Cataloguing ethics code backed by CILIP,” June 2022, 6, <https://content.yudu.com/web/43mce/0A43mcf/InfoPro37June22/html/index.html?page=6&origin=reader> (accessed July 22, 2022).

<sup>19</sup> For example, see Xwi7xwa Library, “Indigenous Knowledge Organization,” <https://xwi7xwa.library.ubc.ca/collections/indigenous-knowledge-organization/> (accessed July 22, 2022).

<sup>20</sup> For more information about Thema, see <https://www.editeur.org/206/About-Thema/>

<sup>21</sup> A link to a presentation on this project can be found here: Marilyn Cameron, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a\\_-G9MNBL6E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_-G9MNBL6E) (accessed July 22, 2022).

<sup>22</sup> See *FAIR Principles*, <https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/> (accessed July 22, 2022).

<sup>23</sup> Angela Yon and Eric Willey, “Using the Cataloguing Code of Ethics Principles for a Retrospective Project Analysis,” *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (2022): 112-37.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01639374.2021.2012310>

<sup>24</sup> Rachel L. Frick and Merrilee Proffitt, “Reimagine Descriptive Workflows: A Community-informed Agenda for Reparative and Inclusive Descriptive Practice,” OCLC Research Report, April 2022, <https://www.oclc.org/research/publications/2022/reimagine-descriptive-workflows.html> (accessed July 22, 2022).

<sup>25</sup> The Trans Metadata Collective, “Metadata Best Practices for Trans and Gender Diverse Resources,” June 22, 2022, <https://zenodo.org/record/6686841#.YsivXHbMK4Q> (accessed July 22, 2022).

<sup>26</sup> University of Wales, Trinity, Saint David, “Collection Development Policy - Cataloguing Code of Ethics,” <https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/help-and-support/support-for-staff/collection-development-policy/cataloguing-code-of-ethics/#:~:text=The%20term%20cataloguing%20ethics%20is,in%20cataloguing%20or%20metadata%20positions> (accessed July 22, 2022).

## Appendix A

# CATALOGUING CODE OF ETHICS

## Part 1 - Introduction

### a. Background

The Cataloguing Code of Ethics was created by the Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee, consisting of members from cataloguing communities in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, with the assistance of Working Group members from the international cataloguing community (see membership lists at the end of this document).

This effort to produce a cataloguing ethics document is in response to a clear interest and need for direction on cataloguing ethics expressed through Cataloging and Metadata Management Section (CaMMS) Forums at American Library Association (ALA) Midwinter Meeting and Annual Conference in 2017 and 2018. The CaMMS Executive Board formed the Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee to create a dynamic document on cataloguing ethics (defined in section b. of the *Introduction*) that embodies the collective experiences and wisdom of the cataloguing community of practice. The completed document would consist of ethical statements based on principles and values identified by the Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee and the Working Groups, with guidance and examples of best practice, that can be shared across the cataloguing community.

The six-member Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee includes representatives from CaMMS, the Metadata and Discovery Group (MDG) (formerly Cataloguing and Indexing Group (CIG)) of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) in the United Kingdom, and the Cataloguing and Metadata Standards Committee (CMSC) of the Canadian Federation of Library Associations-Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèque in Canada. Work on the cataloguing ethics document began in February 2019, culminating in the release of a first draft Cataloguing Code of Ethics in June 2020 and a second draft in August 2020. The final version of the document was completed in January 2021.

Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee website: <https://sites.google.com/view/cataloging-ethics/home>

### b. Definitions

The term *cataloguing ethics* is defined as a set of principles and values that provide an intentional decision-making framework for those who work in cataloguing or metadata positions.

A subset of critical librarianship, *critical cataloguing* focuses on understanding and changing how knowledge organisations codify systems of oppression.

The term *cataloguer* is used as shorthand for referring to anyone involved in cataloguing and metadata work.

### c. Scope

As cataloguers, we have significant influence over how information resources are represented through the choices we make. This ethics document provides a framework for approaching cataloguing work that will be a useful tool for practitioners, employers, standards' developers, vendors, students, and educators when ethical situations arise.

Metadata creation is an ongoing process involving work that is wide-ranging, collaborative, and in a constant state of change. Tension between change and status quo creates opportunity to confront ethical issues within our community of practice.

Cataloguing standards and practices are currently and historically characterised by racism, white supremacy, colonialism, othering, and oppression. We recognise that neither cataloguing nor cataloguers are neutral, and we endorse critical cataloguing as an approach to our shared work with the goal of making metadata inclusive and resources accessible. To create systemic change, cataloguers require institutional support. We accept that every workplace is different, and responses to ethical situations are necessarily framed by those local contexts.

We acknowledge systemic barriers to inclusion and recognise that while individual ethical practices are essential, they are not sufficient. The ethical statements listed in Part 2 are intended to inform our professional practice and provide ethical guidance. The statements are based upon fundamental principles and values in cataloguing work, identified by the Cataloguing Ethics Steering Committee and the Working Groups:

- Access to resources and metadata
- Acknowledging bias
- Advocacy
- Collaboration
- Critically applying standards
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Education and training
- Respect for agent privacy and preferences
- Responsibility and transparency
- Understanding and meeting user needs

A separate document will contain case studies that further illustrate the statements by showing how colleagues have negotiated or could negotiate ethical issues.

## Part 2 - Statements of Ethical Principles

We will use these ethical statements, listed here in no particular order of importance, to guide and improve our cataloguing practice:

1. We catalogue resources in our collections with the end-user in mind to facilitate access and promote discovery.
2. We commit to describing resources without discrimination whilst respecting the privacy and preferences of their associated agents.
3. We acknowledge that we bring our biases to the workplace; therefore, we strive to overcome personal, institutional, and societal prejudices in our work.

4. We recognise that interoperability and consistent application of standards help our users find and access materials. However, all standards are biased; we will approach them critically and advocate to make cataloguing more inclusive.
5. We support efforts to make standards and tools financially, intellectually, and technologically accessible to all cataloguers, and developed with evidence-based research and stakeholder input.
6. We take responsibility for our cataloguing decisions and advocate for transparency in our institutional practices and policies.
7. We collaborate widely to support the creation, distribution, maintenance, and enrichment of metadata in various environments and jurisdictions.
8. We insist on diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. We promote education, training, equitable pay, and a fair work environment for everyone who catalogues so that they can continue to support search and discovery.
9. We advocate for the value of cataloguing work within our organisations and with external partners.
10. We work with our user communities to understand their needs in order to provide relevant and timely services.

*Final version - January 2021*

*Updated in September 2022 to correct dates in the second paragraph of the Introduction*

**Created by the Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee:**

Beth Shoemaker (co-chair) - Emory University  
Karen Snow (co-chair) - Dominican University, School of Information Studies  
May Chan - University of Toronto  
Jane Daniels - Cardiff Metropolitan University  
Sarah Furger - Joliet Public Library  
Diane Pennington - University of Strathclyde, Department of Computer and Information Sciences

**In consultation with the following Working Groups:**

Access Scope & Infrastructure Working Group

Miranda Calhoon  
Keri Cascio  
Ahava Cohen  
Carly Diab  
Maryanne Kempthorne  
Sol Maria Lopez



Maurine McCourry  
Christine Megowan  
Jane Rosario

Authority Work Working Group

Rebecca Belford  
Emily Boss  
Abby Dover  
Netanel Ganin  
Ngoc-My Guidarelli  
Linda Ling  
Lisa Lorenzo  
Carol Miller  
R. Antonio Muñoz Gómez  
Gretchen Neidhardt  
Naomi Shiraishi  
Catherine Smith  
Christine F. Smith  
Jonathan Tuttle  
Luiza Wainer  
Eric Willey  
Laura Wright

Classification Working Group

Kelly Buehler  
Alonzo Crawford  
Marco De Petrillo  
Violet Fox  
Susanna French  
Iris Godwin  
Margaret Joyce  
Eve Lacey  
Puck Malamud  
Amanda Ros  
Juniper Starr  
Michael Stewart

Resource Discovery & Accessibility Working Group

Misty Alvero  
Hazel Kearns-Rees  
Alissa McCulloch  
Ann Myers  
Jessica O'Neil  
Bonnie Parks  
Elizabeth Peters  
Annick Stein  
Emily Sugerman  
Susan Vandale

Staffing/Work Conditions Working Group

Tammie Busch  
Leslie Collie  
Wanda Gunther  
Sarah Hovde  
Julene Jones  
Caroline Kent  
Rachel Newlin  
Elsa Ouvrard-Prettol  
Peter Rolla  
Lisa Romano  
Karen Sigler  
Ryan Vernon  
Travis L. Wagner

Subject Headings Working Group

Allison Bailund  
Paromita Biswas  
Chloe Bragg  
Christine Clayton  
Jennie-Claire Crate  
Christine Jacobs  
Rhonda Jessup  
Timothy Keller  
Lisa Lindell  
Joanne MacDonald  
Tammy Moore  
Su Su Myint  
Athena Salaba  
Merle Stevens  
Marcy Strong  
Kelly Swickard

Appendix B

**Cataloging Ethics Working Groups - Expectations and Deliverables**  
June 2019

**Goals**

Each Working Group, within the timeline specified below, should share ideas and produce a report containing suggestions on how the Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee should approach the topic assigned to the Working Group in a cataloging ethics best practices document (i.e., a Code of Ethics for Catalogers). In addition to these suggestions, each group should produce evidence (either through case studies, cataloging literature, or both) for why these suggestions should be included in the cataloging ethics best practices document.

**Working “Cataloging Ethics” Definition**

The Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee has devised the following definition of “cataloging ethics” to help guide the Working Groups in their work:

*Cataloging ethics are the principles and values that provide an intentional decision-making framework for those who work in cataloging or metadata positions.*

### **Working Group Leaders**

Each Working Group will have an elected leader supported by a liaison from the Steering Committee.

Leaders will perform the following duties:

- Regularly communicate with the Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee about the activities of the Working Group
- Schedule and lead virtual meetings with the Working Group (minimum of one virtual meeting per month - more, if needed)
- Determine and delegate the tasks of Working Group members
- Confer with other Working Group Leaders, as needed
- Collaborate with the Working Group to produce and submit a report of the group's findings and suggestions to the Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee by November 1, 2019.

### **Timeline**

August 1, 2019 - Working Groups convene officially to begin their work

November 1, 2019 - Working Groups will have a draft report of their conclusions (and other information specified below under "Deliverables") to present to the Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee for review.

### **Reading list**

A list of optional cataloging ethics readings is provided in a separate document, accessible via the Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee website: <https://sites.google.com/view/cataloging-ethics/home>

We encourage Working Group members to gather and read as much information about their topic area as possible as they complete their work.

All Working Group members should read the following ethics documents for background/reference:

ALA's Code of Ethics (United States, 2008): <http://www.ala.org/tools/ethics>  
CILIP's Ethical Framework (United Kingdom, 2018): <https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/ethics>  
CFLA-FCAB Code of Ethics (Canada, 2018): <http://cfla-fcab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Code-of-ethics.pdf>

### **Deliverables**

By November 1, 2019, send a draft report of your Working Group's suggestions, conclusions, evidence, bibliography, frameworks (if applicable), and any other information that your group thinks is helpful, to the Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee chairs, Beth Shoemaker ([elizabeth.shoemaker@emory.edu](mailto:elizabeth.shoemaker@emory.edu)) and Karen Snow ([ksnow@dom.edu](mailto:ksnow@dom.edu)).

Once the Steering Committee has read your group's document, they may require further information or clarification. Ultimately, the Steering Committee would like to have a draft of the cataloging ethics best practices document completed by June 2020.

### **Code of Conduct**

In order to achieve our objectives, the Ethics Steering Committee and all Working Groups are expected to comply with the following Code of Conduct for group work:

1. Please strive to attend all meetings punctually sending apologies to the Leader for necessary absences.
2. Please prepare for meetings by reading agendas, papers and any emails.
3. If you can't attend meetings please consider providing your input in written form and sending this to the other group members in advance.
4. Contact the Leader before the meeting if you need to clarify anything.
5. There is an expectation that you will make a full and fair contribution to the work of the group.
6. When you agree to undertake a task please try to work to the agreed deadline.
7. Please let Group members know if circumstances prevent you from doing so.
8. Participate fully and positively in meetings and collaborative tasks:
  - Listen to what others have to say and keep an open mind
  - Treat other members of the group with courtesy and respect their opinions even if you do not necessarily agree with them
  - You have the right, to challenge others' opinions but please do it in a courteous, non-aggressive way
  - Try to make your contributions concise and relevant

These expected behaviours reinforce the values enshrined in our Professional Codes of Ethics as Information Professionals:

- We treat each other with respect and collegiality, valuing all contributions and fostering mutual confidence to offer thoughts, experience & knowledge to fulfill our shared goals
- We agree to give communication from each person our full attention and to listen actively, being mindful that the sum of the parts is greater than the whole
- We strive to enter this work with an open mind, understanding that successful shared outcomes require each individual to be flexible about their own opinions.