Harvard Library Metadata Acquisition Policy and Process

The Harvard Library Policy On Open Metadata instituted by the Harvard Library Board in 2012 is short and simple:

“The Harvard Library provides open access to library metadata, subject to legal and privacy factors. In particular, the Library makes available its own catalog metadata under appropriate broad use licenses. The Library Board is responsible for interpreting this policy, resolving disputes concerning its interpretation and application, and modifying it as necessary.”

The policy is a continuation and extension of Harvard’s long-standing policy of acquiring only metadata that can be reused, repurposed, and shared.

When new sources of bibliographic metadata are considered, either as stand-alone purchases or together with the licensing or purchase of content, the terms of use for the metadata must be examined. This applies both to batches of records and to new Z39.50 partners or other channels through which bibliographic metadata can enter Harvard systems. If the terms conflict with Harvard Library Policy, an attempt must be made to negotiate with the vendor for changes to the terms. The memorandum of understanding in the appendix below describes Harvard’s position on metadata.

All efforts should be made to come to agreement with the vendor that there are no restrictions on use of the metadata. If agreement cannot be reached, the library can pursue other options for creating or acquiring the metadata or can apply to the Library Board for an exemption to the open metadata policy.

All bibliographic metadata (except OCLC records) added to Alma must include a distinctive 040 $a code so that its distribution can be controlled. Codes for new dataloads must be added to the scripts that process exports from Alma so that the records will be managed correctly. If the Library Board approves an exemption to the open metadata policy for a particular set of metadata, the 040 $a value for that set must be mapped to a code in the 906 $0 or either RES-C (not for commercial reuse) or RES-D (may not be exported at all—even to report holdings to OCLC). Either of these codes will cause the records to be excluded from Harvard’s “bibdata” open metadata set.

A copy of terms of use associated with acquired metadata, whether or not any restrictions apply, must be provided to E-Resource Licensing Specialist in Harvard Library Technical Services prior to the dataload process.

Appendix: Memorandum of Understanding with Metadata Vendors

Harvard University has a strong commitment to open access. Correspondingly, open access to data and metadata are cornerstone values of the Harvard Library. Metadata about Harvard library collections are made available to users inside and outside the university through catalogs programming interfaces and bulk distributions of metadata about Harvard’s collections.

Once added to Harvard databases, metadata is routinely merged with metadata from other sources, enhanced, and localized to meet Harvard needs and to best represent Harvard Library’s collection. The metadata is continually subject to change from authority control processes and database maintenance. It is this customized, continually maintained metadata about its collections that Harvard makes available.

Harvard does not sell metadata nor does it make purchased metadata sets available in the same extent provided by the vendor or in the unaltered form provided by the vendor. Distribution of metadata about Harvard’s collections is not intended to substitute for the vendor’s own metadata product.