

# Collection Description Policy

Policy Number: PCY21/012

Approval date: (17 October 2024)

<b>Document type</b>	Policy
<b>Policy number [or related policy]</b>	PCY21/012
<b>Version</b>	Version 2.0
<b>Date of approval</b>	Approved by Assistant Director General – Collection on 17 October 2024
<b>Former reference</b>	N/A
<b>Policy Owner</b>	Director – Collection Management
<b>Section owner</b>	Collection Management – Collection
<b>Date of next review</b>	30 June 2026
<b>Audience</b>	Library staff and Public
<b>Related documents</b>	See 7. Related policy documents and guidance
<b>Keywords</b>	“collection description”, “metadata”
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## Document Tracking

Version no.	Date of approval	Approval Authority	Revisions made
1.0	9 July 2021	NLA Executive	Finalised
2.0	17 October 2024	ADG, Collection	Content revised, new template

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## 1. Purpose

Under the *National Library Act 1960*, the National Library of Australia collects documentary resources, 'particularly relating to Australia and the Australian people' so Australians can discover, learn and create new knowledge, now and in the future.

This policy outlines the key principles that underpin sustainable description activities and practices. It aims to ensure material in the National Library collections is effectively managed and controlled, offering the widest possible access to its diverse voices and stories.

## 2. Scope

The policy applies to all formats of library material, described by National Library staff or received through other sources (such as creators, donors, publishers and vendors), and managed in various library management systems for discovery via the National Library catalogue. It also supports the National Library's digitisation program, noting appropriate description is integral to the delivery of digitised content.

The Collection Description Policy heads a suite of internal procedural and guideline documents, providing the over-arching guidance that directs the National Library's approach to description.

## 3. Definitions

Term	Definition
<b>Archival materials</b>	Materials created, accumulated and/or used by an individual/family/organisation in the conduct of their affairs and preserved because of their continuing value. They most often consist of aggregations of largely unpublished documents.
<b>Authority record</b>	Metadata that contains a single form of name for people, organisations, meetings, titles and subjects that draw together variant forms of the name and to facilitate consistency in catalogue records.
<b>Bibliographic metadata</b>	Data elements such as titles, names, subjects, notes, publication information, and the physical attributes of an item.
<b>Catalogue record</b>	The compilation of bibliographic metadata and authority control that enable identification and access to an individual entry or resource in a library catalogue.
<b>Creator</b>	A person or organisation who creates, produces, assembles or makes library material.
<b>Description</b>	Metadata that describes the authorship, content and arrangement of collections or items including bibliographic, subject and authority data. This is usually in the form of catalogue records and finding aids.
<b>Donor</b>	A person or organisation offering library materials for inclusion in the collection.
<b>Finding Aid/EAD  (ISAD(G))</b>	Encoded Archival Description (EAD) is an XML (Extensible Mark-up Language) standard for encoding archival finding aids, maintained by the Technical Subcommittee for Encoded Archival Standards of the Society of American Archivists, in partnership with the Library of Congress.  General International Standard Archival Description (2nd edition, 2000), The International Council on Archives (ICA).

Term	Definition
<b>Fit for purpose</b>	The minimum level of description necessary for system requirements and to facilitate discoverability of resources.
<b>LCSH</b>	LCSH (Library of Congress Subject Headings) is a controlled vocabulary, or thesaurus, of subject headings maintained by the United States Library of Congress, for use in bibliographic (catalogue) records.
<b>MARC</b>	MARC (Machine-Readable Cataloging) is a metadata encoding and transmission schema for the description of items catalogued by libraries.
<b>Metadata</b>	Information about an object or other resource that describes characteristics such as the content, quality format, location etc.
<b>Publisher</b>	A person or company that prepares and prints books, magazines, newspapers or electronic products and makes them available to the public, i.e. produces published material.
<b>RDA</b>	RDA (Resource Description and Access) is the current standard for descriptive cataloguing. It provides data elements, instructions, and guidelines on recording the contents and formulating bibliographic metadata for description and access to information resources covering all types of content and media held in libraries, museums and archives.
<b>Sustainable description</b>	Meets the minimum needs of library users now and in the future. Enables scope for further enrichment of metadata through automated processes when available.
<b>Vendor</b>	Refers to a third party, other than a publisher, that sells content and supporting services specifically to libraries.

## 4. Policy statement

The National Library of Australia seeks to:

- sufficiently describe collection material using the most appropriate descriptive model to support collection discovery and access;
- use appropriate cultural and inclusive language and terminology, with active and responsive reparation to amend harmful or offensive terms in existing descriptions;
- enhance searching and discovery via links to summaries, finding aids and content within metadata records when available;
- follow international, national and local metadata standards and record metadata consistently to aid resource exposure and data sharing;
- utilise description and metadata created by others where possible in preference to re-creating it ourselves;
- pursue continual business improvement opportunities, developing more innovative and efficient ways to describe the National Library's collections.

## 4.1 Reparative and inclusive description

The National Library is committed to reparative description and inclusive cataloguing practices for First Nations content and that of other minority and/or disadvantaged communities.

Description of First Nations collection material is guided by the Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) Protocol. The National Library also actively collaborates with the broader library sector to develop protocols and continually improve culturally appropriate approaches to describing Indigenous collection material. The National Library adheres to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library, Information and Resource Network's *ATSILIRN protocols for libraries, archives and information services*.

Reparative description addresses bias and harmful or offensive language that exists in legacy descriptions. When First Nations content is identified, records are enhanced where the description is potentially culturally inappropriate, as well as to include cultural sensitivity notes, Indigenous language (Austlang) codes, geographic and subject terms and creator names.

The National Library takes a proactive approach to ensure description is respectful and minimises harm while promoting effective representation and discovery. When existing description cannot be changed (for example, the title of a published work), appropriate cultural safety messages and contextual information are added to the records.

Increasingly, long-established thesauri no longer have suitable terminology for many concepts, especially when considering equity, diversity and inclusion. The National Library actively utilises a variety of subject vocabularies to facilitate access and discovery.

## 4.2 Descriptive metadata

This policy focuses on descriptive metadata, which is the information about material that enables its identification, discovery and use.

In looking for fit-for-purpose and cost-effective approaches to describing and making the collection accessible, the National Library has made pragmatic decisions to maximise resources.

Each item is discoverable via a catalogue record, with individual item-level records created for most single published materials, and original archival material or collections comprising multiple parts having additional hierarchical description via a finding aid.

Finding Aids are also increasingly used for other types of material with multiple parts as a streamlined method to describe items with common characteristics.

The decision on level and approach is determined by a number of factors:

- Efficiency
- Effectiveness of the description in enabling discovery and use
- Relationship of the components and whether they lend themselves to a collection based descriptive approach.

RDA is the preferred format for new or original bibliographic item records. If a record is available in non-RDA then it is acceptable not to upgrade. MARC 21 is the current format standard for structuring bibliographic and authority records.

ISAD (G) Encoded Archival Description (EAD) encoded finding aid is the preferred format for hierarchical collection-based description. Where a listing is provided or created with the collection material, it is acceptable to ingest that subset and make it available.

### 4.3 Third party metadata

The National Library chooses to utilise externally generated metadata where available, or to cooperate in metadata creation where possible to maximise the value and effectiveness of metadata creation activities by staff and to ensure that collections are described, discoverable and available in an efficient, equitable and timely way.

The National Library obtains and reuses descriptive and bibliographic metadata from a range of sources including creators, donors, publishers and vendors. A number of overseas vendors supply MARC catalogue records with publications and archived databases that the Library acquires. In general, there are no enhancements made to these records. Publisher-created National eDeposit (NED) records are accepted with little amendment.

## 5. Key roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Director, Collection Management	Policy owner
Assistant Director General, Collection	Policy approval

## 6. Review

The Director, Collection Management will review this policy every two years from the date of effect.

## 7. Related policy documents and guidance

- [National Library of Australia Corporate Plan 2024-25](#)
- [National Library Act 1960](#)
- [Copyright Act 1968 \(Cwth\)](#)
- Sustainable Description for Digitisation Guidelines (2024)
- Guidelines for Australian First Nations collection description (2024) - draft
- [ATSILIRN protocols for libraries, archives and information services](#)
- [Guidelines for First Nations collection description / Tui Raven](#)
- Collecting Strategy 2024-2028
- [Digital Strategy 2024-2028](#)
- Digitisation Strategy 2024-2028
- [Engagement Strategy 2023-2026](#)

## 8. Commonwealth resources and legislation

This procedure supports the NLA to implement the [National Library Act 1960 \(Cth\)](#), notably subsections 6(b) (*make library material in the national collection available*) and 6(c) (*provision of library services, including bibliographical services*).