

# 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 Cataloging 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 Cataloging 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.

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*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