

**NACO: a cooperative model
for building and maintaining a shared name authority database**

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More than 20 years have passed since the Name Authority Cooperative was conceived¹. Although not the most senior of cooperative cataloguing initiatives hosted by the Library of Congress – that distinction is held by the Cooperative Online Serials program (CONSER) dating from 1972 – NACO has emerged in terms of size of membership and extent of production as the largest endeavor of its nature in the history of bibliographic control.

NACO, which began with an agreement with but a single institution in 1976, now encompasses some 395 institutions that, during the past quarter century, have collectively developed and maintained a database of more than 2,000,000 authority records. The NACO family of libraries is expanding at a rate of about 50 new members annually, while the number of new and updated name and series authority records is currently growing by nearly 220,000 records each year². The strategic goal established for the NACO program is to enlarge the program by a minimum of 10% annually from 2003 to 2006. Indeed, with a membership now including institutions from all but four of the 50 states comprising the U.S. and including 43 institutions in 16 countries within Europe, Africa, Oceania, Asia, and Latin America, we no longer are actively recruiting new members. Libraries seek out and apply for NACO membership on their own in such quantities that it has recently become necessary to implement policy of “managed growth”, which I will describe later.

How does one explain the popularity of and commitment to this partnership focused on promoting the concept and reality of authority control?

First and foremost was the gradual recognition that the utility of the catalogue – any catalogue – depends on uniform and unique headings as access points to bibliographic data and that the national library by itself could not provide controlled headings for all materials of interest to the library community as a whole. When NACO was first offered as a cooperative vehicle to achieve increased authority control, there was frankly some resistance to joining on the part of many libraries. Administrators, in particular, often felt that creating authority records at the local level was a luxury that their cataloguing departments could not afford. And, at that time, libraries that did undertake to produce

authority records often would limit them to cases of name headings that required cross references. In addition, to minimize the expense of authority records when created, cataloguers were often instructed to establish only authorized headings and variants, to limit research to materials in hand whenever possible, and to omit mention of citations or other data now routinely provided.

The generally skeptical attitude about the cost-effectiveness of name authority work prevailing in the mid-1970's put a great deal of pressure on NACO to streamline process and procedures. As a result, the original model for this cooperative program has changed considerably over the years. For example, when NACO first began to recruit members, an interested institution was required to send a staff member to the Library of Congress for two-weeks of training, at the institutions's own expense, with that person in turn providing local training to others at the institution. Today, NACO training has been condensed to a five-day session, and prospective members can usually reduce training expenses by arranging for local onsite training of up to 12 of cataloguers by selecting from among a cadre of nearly 20 regional trainers scattered throughout the U. S. who have been recruited and prepared to provide this training. In addition, documentation was re-written to make it more "user-friendly", and some of the standards were relaxed to encourage "cataloguer judgement" – for example, when the specifications for information recorded in the "sources found" note were better defined and simplified regarding form and style.

Mark Watson summarized the case for library management support of cooperative programs such as NACO in his paper "Top Five Reasons Why Library Administrators Should Support Participation in the Program for Cooperative Cataloging."³ Here in short are the arguments that Watson put forth in advocating cooperation:

T First, he points out that "the very act of considering membership is an excellent opportunity for catalogers, their public services colleagues, and library administrators to ... set aside some time to consider the big picture, to think about why cataloging is performed, what makes it valuable, what is essential and what is not, and whether it makes sense to approach it in a cooperative environment like the [Program for Cooperative Cataloging]" which hosts NACO.

T Next, he asserts that " that the act of participation imposes a greater discipline ... that can pave the way for better original and upgraded copy cataloging, higher morale, and potentially higher production and productivity...."

T Thirdly, Watson contends that "an investment in the overhead necessary for participation pays dividends

that, in a short period of time, more than exceed the costs”, a point that most library managers have come to appreciate.

T A closely related argument follows: “ cataloging in general is labor_intensive to begin with and, when the effort is shared according to mutually agreed_upon standards, becomes less so for everyone.”

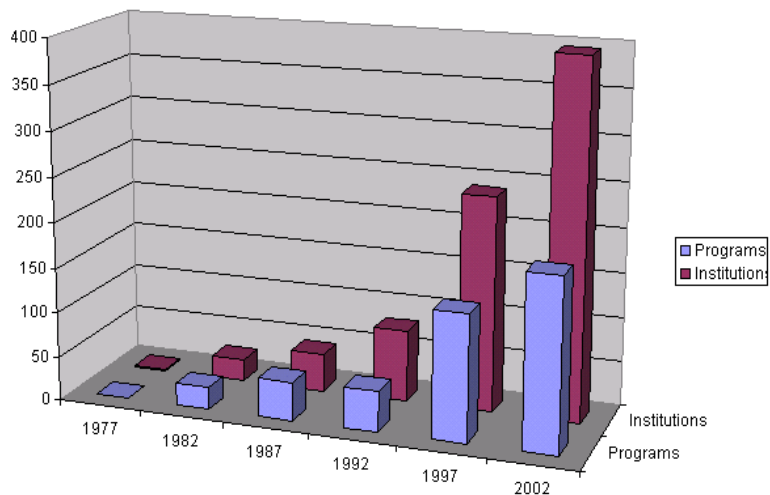
T And, finally, pointing out that those who help others in fact help themselves, he concludes: “... it’s too expensive **not** to participate __ the more participants, the lower the overall cost for everyone.”

In short, NACO is now perceived as the “golden opportunity” to add more authority records to the distributed national and international databases, and to accomplish more dependable, timely, and efficient cataloging, with better problem_solving through networking and access to expert training. As Brian Schottlaender, then associate university librarian at the University of California, Los Angeles, wrote to me: “Our attempting to create the same level of authority control we (and our patrons!) currently enjoy in our local database without benefit of the [NACO] file would be so cost-prohibitive as to be virtually unthinkable.”⁴

While efforts to make NACO participation an affordable activity were unfolding and while library managers were beginning to change their attitudes about participating in cooperative cataloging programs, other forces were also reinforcing a new view about the value of authority control and the need to invest staff resources in performing such work. As large bibliographic utilities such as OCLC and RLG flourished, users more fully appreciated the structure of controlled access to information. Reflecting the “explosion” of publications in a wide variety of languages, scripts, and formats, these databases grew at such a pace that it became increasingly obvious that controlled access would entail creation of authority records far beyond what any national library might itself produce. The NACO program proved to be the logical focus of an ever increasing attention to the need for an organized and coherent response to the proliferation of bibliographic information.

As a result of the successful efforts to make NACO membership an affordable venture and of the increasing acceptance of the necessity of authority work, NACO has experienced dramatic growth during the past decade. Last

year, NACO libraries contributed 64% of all the total name authority production distributed by the Library of Congress, while LC staff contributed 36%. About the same ratio applies to the output of authority records, where last year NACO libraries created about 12,000 in comparison to 8,000 produced by LC staff.



To become a partner in NACO, an institution must be selected for membership in the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC), since NACO operates within the PCC as one of its four core activities.⁵ Any kind of institution may join the PCC, as the program's membership is comprised of libraries of various sizes and types. About half of the PCC's current participants are academic libraries, with the remainder coming from public, governmental, and special libraries. Vendors may also participate.

Since this is an international conference, it might be of interest to identify those institutions outside the U. S. that are current NACO members: British Library; Cambridge University Library; El Colegio de México; English Short Title Catalogue; Hong Kong University of Science and Technology; Memorial University of Newfoundland; National Art Library (Great Britain); National Library of Canada; National Library of New Zealand; National Library of Scotland; National Library of South Africa; National Library of Wales; Oxford University Library (The Bodleian); Singapore Integrated Library Automated Services (SILAS); Trinity College (University of Dublin); Universidade de San Andrés (Argentina); Universidade de São Paulo (Brazil); University of Regina; University of South Africa; University of Strathclyde (Scotland); University of Toronto-Hebraica Project (Canada); Wellcome Library (London). In addition, there are 17 South African libraries, one from Hong Kong, two from Canada, and one from Italy (Unione romana biblioteche) participating in four of the NACO funnel projects.

Last year, the international partners (Intco) contributed 18.6% of NACO's total contribution. International NACO members have also been responsible for a relatively high percentage of updates to established headings. In terms of numbers, last year the Intco partners contributed 21,386 new name authority records and revised 7,513 existing records.⁶

The benefits of membership help to explain the popularity of the PCC, whether domestic or abroad, and all of them potentially apply to NACO contributors:

- Members participate in the programs of the largest cooperative name authority conglomerate in the world and thereby help to shape the future of cataloging practice.
- Members participate in the development and review of national and international standards designed to create more reliable and cost_efficient authority control.
- Members enjoy reduction in the cost of cataloging operations by increasing the number of authority records that can be used with little or no local editing.
- Members also benefit from a reduction in the amount of authority creation and maintenance that must be done locally by increasing the number of authority records contributed through NACO.
- Members are authorized to update authority records, including those created by national libraries.
- Members receive staff training by experienced NACO trainers, at minimal cost, and are eligible to participate in a variety of seminars and workshops developed for program partners.
- Staff of member institutions interact with colleagues at national libraries and other institutions through numerous meetings and electronic discussion lists.
- Members receive free_of_charge training and cataloging documentation provided to NACO participants.
- Members benefit from a reduction in the cataloging burden on a local scale through collective efforts on a global scale. And, finally,

NAR contributions by International Partners

New NARs--FY2002
Intco as percentage of PCC



- Members directly influence the objectives, policies, and standards applicable to name authority work through service on standing committees and a wide variety of task forces that are created to improve NACO effectiveness.

To enjoy these benefits, libraries seeking NACO membership must be able to meet certain requirements. Firstly, and most important, they must follow the standards established for the formation of headings and cross-references and to supply other data as required. Essentially, the standards stipulated are AACR2 and MARC21, both widely applied within the Anglo-American community and with an increasing number of users elsewhere.

Secondly, they need to belong to a bibliographic utility for record contribution. Today, RLIN and OCLC provide the technical means by which NACO catalogers can search the bibliographic and authority files as well as contribute completed name authority records (NARs). Once received by the bibliographic utility, the new or updated authority records are transmitted immediately to the Library of Congress, which maintains the master database. Through nightly file exchanges with the copyholders, the file is recreated from the work of the previous day's contributions, and then redistributed to OCLC and RLIN. Since these two utilities are increasingly international in scope, it has proved possible for institutions located in countries outside the U. S. to meet this particular requirement. As the utilities extend operations in Europe, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East, prospects for increased international partnerships in the NACO program appear bright.

Thirdly, it is expected that an NACO institution commits its staff to work actively in performing authority work as a part of its cataloging activity. Full integration of NACO contributions into the local library's workflow has proved most effective, both to the program and to individual participants. However, NACO libraries themselves determine which name authority records they will contribute, and many select only a sub-set of headings to submit in order to contain costs. Nevertheless, there is a clear expectation that all NACO members will meet established thresholds: for a small library, the minimum contribution rate of new and updated records combined has been set at 100 name authority records per year, and for a large library, the minimum rises to 200 records annually.

Established in November 2002 as the principle provision in a policy of "managed growth", these quantitative goals are needed in order to justify the costs of processing records contributed – the fewer the records submitted, the more likely they will need review by higher graded (and therefore more costly) staff – and to justify the expense of

providing subscriptions and other documentation for the membership. Not only are these requirements being applied to new NACO libraries, but existing members are being held accountable for meeting them as well. This is because a study revealed that the 16% of the NACO membership currently not able to contribute to the required level only produce 1% of the total number of authorities they incur 14% of the total cost for the program. It is gratifying that when presented with the need to increase output, 20 of the 27 libraries that have replied to date have decided to recommit to the new requirements, while one has decided to join a funnel instead, and only three have withdrawn from the Program.

Related to these expectations are two additional requirements, also components of the policy of managed program growth. First, new NACO members need to achieve independence within one year following approval of their application. Independent status is given by trainers to institutions whose staff have proved reliable in formulating records according to standards, based on review of records created following training. Independence may be granted in stages, for example, initially for personal names only and later for corporate or geographic names. For most institutions, this requirement is not a problem, and many are freed from review within a few months after having received training. Generally, individuals who provide training also provide review. Since their time is quite valuable, it is in the interests of all involved that the trainee achieves an independent status as quickly as possible.

The other related and recently adopted expectation is that every NACO institution will designate a second person to serve as back-up to an individual named as being responsible for the library's day-to-day NACO activities. The need for a back-up has become apparent over the years due to some situations where a NACO library's principal contact comprised the sole source of authority control expertise within the institution. When that person left for another job or for whatever reason, the library found itself without any staff qualified to continue its NACO participation and had to begin anew.

Should a library wish to join NACO but is unable to produce the minimum number of records required, there is still an opportunity for participation. This option is available to libraries that wish to partner with others in one of NACO's so-called "funnel projects." Funnel projects have become a major feature of the NACO program. Indeed, today, there currently are 223 libraries participating in 19 funnels. A NACO funnel project results when a group of libraries join together to contribute name authority records to the master database. Funnel members that create records in modest numbers are able to consolidate their efforts to make a larger contribution as a group. These joint

endeavors are typically based on a shared interest among the participating libraries: Some funnels are subject or language based, such as the Arabic, Hebraica, Art, Music and Law funnels. Some reflect geographic proximity among the funnel members (such as the Detroit Area funnel). And, a few occur from common membership in a consortium (such as the GAELIC South Africa Funnel). Thus, funnel projects serve two needs: (1) to enable smaller libraries with modest resources and contributions to participate in NACO; and (2) to promote a means for catalogers with special interests to interact with colleagues who share these interests.

Crucial to the success of a funnel project are the interest and dedication of the person who volunteers to organize it and serve as its coordinator. This person recruits participants and generally hosts training sessions; disseminates information about NACO policy and practice to funnel members; receives documents distributed by NACO subscription and distributes copies of them to members; and may serve as trainer and reviewer for members, with help from other funnel members when needed. In short, the funnel coordinators are the sole individuals responsible for administration of all the funnel activity. They are held accountable for conforming to NACO policy and practice on behalf of the entire funnel membership. As a result, a great deal of authority is delegated to them and they are largely autonomous in their administration the funnel's operations . Funnel coordinators are given sole power to determine whether to admit a library to the funnel, whether to grant independent status to individual members, and whether to retain those that are very low producers.⁷

On several occasions, this presentation has referred to NACO training and documentation. Together they are the most important ingredients to the program's success. As already noted, the basic training is provided in the course of a five-day workshop taught by a certified trainer which covers the basic cataloguing rules for personal, corporate, and geographic names, as well as uniform titles and cross-references. Also included are related topics such as MARC format issues, searching requirements, and administrative matters. The format divides each day into instruction in the morning and hands-on practice sessions in the afternoon, with trainees expected to bring to the classroom examples from their daily work for discussion or input and contribution.⁸

A considerable amount of work has been devoted to ensuring that these training sessions are as easy to conduct, uniform in content, and as user-friendly to the trainees as possible. A Web page has been mounted for trainers providing a document to use to prepare for the training assignment, as well as training manuals, PowerPoint slide shows, tips by way of lists of "things to remember", and the answers to exercises developed to reinforce each topic

covered by the course. There is also a Web site for those who for the trainees. This page accesses PDF and HTML files that cover the actual documentation that they will need for participation, including the relevant Library of Congress rule interpretations, appropriate LC Descriptive Cataloging Manual sections and excerpts from the MARC format regarding the topics covered during training.

Beyond the basic introduction to policies and procedures given to staff of all new NACO member libraries are other training sessions intended to provide on-the-job learning opportunities. Many of these take the form of workshops held in conjunction with the semiannual meetings of the American Library Association which attracts large number of catalogers. In addition, the Program periodically offers the NACO Series Institute that is open to experienced NACO catalogers at independent NACO libraries. This three-day course covers searching techniques for series as well as the various complexities of series, including sub-series, series_like phrases, qualifiers, multi-part items, cross-references, and successive entries. This Institute has proved very popular over the years and has generally help to improve the general level of cataloger expertise in this rather complicated area of bibliographic control. Also drawing strong interest among cataloguers has been the NACO Training- the-Trainer courses offered to assist NACO trainers in improving their teaching abilities.

Documentation is another major strength of the NACO program. A high priority is given to the creation and maintenance of technical and administrative guidelines and written instructions in order to enable participants to create and update records in a standardized way. This material is also intended to help them resolve problems more independently. The NACO Participants Manual, now undergoing its third revision, is perhaps the most substantial document produced for the membership, but many other shorter documents are produced and shared. In addition, all NACO members receive at no cost the MARC 21 Authorities Format, parts of the Library of Congress Rule Interpretations and updates to both.

Throughout most of the 1990s, NACO documentation was published mostly in print and distributed by mail. However, recently a decision was implemented utilizing the Web in order to make NACO material universally available as quickly as possible. As a result, the Program has enjoyed savings in excess of \$20,000 (U. S.) annually in the costs of printing, assembling, and posting material.

What is the role of the Library of Congress which helps to operate NACO by serving as secretariat Program for Cooperative Cataloging? By way of a general reply, I can say that we view our role as one of leadership through

collaboration. We provide the impetus to bring the NACO partners together to set goals and standards, and we coordinate the work of NACO expansion. We provide the infrastructure for the day-to-day business by which the members pursue their NACO work and make their contributions. We are also responsible for maintaining effective communications among the NACO membership and with other interested parties within the information community at-large. Through the Cataloging Distribution Service, the Library widely shares the fruits of the contributed records with utilities, libraries and many others throughout the world. In short, LC is fully wedded to the NACO program and accepts an ongoing and major role for furthering its goals and contributing to its accomplishments. We have made this commitment because we firmly believe that cooperative cataloging will continue into the foreseeable future to provide the most effective opportunity for meeting the even greater bibliographic challenges that lie ahead. More specifically, the Library dedicates staff resources to the work that is needed to maintain daily operations and to realize expansion of the NACO program. Within LC's Regional and Cooperative Cataloging Division, we have a team of a dozen cataloging specialists whose full-time work is devoted to cooperative cataloging. They contribute to the preparation of documentation and training materials. These staff diligently maintain the Program's Web site by posting new documents, summaries of meetings, announcements, FAQs about various programs and cataloging policy questions. They update calendars, rosters, and other documents that are also available on the Web site. In the past five years, nearly 95,000 visits were recorded to the PCC home page which provides access to all the NACO Program information generated.

These staff also answer a steady stream of queries regarding related LC cataloging policies and practices that come in from around the world. They host or arrange for a large number of meetings and conference workshops, providing agendas and documentation of decisions, policies and practices provided by the Library for these groups. In addition to these dedicated cooperative cataloging experts, a large number of "associates" from other teams throughout the Cataloging Directorate serve on call for training and support.

The investment that LC makes in supporting and promoting NACO is more than repaid in numerous ways – most directly in the reduction of the costs of its cataloging operations. For example, one study undertaken in the late 1990s focused on the re-use of headings established by the British Library as part of its NACO contribution. This study found that “Library of Congress catalogers had used two-thirds of these headings to support copy cataloging of the same bibliographic titles for which the British Library had created authority records.”⁹ Clearly, NACO has

made it possible for LC to reduce considerably the amount it has had to invest in one of the most time-consuming and expensive portions of cataloging, authority work. Other important benefits accrue to the Library through the closer relationship between the Cataloging Directorate and many of its numerous constituents that results from this cooperative program by bringing our staff into direct relationships with staff of other libraries. We learn from hearing the cataloguing concerns and problems of others, and they from our responses.

In conclusion, NACO offers the most viable cooperative model for building and maintaining a shared name authority database currently available. It is not a theoretical model waiting for pilot testing, but a real-time program that has proven itself through rapidly growth, as more and more libraries accept the value of authority control and want to participate collaboratively in building and maintaining a shared database for the benefit to all the members. Internationally, as the trend towards adopting AACR and MARC 21 increases, we expect the number of partners outside the U. S. to increase.

Nevertheless, we fully appreciate that bibliographic agencies that catalogue in languages other than English will need to pursue an alternative. For them, the principles that NACO embodies offers as model by which they too might replicate NACO successes, whether their model is set up within a single nation (perhaps Italy, for example) or across national boundaries on the basis of a shared language. Such cooperative projects might incorporate the basic principles upon which NACO has been built, in order to replicate its successes. In summary, these principles are:

- T Seek to minimize the cost of participation to the members by avoiding over-exacting requirements and excessive quality control.
- T Follow standards that allow participants to determine themselves the level of their contribution.
- T Recruit a broadly based membership so that libraries of all types and sizes can join.
- T Involve the membership in determining the standards to be followed, in providing the training needed for program expansion, and in deciding program goals and administrative policies.
- T Invest in efforts to increase efficiency of operations like record contribution and communication of operational guidelines through the wonderful technology that is cheaply available to us today.
- T Develop a clear statement of benefits to accrue from participation, so that all the staff of member institutions buy into the cost of the work required for participation, and pursue public relations initiatives that will share the value of the project with the information community at large.

I would like to leave you with a thought that was expressed by the University Librarian of Cornell University, Sarah E. Thomas, on the occasion of NACO's 20th anniversary in 1977. She said:

As I reflect on NACO's accomplishment, I find NACO is a model of successful partnership between the Library of Congress and an international community of catalogers. Working together, LC and hundreds of other institutions have cut the cost of cataloging, and even more importantly, have increased the reliability of access to bibliographic records through the provision of authoritative headings...Truly, NACO demonstrates the power of collaboration and the importance of common standards. May its achievements continue to grow and benefit many more generations of library users."¹⁰

Endnotes

¹ An excellent overview of NACO's history for the period 1976-1992 is provided by: Reimer, John J. and Morgenroth, Karen, "Hang Together or Hang Separately: The Cooperative Authority Work Component of NACO," *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly*, v. 17, no. 3/4 (1993), pp. 127-161.

² These figures do not include authority records created or updated by Library of Congress staff.

³ Available at: <<http://www.loc.gov/catdir/pcc/topfive.html> > [Jan. 2003].

⁴ Letter from Brian E. C. Schottlaender to John Byrum, 30 Oct. 1997.

⁵ For further information regarding the PCC, visit its Web site at: <<http://lcweb.loc.gov/catdir/pcc/>> [Jan. 2003].

⁶ For a discussion of the PCC's international activities, see: Franks, Anthony R. D., "International Participation in the Program for Cooperative Cataloging: Present Status," *International Cataloguing and Bibliographic Control*, v. 30, no. 2, pp. 23-26.

⁷ For further information regarding the duties of the funnel coordinators, see:

<<http://www.loc.gov/catdir/pcc/naco/funres.htm> > [Jan. 2003].

⁸ The outline of the 5-day basic course is available at: <<http://www.loc.gov/catdir/pcc/naco/outline.html> > [Jan. 2003].

⁹ Franks, *ibid.*

¹⁰ Letter from Sarah E. Thomas to John D. Byrum, Oct. 27, 1997.