Practical Principles for Metadata Creation and Maintenance

1. Metadata creation is one of the core activities of collecting and memory institutions. Quality metadata creation is just as important as the care, preservation, display, and dissemination of collections; adequate planning and resources must be devoted to this ongoing, mission-critical activity.

2. Metadata creation is an incremental process and should be a shared responsibility. A metadata record may begin its life cycle as a "place holder" consisting of core data and then be enriched as it moves through the various stages of its use within an institution. By the same token, metadata creation and management should be a shared responsibility, distributed in a practical, reasonable way throughout the appropriate units of an institution, including but not limited to staff in acquisitions, cataloging and processing units, the registrar's office, digital asset management units, digitizing units, and conservation and curatorial departments. "Ad hoc" user-created metadata may be generated from work done by visiting researchers and scholars as well as other users, including nonexpert users.

3. Metadata rules and processes must be enforced in all appropriate units of an institution. Inefficiencies, gaps in mission-critical metadata, poor-quality metadata, and negative "downstream" effects on metadata creation and work flow can be avoided by establishing and enforcing processes and procedures in all the participating units throughout an institution.

4. Adequate, carefully thought-out staffing levels including appropriate skill sets are essential for the successful implementation of a cohesive, comprehensive metadata strategy. An adequate number of appropriately trained staff with a variety of expertises and skill sets (e.g., subject expertise, cataloging experience, technical knowledge, research skills, knowledge of rights issues) is necessary for implementation of a successful, institution-wide metadata strategy.

5. Institutions must build heritability of metadata into core information systems. To avoid redundant data entry and lack of synchronization of metadata in core enterprise systems and to ensure sharing of reliable, mission-critical information among the relevant units throughout the institution, interoperability for the automated transfer and validation of metadata from one core system to another must be achieved.

6. There is no "one-size-fits-all" metadata schema or controlled vocabulary or data content (cataloging) standard. Institutions must carefully choose the appropriate suite of metadata schemas and controlled vocabularies (including collection-specific thesauri and local picklists), along with the most appropriate cataloging standards (including local cataloging guidelines based on published standards) to best describe and provide access to their collections and other resources.

7. Institutions must streamline metadata production and replace manual methods of metadata creation with "industrial" production methods wherever possible and appropriate. Time- and labor-intensive procedures for metadata creation should be evaluated and streamlined wherever possible (e.g., creation of core records rather than exhaustive records; metadata work and vocabulary control focused on a very few core elements or access points; elimination of redundant and outdated work flows). Automated tools (e.g., use of templates, picklists, built-in thesauri, automated metadata generation or metadata mining) should be carefully researched and implemented as appropriate.

8. Institutions should make the creation of shareable, repurposable metadata a routine part of their work flow. Creation of consistent, standards-based, continuously refreshed and updated metadata enables institutions to publish information about their collections and other resources and activities in a timely, efficient manner and to more broadly disseminate that information through union catalogs and other "federated" resources via protocols such as the Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH).

9. Research and documentation of rights metadata must be an integral part of an institution's metadata workflow. This metadata should be captured and managed in an appropriate information system that is available to the all of the individuals in the organization who need to contribute to it, as well as those who need to use it. (See "Rights Metadata Made Simple," p. 63.)

10. A high-level understanding of the importance of metadata and buy-in from upper management are essential for the successful implementation of a metadata strategy. Without a general understanding of principles 1–9 above on the part of the decision makers of an institution, it will be difficult if not impossible consistently to create adequate, appropriate metadata to enable access and use by core constituents (including internal users, the general public, and expert reseachers).

http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting_research/standards/intrometadata/