
# Implementing ISAAR(CPF): LEAF, the NRA and EAC

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**Implementing ISAAR(CPF): Encoded Archival Description (EAC) – A Summary**

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## Introduction

Members of the ICA Committee on Descriptive Standards have now revised the International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families (ISAAR(CPF)). In parallel with this, some members have also assisted with the development of the Encoded Archival Context (EAC), an XML DTD for authority records. The first EAC implementers in Europe have primarily tested EAC as a format for communication. As such it is proved to be very successful as a bridge between different formats and descriptive traditions of archives and libraries. The present presentation will give an overview of EAC and its development, and in the following we will learn more on the development in UK, and then on how authority files from different countries and systems can be converted into EAC and brought together in a central European server for search and retrieval.

The purpose of ISAAR(CPF) is to provide guidance for preparing archival authority records, that is descriptions of corporate bodies, persons and families) associated with archival descriptions (ISAAR(CPF)1.1). These descriptions will serve to:

- provide access points to archives and records, especially in cases when records of the same provenance have been dispersed;
- promote understanding of the context underlying the creation and use of archives and records;
- support the exchange of these descriptions between institutions, systems and/or networks.(ISAAR(CPF) 1.10)

As a standard ISAAR(CPF) cannot stand alone. It is only intended to give guidance for the general content and structure of the descriptions. It must be supplemented by national and local rules for the contents. Neither can it directly be translated into fields in a data base nor elements in a document type definition. ISAAR(CPF) is like ISAD(G) only one step in the processes to facilitate the retrieval and exchange of information about archival material. They must be complemented also by formats for communication of data and a model on how to deal with search, retrieval and linking between different local systems.

Concerning archival descriptions we can now conclude that the structural contents standard--ISAD(G)--has a data model and communication format in EAD(Encoded Archival Context) that is well established as a de facto standard for the archival profession. It was, however, a long process until ISAD(G) and EAD reached the present stage of coordination.

## The Development of EAC

When the time came to revise ISAAR it was clear for many in the archival community that it could not only be matter of just revising the wording of the existing standard; steps must also be taken to ensure that the standard could be understood, accepted and implemented. It was therefore regarded essential to complement the EAD with a format that could represent the new version of ISAAR(CPF)

An international group of archival and information specialists, including representatives of ICA/CDS, laid down the first principles of EAC at a meeting in Toronto in March 2001. The proposed structure from that meeting played an important role for the revision of ISAAR(CPF), and during the process it has been a very fruitful exchange of ideas between ICA/CDS, the EAC Working Group, as well as reviewers within the profession. The alpha version of the DTD (available since July 2001) was extensively tested within the EU-project LEAF. The beta version of EAC and a draft Tag Library was prereleased in October 2003.

## The EAC structure

EAC is as ISAAR(CPF) designed both to comply with library standards for authority data in order to facilitate the exchange of authority data between the archive and the library domain, and to accommodate such archival context information that usually was included in administrative histories or

biographies in traditional archival finding aids. While ISAAR(CPF) is normative, EAC is made open to include also such legacy data that does not comply with standards.

**Each EAC instance consists of two parts:**

The EAC Header contains the data for control of the description.
The Context Description contains elements for the identification and description of the entity (corporate body, person or family).
The EAC header corresponds to the Control Area of ISAAR(CPF). EAC has here sub-elements for the identification of the EAC record, maintenance history, and declarations of the description language, rules, sources and authorities used in creating the record.

**The Context description contains areas for the description of the entity and its relations:**

The Identity area contains the name elements and additions to names which are the core elements in authority records. The ISAAR section has separate elements for the types of names that should be entered. In EAC all forms of names are contained in the same elements that instead are distinguished by type attributes. The authorized form of name is recognized from other forms of name by an attribute (@authorized) containing the code for the authorizing agency. This method allows for keeping names authorized by different agencies in the same records.

The Description areas of ISAAR and EAC contain elements for describing the history, functions and activities of the entity. The essential element is here the dates of existence. The information specified in the rules of ISAAR may be entered either as separate structured elements or as a narrative text in the form of a traditional administrative history or biography. However, both ISAAR and EAC strongly advocate a structured approach, and the use of controlled vocabularies whenever appropriate.

For functions and activities, which also can be described in the Description area above, EAC provides also a highly structured method in the area Function or Activity Relations. Information on functions and activities with the same methods as other relationships. This model presumes the existence of a separate thesaurus with a controlled vocabulary and descriptions of functions.

The purpose of EAC relations area is to create links with and describe relationships with other corporate bodies, persons, and families, represented by other EAC instances.

EAC is as ISAAR(CPF) primarily created for use in conjunction with archival descriptions. Within Resource relations elements are available for maintaining links and describing resources related to the entity described: archival records (for instance represented by an EAD file), bibliographic items or museum objects. In a relational system this would be represented by a linking table between the archival units and the authority records. In ISAAR(CPF) this function is represented by guidelines in a separate chapter and a data model, which point out its specific role as the bridge between ISAD(G) and ISAAR(CPF).

**Archival System Requirements**
Both ISAAR(CPF) and EAC, as well as ISAD(G) and EAD, can be implemented in various technical environments and systems, but certain general system requirements can be deduced from them. EAD and EAC are usually identified with their XML Document Type Definitions, but the DTDs are merely the expressions of the underlying data model. To be EAC compliant does not mean that a system actually should be storing valid XML files, but that the system should have the potential to produce such an output.

The two major alternatives are relational database systems or marked-up text systems. The choice between such systems are usually said to be depending on the structure of the information; is it data-centric or document-centric? For archival descriptions and authority records this distinction is not very clear. ISAAR(CPF) clearly advocates a model in which the information on corporate bodies, persons, and families is kept separately from the archival descriptions as linked authority records. The same applies also for EAC, and many areas there are structured in a way that logically would be implemented as relational tables. In other elements there is a need to create prose descriptions, for which the structure will differ from case to case. In the archival practice and management, there is a

need to handle both large amounts of structured data and relations and transactions, as well as associated texts in irregular and complex structures and images. These requirements have so far made it extremely difficult to develop archival systems without giving up requirements that are regarded as essential. However, the present development of relational data base systems with support for XML documents and imaging makes the prospects for developers of archival systems look somewhat brighter.

**References**

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