

IFLA Professional Statement on Universal Bibliographic Control (2025)

Definition and Background

Universal Bibliographic Control (UBC) is the concept of achieving global coordination and access to bibliographic and authority metadata through the timely creation and sharing of essential user-oriented bibliographic information.

The concept of UBC was shaped through a series of international conferences and initiatives starting in the 1960s and resulting in the establishment of IFLA's International Office for UBC in 1974. IFLA maintained units with a focus on UBC until responsibility was assigned to the Bibliography Section which developed the previous statement in 2012.

With this statement, IFLA reaffirms the continuing importance and centrality of UBC in the broader metadata ecosystem.

Goals of UBC

- To ensure authoritative metadata representing each region's published output is distributed and available
- To increase efficiency, reduce costs, and pool efforts by distributing the responsibility for creating and disseminating metadata
- To facilitate the work of all libraries in managing their collections
- To provide free and open access to trustworthy information to library users to meet their information needs, via appropriate current technologies

Principles for UBC

- Distribute responsibility globally, each national bibliographic agency taking responsibility for metadata describing its national published output
- Create and maintain metadata at the source, in the territory of origin
- Ensure timeliness of production and distribution of quality metadata
- Make metadata widely and openly available for reuse
- Use internationally agreed standards to make metadata consistent and interoperable

Benefits of UBC

UBC ensures free and open access to trustworthy information to library users worldwide. It provides added value to bibliographic and authority metadata globally and fosters interoperability across systems and languages. For National Bibliographic Agencies, UBC is a venue for sharing the creative output of their territories and of their cultures with the world. Within IFLA, it structures the application of IFLA's other bibliographic standards and facilitates consistent data presentation. UBC benefits the publishing industry, as well as authors and creators, through the provision and distribution of accurate information about available publications. UBC is a time-saver for users, integrating data in one place and reducing the complexity of information retrieval. It also helps minimize data storage requirements, offering potential space-saving benefits.

Stakeholders and their Roles in UBC

IFLA: As the major international standards body in the library domain, IFLA is responsible for developing, maintaining, publishing in open access, and promoting a suite of cohesive standards and guidelines for managing and sharing bibliographic and authority metadata. These standards include principles, conceptual models, rules for resource description, and data encoding schemes. IFLA additionally has the role of representing the library community and actively engaging with equivalent bodies in other heritage communities, including but not limited to the broader galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (GLAM) sector, and with other international standards organisations, to ensure cross-community interoperability and relevance.

National Bibliographic Agencies (NBAs): An NBA is an agency officially entrusted, in each territory, with creating and maintaining bibliographic and authority metadata about the published output of its own territory, including its works, creators, and places. The NBA may be a unit of the national library or of another territorial entity. The NBA is responsible for producing and distributing authoritative metadata in a timely manner, ensuring its quality and integrity, and making it available for accessible, interoperable use globally.

Libraries: Libraries, information centres, other documentation centres and organisations are the primary users of the metadata distributed by NBAs. Integration of this metadata with the larger GLAM sector mutually benefits these institutions by increasing access.

Publishing industry: Publishers and distributors provide the primary content and supply metadata at the source. Their collaboration with NBAs and libraries and adherence to international bibliographic standards contribute to achieving time-saving and cost reduction across the bibliographic ecosystem.

Providers of technology and systems: UBC depends on the participation of all organisations that create systems that support the standards required to achieve metadata interoperability, the sharing and reuse of data.

End users: The users of library services, researchers, students, and the general public, are the ultimate beneficiaries of UBC. Meeting their needs guides the development and use of bibliographic and authority metadata, ensuring that access remains user-focused.

Call to Action

Achieving UBC requires collaboration among all stakeholders in the documentary ecosystem, including the broader GLAM sector. Modern technologies offer powerful tools that should be actively utilized to enhance the global exchange, integration, and accessibility of bibliographic and authority metadata.

This vision of global access to authoritative metadata remains crucial today as technology continues to transform how information is created and shared. Rapid technological change and proliferation of digital content require reliable, standardized information in order to ensure trustworthy access to global knowledge which is vital for the advancement of knowledge and the functioning of informed societies.