

Encouraging Adoption and Maintenance of RDA Recommendations

Background

A [proposal for RDA Adoption Groups](#) was drafted in November 2015 by a group consisting of Stefanie Kethers, Mark Parsons and Andrew Treloar. This draft proposal was then presented for consideration and improvement to the TAB, OAB, and WG/IG Chairs meeting who all discussed it late last year. Andrew then wrote [another document](#) summarizing key issues and a proposed way forward. This led to additional discussion in OAB and TAB this month.

Links to the various discussions are below:

- TAB – [November](#) and [January](#)
- OAB – [December](#) and [January](#)
- WG/IG Chairs (at the 4th WG/IG Collaboration Meeting - [notes](#))

Although there is broad consensus that adoption needed to be addressed in a more systematic way than it has been so far, there was still a lot of discussion on how to move forward. So a task force with representatives from TAB and OAB convened to try and develop a harmonized view and a clear proposal for acceptance by TAB, OAB, and Council at P7.

The Task Force members are: David Baker (OAB), Juan Bicarregui (OAB), Simon Cox (TAB), Patricia Cruse (OAB), Steve Diggs (TAB), Kathleen Fontaine (Sect.), Francoise Genova (TAB), Larry Lannom (OAB and TAB), Mark Parsons (Sect.), Walter Stewart (OAB), Andrew Treloar (TAB), Malcolm Wolski (OAB).

Key Points and Issues

- There are several separate but interrelated concerns at play: Recommendation maintenance, major Recommendation updates, promoting the adoption of Recommendations, and supporting the adoption of Recommendations.
- There is no clear line between maintenance of (minor changes) and updates to (major changes). It is very situational, so we need to allow different approaches for different Recommendations.
- Adoption is an activity that can and, if possible, should start while the WG is still running, and can continue after the WG concludes.
- Adoption support is a related but separate activity that can start while the WG is still running and can continue after the WG concludes.

- Adoption support can include many things such as a testing environment, open reference implementations, and help desk style support. It depends largely on the nature of the Recommendation.
- Adoption support and promotion need not be the responsibility of the original group and may often involve different skills than those of the original members.
- Adoption should be encouraged and supported for all Recommendations, especially since many of them work in conjunction with each other.
- Whatever is decided, we need to minimise bureaucratic overhead for the Groups, Boards, and Secretariat.
- The question of whether or not to keep the 12-18 month period for WGs was contentious, with strongly expressed views on both sides of the question, but there was at least agreement that periodic review of all groups is necessary.
- There is a tension between the need to support adopters of the original Recommendations (with the associated minor tweaks arising from real-world use) and the kinds of things that might require a new WG to produce a major update or a minor maintenance release. A WG may want to continue for reasons other than adoption.
- RDA should get regular reports on adoption activity at Plenary Meetings.
- The [current criteria for Recommendations](#) require a short maintenance and retirement plan that identifies who keeps the Recommendation current and how it would be superseded or retired. This needs to be formalized more, should include lessons learned, and considered more closely in the review of recommendations.
- The RDA organisation or Secretariat does not have the resources to fully support and run maintenance and adoption activities. As always, we rely on the power of the volunteer.

Proposal

General:

- RDA is keen to support the adoption of outputs. Adoption should also inform maintenance and updates to a Recommendation, but adoption and maintenance and updates are different things.
- The approach outlined below would be a one year pilot activity after which the task force would reconvene and assess how it worked for at least two very different Recommendations and then make recommendations to TAB, OAB, and Council on how to proceed.
- No change is recommended for current review processes for new WGs and IGs.

Maintenance and Updates:

- Maintenance plans should be reviewed more closely during the Recommendation Review.
- As part of its maintenance plan, a Working Group may propose a “Maintenance Group” (MG) to manage maintenance activities. The formation of a MG is not required, and is

not the only mechanism for ongoing maintenance of RDA Recommendations. However, a MG with the same name as the working group may be formed automatically with no additional review or delay beyond the review of the Recommendation.

- As there is no clear line between maintenance of (minor changes) and updates to (major changes) Recommendations, different groups may define things differently. Where possible this should be specified in the Maintenance plan. The idea is that major updates should have a new community review but small additions should not.
- The OAB should periodically (initially annually) coordinate a review of the maintenance plans and adoption of endorsed outputs and recommend follow-on activity as appropriate, including potential deprecation of a recommendation. A set of guidelines of this review will need to be drafted.
- Working Groups may propose a follow-on Working Group to update or produce a new version of a Recommendation. This can happen at any time after a Recommendation is first completed. The case statement for a follow-on WG would be different, focussing on why the update was needed (e.g. demand from adopters). The review process for a follow-on WG would be easier than a new WG. TAB and OAB would work this out. Perhaps just a quick thumbs up or down with comments from TAB and OAB after a community review.

Adoption Promotion and Support

- Our approach must recognize that adoption is an ongoing process that can occur at different times and different ways for different Recommendations.
- Adoption support can occur in a number of ways, and WGs are free to choose which one works best for them: informal activity, open reference implementations, adopting organisations taking on a support role, etc.
- In addition, the Secretariat would help coordinate a group of volunteers who would help support the adoption of suites of Recommendations. This would primarily be through referrals to experts, but would also include a feedback mechanism, such as an issue tracker, to inform the maintenance activities of Recommendations. We would start with one group, but one or two groups may be added if different types of Recommendations or communities warrant it.
- The Secretariat (ideally through volunteers) would help coordinate an Adoption promotion program involving the Ambassador programs described in the Future Directions Document and the proposed Council Communications and Engagement Subcommittee.
- Adoption activities would be reported at each Plenary.

Next Steps

- Present to TAB and OAB for approval in February meetings and at Group Chairs meeting at P7.
- The Task Force revises accordingly and then proposes a plan to Council.

- If approved, implementation details worked out by Secretariat in consultation with Task Force
- Task Force reviews pilot effort in a year.

Definitions

Adoption - Use of an RDA Recommendation in formal practice or inclusion in a functional system.

Maintenance - Minor corrections or changes to an existing Recommendation. The nature of maintenance and how it is distinguished from updates (see below) are described in the Maintenance Plan for the Recommendation.

Maintenance (and Retirement) Plan - The required plan to be submitted by a WG with their recommendation(s) for final review and endorsement. See the [current criteria for Recommendations](#)

Maintenance Group - A group voluntarily formed after the completion of a Working Group to maintain the Recommendation(s) of that group as defined in their Maintenance Plan.

Promotion - Information and activities that encourage the adoption of RDA recommendations.

Recommendation - the official endorsed results of RDA. Recommendations undergo formal phases of discussion, comment, and decision taking. Recommendations are documents in a very broad sense and may include specifications, taxonomies or ontologies, workflows, schemas, data models, etc. See the [RDA Outputs Policy](#)

Support - Efforts or things that help people or organisations adopt and use a Recommendation. This can include many things such as a testing environment, open reference implementations, and help desk style support. It depends largely on the nature of the Recommendation.

Updates - Major changes or revisions to a Recommendation resulting in a new formal review. The nature of updates and how they are distinguished from maintenance are described in the Maintenance Plan for the Recommendation.