

Metadata

Key Issues to Consider

Now that you are familiar with some of the basic concepts and types of metadata, you can consider some of the issues that have to be addressed in order to use metadata effectively. The most important are:

- **Audiences:** Most people who rely on metadata are unaware they're using it or even that it exists. Nevertheless, when you create metadata, you have to be aware of the audiences for your information in order to determine the appropriate standards and approaches. To make your decisions, you should know which information resources your audiences use, which questions they ask, and what their level of expertise is.
- **Partnerships:** To increase the value of both metadata and the information it describes, you need to work with other creators, custodians, and users of information. If you agree on metadata standards, tools, and practices in collaboration with others, you will create a much more beneficial information management program for your whole organization.
- **Implementation:** Selecting a standard is a good first step. Putting it into practice is a more useful and difficult one. Creating and maintaining metadata over time will demand attention, resources, and staff. You will get a good return on that investment if you keep in mind your legal mandates, your business processes, and your customers as you choose what standards and practices are most appropriate for you.
- **Education:** One critical element of a practical metadata program to keep in mind is education. You will need to know about what others are doing with the standards, the tools, and the uses of metadata. As these change, you will need to keep up with those developments.
- **Promotion:** To promote the understanding, use, and creation of metadata, as well as to ensure that there are enough resources to support a metadata program, it is important to draw people's attention to metadata and its importance. The State of Minnesota's Information Policy Council supports a metadata awareness program designed by the Land Management Information Center and the State Archives Department of the Minnesota Historical Society. The program promotes reliable and standardized metadata with an educational resource online and a symbol:



When you see this symbol, you are looking at information that is described by metadata created according to a recognized standard. On a web page, the symbol will act as a hot link to a page describing the value and uses of metadata and offering information about specific metadata standards used in Minnesota

Discussion Questions

- What are the business functions your metadata is supposed to fulfill?
- Who is the audience for your metadata? What are their needs?
- Does your agency have an information and/or technical architecture? What metadata standards does it recommend?
- Are your software applications creating metadata?
- What are your legal needs? Does your agency have a records management or data practices office?
- Do the managers and resource allocators in your agency support a metadata program? Have you made a business case to them?
- Are the offices or departments of your agency already creating metadata? Are they using different standards?
- What are the metadata standards pertinent to your profession or business functions?