

## **PCC Position Statement on Personal Data in Name Authority Records<sup>1</sup>**

**Approved: July 12, 2023**

Name authority control, at its essence, is about facilitating searching and browsing. Done well, it ensures all works by a particular creator can be efficiently retrieved together. Name authority work has multiple benefits, including:

- distinguishing between creators with the same or similar names,
- bringing together names in various forms or languages,
- and providing contextual information.

When new MARC fields were introduced to name authority records (NARs), such as field of activity, associated group, and occupation, in coordination with the adoption of RDA in 2013, the idea was to encourage richer information about the creators of works. These data elements were intended to better integrate data about creators into the wider digital environment. At the time of implementation, little guidance was given about when and how these data elements should be used beyond “cataloger’s judgment.” Some took this opportunity to anticipate new ways of using the name authority file in the future, creating NARs which were encyclopedic in nature in the hopes of facilitating complex searches about library collections.

The data environment has shifted rapidly since then, as has our understanding of the use and potential misuse of personal data. What constitutes personal data varies by context and culture, but includes information such as name, birthdate, and employment information. These are precisely the types of information that are frequently used when creating personal NARs, but the risks of publishing such information have not universally been considered by those creating NARs. Those risks can include digital harassment, embarrassment, outing, [doxing](#) threats, identity theft, stalking, and in the most extreme cases, arrest and/or physical harm.

While there is no one-size-fits-all policy that will serve to protect authors and creators, it is important that anyone creating or editing NARs center the humanity of the individual, whether living or dead, that they are describing and identify potential risks of codifying information about individuals, especially those from marginalized groups. In particular:

- Be aware that personal data privacy practices and legislation differ from country to country. PCC should consider the privacy guidelines outlined by relevant national library organizations and reflect on how they might impact authority work.
- Recognize the need for a balance between providing information to users and protecting the personal information of creators.

---

<sup>1</sup> This statement is dedicated to the memory of Kelly Swickard, Metadata and Linked Data Strategist at Project MUSE, in recognition of her work in protecting the privacy of marginalized people.

- Critically assess sources of information used within NARs, considering factors such as accuracy and recency as well as how that information was obtained and for what purpose.
- When consulting with creators, respect their choices in what personal data should be shared and which terms are used to identify them.
- Appreciate that creators may have valid reasons for not wanting to be associated with their works.
- Acknowledge the socially-constructed, political nature of categories which describe people.
- Understand that leaving information out of NARs can lead to better representation than using terms or codes that do not reflect an individual's identity appropriately.
- Be aware that information published in NARs exists in a linked open data environment and is often propagated to other sites, so that even if information is removed from an NAR, it is effectively impossible to remove from the Internet.

For further exploration of these considerations, metadata librarians and others creating NARs are encouraged to read the 2019 book [\*Ethical Questions in Name Authority Control\*](#) and keep abreast of ongoing conversations around ethical considerations for personal data in libraries and archives.

This document is a statement of intent. PCC has made policy decisions in line with these considerations, such as not recording gender or individual home addresses, and will continue to provide additional policy decisions and guidelines as situations arise in the future.