

RUSA Guidelines Task Force: Recommendations

I. Charge and Timeline

In August 2019, the RUSA Board of Directors authorized the formation of the RUSA Guidelines Task Force, hereafter the Task Force, and directed the group to propose recommendations according to its charge by ALA Annual Conference 2020. The Task Force was charged as follows:

to assess the current publication and review process for division- and section-level professional guidelines, professional competencies, and other language or wording related to best practices (hereafter referred to as 'guidelines').

The work of this task force should be undertaken with the understanding that different types of guidelines will require different levels of approval and review based on their complexity, content, etc. All proposed processes should minimize bureaucratic overhead and center the expertise of subject matter experts.

The following directives from RUSA Board shaped the Task Force's approach to our work:

- Articulating the role of subject matter experts and section leadership in the development and assessment of guidelines;
- Defining categories of guidelines based on purpose or complexity, and propose differentiated processes for each;
- Defining a process for review and approval of existing guidelines distinct from a process for review, revision, and assessment; and,
- Addressing the question of what constitutes public comment for each of the various categories, balancing thoroughness of review with efficiency.

The Task Force reviewed the [Guidelines by Topic](#) and [Resources by Topic](#) pages, the [relevant section](#) of the RUSA Handbook, the [ALA Standards Manual](#), ALA and RUSA By-Laws, and other materials as appropriate.

Vice President/President-Elect Courtney McDonald served as chair for the Task Force. A general call for interest was circulated across the RUSA membership, and seven people were appointed in December 2019: Rebecca Eve Graff, Liz Kocevar-Weidinger, Hilary Kraus, Michelle Leonard, Michelle Roubal, William Weare, and Joseph Yue.

Neither *RUSQ* nor *RUSA Update* were within the scope of our work.

II. Recommendations for Publication Types

A. Terminology

- Throughout this report, the terms ‘document’, ‘documents’ and ‘documentation’ are used to refer to division- and section-level professional guidelines, professional competencies, and other publications related to best practices
- Documents/documentation are defined within three categories:
 - Standards
 - Guidelines
 - Recommendations
- A ‘responsible body’ is either:
 - A standing group (such as an existing committee) that authored the document
 - The standing group (such as an executive board) that formed the temporary group (such as a task force) that authored the document

B. General recommendations

Documents within every category should include responsible body and revision/approval dates. Standards and Guidelines have additional procedures and requirements. All Standards and Guidelines documents should comply with templates developed and maintained by the Professional Resources Committee (PRC).

PRC should be responsible for the organization, maintenance and archiving of the relevant pages on the RUSA website and may edit those pages themselves or work with the RUSA Office to do so.

PRC should be responsible for ensuring that retired documents and superseded versions of documents are stored in the ALA Institutional Repository.

C. Review processes and calendar

All documents should be reviewed on a rolling five-year basis. If still current as written, the responsible body may vote to re-approve the document as-is with no further action required; or, if necessary, a revision process should be initiated.

I. Review and approval of existing documents

Yearly, following ALA Annual Conference, PRC should conduct a review of all documents, identify documents that are due for 5 year review, and communicate with responsible bodies that action is needed.

Responsible bodies should complete the review and approval of the document and notify PRC. For documents not requiring revision, the following verbiage should be added in keeping with ISO practice ([example](#)):

This document was last reviewed and confirmed in [year]. This version remains current and will be subject to review in [year +5].

II. Review, revision, and assessment of existing documents

Our recommendations for appropriate processes related to review, revision, and assessment of existing documents are outlined below.

D. Categories of guidelines and their respective processes

The Task Force proposes three categories of documents:

1. Standards
2. Guidelines
3. Recommendations

1- Standards

Definition

Standards documents reflect shared values, may be used for assessment or evaluation, are common to all types of libraries with relevant services or collections, serve as baselines for comparative assessment, and serve as springboards for local data management. Per the [ALA Standards Manual](#),

The ALA Policy Manual (55) defines standards as, “policies which describe shared values and principles of performance for a library.” Standards documents:

1. Tend to be comprehensive, covering a broad scope of programs and services provided by a library.
2. May define both qualitative and quantitative criteria.
3. Present goals toward which the profession aspires.
4. May include statements expressed in relative terms; that is, by relating library performance to norms derived from a reference population.
5. Set criteria for the decisions and actions of those concerned with the planning and administering and accrediting of library services.

Examples of Extant RUSA Documents in this Category

- [Definition of Reference](#) (2008)

- [ILL Code](#) (2016)

Workflow for reviewing existing Standards

PRC notifies the responsible body when Standards needs review and appoints a PRC liaison to work with the responsible body throughout the process. PRC manages public comment (process outlined below). If public comments merit reconsideration or substantive revisions, the responsible body should consult with the PRC and with their appointing authority in a timely fashion. If changes are deemed appropriate, upon revision the responsible body should re-submit for a new public comment period. Standards require Board approval; if coming from a Section, they also require Section leadership approval. Final versions of approved Standards are circulated by the RUSA Office to RUSA membership and posted to the RUSA website.

Workflow for proposing new Standards

New Standards documents may only be undertaken following a vote of the Board. PRC may recommend the creation of new Standards to the Board; members or committees proposing new Standards should work with PRC.

Public Comment

For Standards documents, public comment constitutes the following:

- Working with the RUSA Office, the responsible body should develop an announcement to be posted in *RUSA Update*. Once posted, the RUSA Office should share the information across all RUSA listservs, on RUSA social media, to the RUSA ALA Connect community, and to all-ALA Connect community.
- Public comment period extends from four to 12 weeks.
- Comments should be collected via an online feedback form. PRC is responsible for developing standard question(s), management of the form, and for sharing responses.
- Coordinating with PRC, the responsible body should schedule one or more virtual town hall sessions, and/or in-person panel or discussion at conference.
 - Depending on the weightiness of the document in question, multiple sessions should be planned throughout the comment period.

2- Guidelines

Definition

Guidelines documents show how principles ought to be applied in practice, elucidate competencies, and illustrate what skills are necessary for best results in a service-specific context. They guide our behaviors toward best results.

From the [ALA Standards Manual](#),

The ALA Policy Manual (55) states that guidelines “consist of procedures that will prove useful in meeting the standards.” Guideline documents:

1. Are program- or service-specific and not necessarily comprehensive.
2. Define qualitative criteria; generally exclude quantitative criteria.
3. Identify factors contributing to program effectiveness.
4. Provide a framework for developing service policies and procedures.
5. Incorporate benchmarks by which a particular library and information service, resource, or material may be judged.

Examples of Extant RUSA Documents in this Category

- [Business Research Competencies](#) (2019)
- [Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers](#) (2013)

Workflow for reviewing existing Guidelines

PRC notifies the responsible body when a Guideline needs review and appoints PRC liaison to work with the responsible body throughout the process. PRC manages public comment process (outlined below). If public comments merit reconsideration or substantive revisions, the responsible body should consult with the PRC and with their appointing authority in a timely fashion. If changes are deemed appropriate, upon revision the responsible body should re-submit for a new public comment period. The appointing authority for the responsible body approves Guidelines (e.g., if the responsible body is a section committee, then the section executive would approve the Guidelines document). Final versions of approved Guidelines are posted to the RUSA website, and circulated by the RUSA Office to Section leadership, RUSA Board, and RUSA membership.

Workflow for proposing new Guidelines

Either an appointing authority forms a group to develop a new Guideline or a responsible body should include intention to create a Guidelines document in their 'annual action plan' submitted to their appointed authority. PRC is notified.

Public Comment

For Guidelines documents, public comment constitutes the following:

- Working with the RUSA Office, the responsible body should develop an announcement to be posted in *RUSA Update*. Once posted, the RUSA Office should share the information across all RUSA listservs, on RUSA social media, to the RUSA ALA Connect community, and to ALA Connect communities for relevant RUSA section(s).
- Public comment period is 6 weeks.
- Comments should be collected via an online feedback form. PRC is responsible for developing standard question(s), management of the form, and for sharing responses.
- Coordinating with PRC, the responsible body should determine if virtual town hall sessions are appropriate; if so, the responsible body should schedule such a session.

- Depending on the weightiness of the document in question, multiple sessions may be planned throughout the comment period.

3- Recommendations

Definition

Recommendations documents encompass the following: good ideas worth distributing; articulate shared understandings of a committee, working group, or other division- or section-level group; and provide advice or current awareness.

Examples of Extant RUSA Documents in this Category

- [Model Interlibrary Loan Clause](#) (2017)
- [Guidelines for the Preparation of a Bibliography](#) (2010)
- [Measuring and Assessing Reference Services and Resources: A Guide](#) (2008)

Workflow for reviewing existing Recommendations

PRC notifies the responsible body when a document needs review; PRC available to responsible body to address questions, etc., should they arise. A public comment period is not necessary for Recommendations documents. Responsible body approves Recommendations; approved Recommendations are circulated to PRC, Section leadership, and RUSA Board.

Workflow for proposing new Recommendations

Responsible body should include intention to create a Recommendations document in their 'annual action plan' and notify PRC.