VRA Nancy DeLaurier Award 2016

"The VRA Core is one of the major accomplishments of the Visual Resources Association . . . it has moved the development of image resource metadata forward. . . . Trish, Jan, Ben, and Esme have my greatest admiration for their work in building a mature version of the Core. It may continue to evolve (it will have to evolve along with technology) but Core 4.0 provides a firm foundation." --Sherman Clarke, Freelance Art Librarian

"The beauty of the schema is that it allows you to grow into it, adding complexity as your user's needs and your programming skills allow. I think this is one key to its staying power." --Greg Reser, UC San Diego Library

"Having a metadata standard that is specifically designed for the description and access of visual works (as opposed to "self-describing" bibliographic items), and having it hosted by the Library of Congress, is a monumental achievement." --Murtha Baca & Patricia Harpring, Getty Research Institute

"VRA Core 4.0 has charted a path to transcend the information silos of past systems by facilitating the construction of interoperable and sharable data. . . . The impact of VRA Core 4.0 is so significant that virtually all ALA accredited library and information science programs now teach it." --Marcia Zeng, School of Library & Information Science, Kent State

<culturalContextSet>

<culturalContext>The wonderful world of data standards!</culturalContext>

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<dateSet>
<display>An incredible investment of time and energy from circa 1993 through 2007.</display>
<notes>The visual resources profession and the extended world of image professionals beyond is indebted to this group for the hundreds (thousands?) of hours invested to create this invaluable resource.</notes>

<date type="Benefit to the World"> <earliestDate>1993</earliestDate>
<latestDate>2015</latestDate>

--Robb Detlefs, Gallery Systems

Johanna Bauman's Remarks

Maureen Burns and I nominated Esme Cowles, Jan Eklund, Ben Kessler, and Trish Rose-Sandler for the 2016 Nancy DeLaurier Award in recognition of their groundbreaking work developing VRA Core 4.0 and the accompanying XML schema. The nomination was backed up by eight letters of support, excerpts of a selection of which you can see on the screen behind me.

VRA Core 4.0 was the culmination of over a decade's worth of standards development and grew out of the work of the VRA data standards committee. With their leadership, expertise, determination, and vision, Cowles, Eklund, Kessler, and Rose-Sandler took the existing approach to describing works of art and their images and brought it up to date by developing an XML encoding scheme that is flexible, shareable, persistent and sustainable, making possible such endeavors as the current VRA Core project to create an RDF ontology to support sharing visual resources on the semantic web via linked open data.

Working both as a collective and as individuals, each of the nominees contributed their unique strengths and skills to the standards development process. Cowles wrote the XML schemas and helped with all the XML questions. Eklund wrote the Element Outline, the Element Description with examples, and the restricted schema attributes document, while Kessler and Rose-Sandler drafted the Introduction document. All four of them reviewed and refined each other's work in order to release the final product. From start to finish, the nominees were mindful of the broader landscape of the cultural heritage community and worked hard to ensure that VRA Core 4.0 would interoperate well with both existing and emerging metadata schemas, and content standards. They also recognized the importance of community input, education, marketing, and ongoing leadership. They have all pitched in to obtain endorsement for the schema and worked tirelessly to promote its use. Rose-Sandler, in particular, was instrumental in developing the VRA Core Oversight Committee and was successful in lobbying to have the standard hosted by the Library of Congress, thereby extending the reach of the schema to a wider audience. The impact of VRA Core 4.0 has been enormous in the field of visual resources and beyond, standing proud next to Dublin Core and other metadata schemas, and making a name for the VRA in the world of metadata.

As a data structure standard, VRA Core 4.0 now stands alongside Cataloging Cultural Objects and the Getty Vocabularies in receiving official recognition with the receipt of this DeLaurier Award, and the colleagues primarily responsible for this standards trifecta have now been fully acknowledged. The development and vision behind VRA Core 4.0 have promoted best practices in metadata creation and sharing to the highest professional standards. Without VRA Core 4.0 our ability to build and aggregate high quality descriptive metadata would be significantly diminished. Congratulations to Esme Cowles, Jan Eklund, Ben Kessler, and Trish Rose-Sandler on this well-deserved recognition.

Trish Rose-Sandler's Remarks

On behalf of my colleagues Jan Eklund, Ben Kessler, Esme Cowles (who regrettably couldn't be here) and myself we'd like to thank VRA and our colleagues for the Nancy DeLaurier Award. When the 4 of us were notified we would be receiving this award we of course felt delighted but we must confess we are a bit uncomfortable with being the only ones on this stage being recognized for developing the VRA Core 4 data standard.

Development of Core 4, like Cataloging Cultural Objects, involved many people too numerous to acknowledge individually but certainly deserve credit so we are accepting the award on behalf of

all of them. We want to acknowledge those who developed the previous versions of the Core (versions 1, 2 and 3) which provided the foundation from which we developed core 4, and those who gave us feedback on the many, many draft versions of the schema and documentation. We want to thank Esme Cowles who at the time, was the only XML expert in our group, so the 3 of us on stage here relied on him heavily. We also want to thank the editors of CCO, a data content standard for cultural objects, which was being developed around the same time. There was a lot of shared knowledge going on between the two groups and those conversations greatly influenced many of the decisions we made on Core 4.

Next year, 2017, will be the 10 year anniversary of the release of Core 4 - so it's a great time to step back from our work (which feels a bit like our child) and see how it has been adopted, matured and held up over time. A lot has changed technically in our profession and ideas like embedded metadata and Linked open data, which were just being introduced a decade ago, have now become more mainstream ways of sharing data. Our goal with Core 4 was to provide a data structure that was both modular and flexible so that it could easily be adapted to these changes and the recent RDF expression of the Core indicates its inherent versatility. While the Core standard has changed significantly since version 1 came out in 1996 the fundamental premise of VRA Core has not changed. That is, if a cultural object can be cataloged once and cataloged well, then that data can be shared communally.

Also a data standard is not just something you publish and walk away from if you really want to see it survive and thrive. It is a living, breathing thing that has to be actively sustained. The Core Oversight Committee was created in 2010 to do just that. I personally want thank Johanna Baumann for serving with me as the co-chair of that committee for five years and then continuing to serve another year as co-chair after I stepped down. I am really proud of the accomplishments of that committee including: 1) hosting of the Core schema and documentation on the Library of Congress Standards page 2) the creation of robust cataloging examples 3) and the development of tools (VRA XMP panel, VRA Import/Export tool, RDA transform tool) that use the Core in really interesting and important ways.   These all demonstrate the ongoing relevance of Core 4 in the cultural heritage and data standards communities.

In closing since we don't have time to name you individually we'd like anyone who has been involved in any way with the development and/or sustainment of Core 4 to stand whether you were a Core 4 beta tester, gave feedbacks on the drafts, have served currently or previously on the Core OC committee, or even taught Core 4 in a workshop, We want to thank you for keeping this standard alive and ensuring its health well into the future. We are proud to have done our bit to be a part of that success.