

Accessibility Metadata in the Community Zone

Overview

Accessibility metadata plays an important role in helping libraries identify, manage, and deliver content that meets accessibility standards. It also helps end users understand the level of accessibility they can expect with a specific resource or content. Accessibility metadata originates from a variety of publishers, platforms, and standards bodies, so ensuring full consistency across library systems is complex.

For Ex Libris products, accessibility metadata is relevant in two primary and distinct ways 1) metadata that is created by libraries and brought into our platforms and 2) metadata that is provided by publishers and content providers that is made available through our systems.

This article focuses on the current challenges and outlines the status of accessibility metadata that is provided to us for the Community Zone (CZ) by content providers. We have additional ongoing work across Ex Libris products to enable accessibility metadata for libraries to develop across platforms and systems. A future in-depth article is planned for early 2026 with more information and examples of how we are enabling accessibility metadata across Ex Libris products.

What is Accessibility Metadata?

Accessibility metadata describes the extent to which a resource is accessible to users who rely on assistive technologies. Examples include indicators for:

- Screen-reader compatibility
- Availability of OCR, closed captions, or audio descriptions
- Structural tagging (e.g., headings, tables)
- Conformance with WCAG or EPUB accessibility standards

There are growing [industry standards](#) across the publishing ecosystem that seek to improve consistency and broaden availability of accessibility metadata for a variety of content types. Various international groups are involved in developing standards working with publishers, librarians, and end users to determine the best approach for all. Accessibility metadata can be stored and formatted in multiple ways. There are growing standard methods for ONIX and MARC fields.

Current Accessibility Metadata Standards

Accessibility metadata should be included in the following MARC fields:

[341 Accessibility content](#)

Subfield Codes

\$a - Content access mode (NR)

\$b - Textual assistive features (R)

- \$c - Visual assistive features (R)
- \$d - Auditory assistive features (R)
- \$e - Tactile assistive features (R)
- \$0 - Authority record control number or standard number (R)
- \$1 - Real World Object URI (R)
- \$2 - Source (NR)
- \$3 - Materials specified (NR)
- \$6 - Linkage (NR)
- \$8 - Field link and sequence number (R)

532 - Accessibility Note

- \$a - Summary of accessibility (NR)
- \$3 - Materials specified (NR)
- \$6 - Linkage (NR)
- \$8 - Field link and sequence number (R)

Current Challenges

- **Inconsistent Publisher Practices**

Accessibility metadata is not uniformly supplied by all publishers or vendors. When it is supplied, the fields used and the level of detail may differ.

Impact: Libraries may see gaps or variations depending on the provider's data quality and their adherence to accessibility metadata standards.

- **Limited Metadata in KBART**

KBART does not currently include accessibility-specific fields.

Impact: Even when publishers have accessibility data, it cannot always be transported via the KBART update workflow used in the Knowledgebases.

- **Variability in Platform-Level Metadata**

Many accessibility attributes apply to the platform or delivery interface rather than to individual titles (e.g., a vendor's reader supports text-to-speech).

There could also be Accessibility variations within collections and titles (specifically serial publications).

Impact: This information does not always fit into traditional bibliographic or portfolio-level metadata structures.

How Ex Libris Is Addressing These Challenges

- **Collaboration With Content Providers**

Where publishers supply accessibility metadata in structured formats, Ex Libris is working to improve ingestion and mapping into the knowledge base. Adoption depends on vendor participation and the availability of reliable metadata.

- **User Research**

In Q1 2026, Content Operations will conduct user research to better understand how accessibility metadata is used by librarians and end users, and what customers expect from it. If you're interested in taking part, please reach out to accessibility@clarivate.com.

- **What to Expect Going Forward**

- Improved metadata ingestion as more publishers adopt structured accessibility metadata
- Expanded fields and configurations as standards evolve
- Greater clarity around platform-level vs. title-level accessibility data
- Continued collaboration with content providers to improve quality and availability

Updates will continue to be shared through the Ex Libris Release Notes, mailing lists and roadmaps.

Example: Accessibility Metadata on EBook Central

Earlier this year, we introduced [accessibility metadata](#) on EBook Central and LibCentral as it is provided to us by publishers. We are working on an ongoing basis to increase the availability of accessibility metadata for ebooks and customers are able to [request an update](#) for accessibility metadata for a title if not available, as needed.

Additional Work on Accessibility Metadata in Ex Libris products

The work described in this article covers the specific efforts underway to address the availability of accessibility metadata for content in our CZ that is made available through our content and publishing providers.

Ex Libris products host content from thousands of libraries, and millions of library and institution-generated sources (for example library databases, faculty, and staff). Additional work is underway to explore how accessibility metadata can be enabled for institution-generated content across a range of Ex Libris products. We plan to publish an additional article in early 2026 on how we are working to enable accessibility metadata for library-generated content for a variety of products (e.g. Leganto, Specto).

Summary

Accessibility metadata is an evolving area across the entire scholarly content ecosystem. Ex Libris is committed to improving support for accessibility metadata across its products, but the completeness of data depends heavily on publisher participation and the adoption of consistent global standards. As these standards mature, coverage and reliability within Ex Libris systems will continue to improve.