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# Information technology — Metadata registries (MDR) —

## Part 1: Framework

*Technologies de l'information — Registres de métadonnées (RM) —  
Partie 1: Cadre de référence*



Reference number  
ISO/IEC 11179-1:2023(E)

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## Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) and IEC (the International Electrotechnical Commission) form the specialized system for worldwide standardization. National bodies that are members of ISO or IEC participate in the development of International Standards through technical committees established by the respective organization to deal with particular fields of technical activity. ISO and IEC technical committees collaborate in fields of mutual interest. Other international organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO and IEC, also take part in the work.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of document should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see [www.iso.org/directives](http://www.iso.org/directives) or [www.iec.ch/members\\_experts/refdocs](http://www.iec.ch/members_experts/refdocs)).

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO and IEC shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see [www.iso.org/patents](http://www.iso.org/patents)) or the IEC list of patent declarations received (see <https://patents.iec.ch>).

Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) see [www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html](http://www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html). In the IEC, see [www.iec.ch/understanding-standards](http://www.iec.ch/understanding-standards).

This document was prepared by Joint Technical Committee ISO/IEC/JTC 1, *Information technology*, Subcommittee SC 32, *Data management and interchange*.

This fourth edition cancels and replaces the third edition (ISO/IEC 11179-1:2015), which has been technically revised.

The main changes are as follows:

- some of the detailed descriptions from the Introduction and [Clause 5](#) have been removed to avoid duplication with other parts;
- [Clause 7](#) has been updated to:
  - revise the description for ISO/IEC 11179-3 to reflect its focus on the core metamodel of a metadata registry, and the creation of separate parts to handle other aspects;
  - add a description for ISO/IEC 11179-30;
  - add a description for ISO/IEC 11179-31;
  - add a description for ISO/IEC 11179-32;
  - add a description for ISO/IEC 11179-33;
  - add a description for ISO/IEC 11179-34;
  - add a description for ISO/IEC 11179-35;
- [Clause 8](#) has been added to describe the relationship of other ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 32 standards on metadata to the ISO/IEC 11179 series;
- references to other standards have been updated, especially ISO 1087, to the latest edition.

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A list of all parts in the ISO/IEC 11179 series can be found on the ISO and IEC websites.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at [www.iso.org/members.html](http://www.iso.org/members.html) and [www.iec.ch/national-committees](http://www.iec.ch/national-committees).

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## Introduction

The ISO/IEC 11179 series addresses the semantics of data, the representation of data and the registration of the descriptions of that data. It is through these descriptions that an accurate understanding of the semantics and a useful depiction of the data are found.

The purposes of ISO/IEC 11179 are to promote the following:

- standard description of data;
- common understanding of data across organizational elements and between organizations;
- re-use and standardization of data over time, space, and applications;
- harmonization and standardization of data within an organization and across organizations;
- management of the components of descriptions of data;
- re-use of the components of descriptions of data.

Each part of ISO/IEC 11179 is devoted to addressing a different aspect of these needs, as described in [Clause 7](#).

Generally, descriptive data are known as metadata. Metadata can describe books, phone calls, data, etc. ISO/IEC 11179 focuses upon metadata that describe data.

A metadata registry (MDR) is a system for maintaining a database of metadata. Registration is one possible function of that system. Registration accomplishes three main goals: identification, provenance, and monitoring quality. Identification is accomplished by assigning a unique identifier (within the registry) to each object registered there. Provenance addresses the source of the metadata and the object described. Monitoring quality ensures that the metadata does the job it is designed to do.

An MDR may contain the semantics of data. An understanding of data is fundamental to their design, harmonization, standardization, use, re-use and interchange. The underlying model for an MDR is designed to capture all the basic components of the semantics of data, independent of any application or subject matter area.

MDRs, typically, are organized so that those designing applications can ascertain whether a suitable object described in the MDR already exists. Where it is established that a new object is essential, its derivation from an existing description with appropriate modifications is encouraged, thus avoiding unnecessary variations in the way similar objects are described. Registration will also allow two or more administered items describing identical objects to be identified, and more importantly, it will help to identify situations where similar or identical names are in use for administered items that are significantly different in one or more respects.

The names, definitions, datatype and related attributes that are associated with the description of an object in an MDR give that object meaning. The depth of this meaning is limited, because names and definitions convey limited information about the object. The relationships object descriptions have with semantically related object descriptions in a registry provide additional information, but this additional information is dependent on how many semantically related object descriptions there are.

A metadata registry that conforms to ISO/IEC 11179 can describe a wide variety of data. In fact, the attributes described in ISO/IEC 11179 are data elements, and they can be registered in an ISO/IEC 11179 metadata registry. Moreover, any set of descriptors or metadata attributes may be interpreted as data elements and registered in the metadata registry.

There are two main consequences to this:

- the metadata registry can describe itself;
- metadata layers or levels are not defined in ISO/IEC 11179.

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As a result, ISO/IEC 11179 is a general description framework for data of any kind, in any organization and for any purpose. ISO/IEC 11179 does not address other data management needs, such as data models, application specifications, programming code, program plans, business plans and business policies. These need to be addressed elsewhere. ISO/IEC 19763 specifies facilities to extend a metadata registry so that information about models can be registered. Such models include information (or data) models, ontologies, process models, role and goal models, and form designs.

The increased use of data processing and electronic data interchange heavily relies on accurate, reliable, controllable and verifiable data recorded in databases. One of the prerequisites for a correct and proper use and interpretation of data is that both users and owners of data have a common understanding of the meaning and descriptive characteristics (e.g. representation) of that data, guaranteed by the definition of several basic attributes.

The basic attributes specified are applicable for the definition and specification of the contents of data dictionaries and interchanging or referencing among various collections of administered items. The "basic" in basic attributes means that the attributes are commonly needed in specifying administered items completely enough to ensure that they will be applicable for a variety of functions, such as:

- design of information processing systems;
- retrieval of data from databases;
- design of messages for data interchange;
- maintenance of metadata registries;
- data management;
- dictionary design;
- dictionary control;
- use of information processing systems.

Basic also implies that they are independent of any:

- application environment;
- function of an object described by an administered item;
- level of abstraction;
- grouping of administered items;
- method for designing information processing systems or data interchange messages;
- MDR system.

Basic does not imply that all attributes specified in ISO/IEC 11179 are required in all cases. Distinction is made between those attributes that are mandatory, conditional, or optional.