MGA – Data Dictionary Guidelines

Prepared by the Functional Data Governance DED Subcommittee Date 6/1/2021

Purpose and Use:

This standard offers guidance about when data definitions and dictionaries may be required or recommended, as well as suggested content and available resources.

Required Actions & Procedures:

Data definitions and dictionaries must be identified and/or established for data elements in all systems and data assets. Data stewards are responsible for defining data elements for their area of responsibility and for systems of which they are the owner. Coordination with affiliated stewards and systems administrators is essential. Procedures are outlined below.

Description:

Following guidance from the University System of Georgia BPM Section 12, existing USG DED's and the International Standards Organization (ISO) that effective use of data requires a shared "common understanding of the meaning and descriptive characteristics of that data" (2004). The Middle Georgia State University Functional Data Governance Committee (FDGC) DED subcommittee has set guidelines for identifying relevant data dictionaries or creating data dictionaries.

A data dictionary is a compendium of data definitions for multiple data elements that exist in a data store or data system. For systems providing data, data dictionaries must be maintained to guide data users in the meaning and proper usage of data.

Principles:

1. Data dictionaries are designed to promote communication and production of meaning; as such dictionaries document the existence, meaning, and use of data elements.
2. Data dictionaries must be accessible to all users who enter and extract data from a data store or data system.
3. Data stewards must actively maintain data dictionary contents, including definitions, values, and other metadata.
4. Data Stewards, systems administrators and users are responsible for actively using data dictionaries to correctly enter, select, and analyze data elements.
5. Data dictionaries should be reviewed annually to ensure currency and documented by the FDGC.

Existing Data Elements Dictionaries:

The FDGC recognizes the existence of vendor or host provider data dictionaries. These dictionaries shall be collected, evaluated, distributed, published for internal users, and reviewed annually.

Current USG data elements dictionaries can be found at https://www.usg.edu/research/reporting_resources and an example of an external vendor DED can be found here

https://complianceassistsupport.campuslabs.com/hc/article_attachments/360097203631/Credentials_Data_Dictionary.xlsx

Prioritized Common Elements:

(For internally crafted data dictionaries and supplements to existing dictionaries)

Dictionary Element	Description	Examples
System	The name of the database, data store, or data system	
Data Element Name	A single or multi-word designation used as primary means of recognition for data users.	
Definition	A long description of what the field means, a verbal explanation of how it is calculated, how it should be used, and how it should not be used. The definition should not simply re-state the name of the data element.	
Data Type and Length	Numeric, character, date, valid image/video files, radio buttons, drop down, etc; length and decimal format, if appropriate	
Valid Values	Provides a description of what data may be entered into a field. List allowable values and labels if fewer than 20 or provide the name of the validation table or setup in which values and labels are stored.	
Database Table Name	A specific data set or database from where the data is available. The data source can be the systems own database or if the system is connected to Banner the form in which the data element is found.	
Field Name	The attribute or variable name in the database table that this data element is found.	
Menu	The name of the table, tab, form, or section that houses the element.	

Label	The name of the label used to identify this data element in the system.	
Business Practices	How the institution uses this data element in day-to-day business operations, for reporting needs, and any parameters applicable to this element.	
Effective Terms	Lists the term the dictionary entry was created.	
Date of Last Update	Lists the date the dictionary entry was modified. Leave null for newly created entries.	
Change History	Brief description of the recent changes to this data element, if applicable.	
Comments	Additional notes related to this data element and/or system that data user should know from a technical and usability perspective to ensure transparent interpretation.	

Procedures:

All data stewards are required to complete a data elements dictionary for data systems that are part of routine data collection and/or store sensitive information, as identified by the CISO. Data stewards are responsible for the integrity and accuracy of the content within the data elements dictionary to provide transparency and understanding to all users. Any updates to the DED such as new systems or elements, modifications, or deletions must be documented using the template found on the Data Governance webpage and emailed to mgaded@mga.edu.

Associated Resources:

- USG Business Procedure Manual Section 12

MGA DED Link:

Relevant MGA Policies, Standards, and Procedures

- **MGA Data Stewardship and Access Standard**
- **MGA Privacy Standard**
- MGA Cybersecurity Plan
- **MGA Data Governance Charter**