

Getting started with ISNI and the ISNI web interface

Scope: Overview of what ISNI is and how to use the ISNI web interface

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[What is ISNI?](#)
[What is an ISNI?](#)
[ISNI Web Interface](#)
[Searching](#)
[Creating a new record](#)
[Enhancing a record](#)
[Identify and report problems and duplicates](#)
[See also & documentation](#)

What is ISNI?

International **Standard Name Identifier**—an ISO (International Standards Organization) standard developed as a global identification system of Public Identities of Parties. It identifies millions of contributors to creative works and those active in their distribution, incl. writers, artists, creators, researchers, publishers, and more. As of July 2017, most of the Public Identities are persons, but corporate bodies are included as well.

ISNI is not an authority file!

ISNI is a significantly different approach than that used for authority control in which we establish and maintain consistent forms of terms—names, subjects, titles—to be used as headings in the bib records of the library catalog. There, headings must not only be consistent, they must also be unique. The bibliographic information is organized using a single distinct text string or heading—which is “authorized” or established in that particular form and applied consistently.

Creating an ISNI is quite a different experience from what we are familiar with as catalogers. Generally when creating a local or NACO authority we are basing the authority on information presented on a resource in our library's collection or for which our library has licensed access, but that is not necessarily true when creating an ISNI. We might not have anything in hand and in many cases the names we are working with are primarily outside the library silo, in terms of the material we work on.

Another difference is the milieu (peer sources)—ISNI contributors are not only other libraries but also property rights organizations, publishers, information aggregators, etc., so we are placed in a much larger/global environment. (In ISNI, “source” refers to the contributing member organization (e.g., HARV), not the part of an information resource from which information is transcribed or recorded.)

It is important to remember that because ISNI is not an authority file, we are not trying to create a unique access point but an identifier for an entity that can have different forms of name, none of which is considered the preferred or authorized form of name.

The concept of “relationships/contributors/creators” roles can be quite a challenge for new ISNI participants. The purpose of ISNI is identification and that we need to put our cataloging hats away for this work.

What is an ISNI?

ISNI identifies public identities of parties:

- **Party:** a person, fictional character, or a legal entity (a party can have more than one Public Identity)
- **Public Identity:** the name by which a Party is publicly known. Each Public Identity for a separate Party shall have a separate ISNI.
 - An author who publishes under several different names: an ISNI will be created for each name or party: example: Ruth Rendell/Barbara Vine

Note that ISNIs identify the Public Identities of Parties such as author, composers, cartographers, performers, academic/scientific authors, publishers, etc. ISNI does not include works/expressions, subjects.

An ISNI consists of a 16-digit number (including check digit).

How do you get an ISNI?

There are two levels of records:

- Provisional
- Assigned

Whether the ISNI receives Assigned status or not depends in large part on a complex algorithm that takes into account the:

- Richness of the data
- Uniqueness of the data
- Source of the data

See also [ISNI Data Quality Policy](#).

One or more of the following actions may satisfy the algorithm and turn a provisional ISNI into an assigned one:

- adding our source, e.g. PCC, as an identifier
- adding a distinguishing bit of data like a birth date
- adding an external link. It isn't necessary to include more information once an ISNI has been assigned, because the ISNI is designed to link to other information on the web about the identity.

Note that the majority of records in the ISNI production database have a status of provisional, most commonly because there are no matches with records from other sources, or there may be too many matches. Potential matches need to be reviewed (manually) before they are upgraded to Assigned status.

Where does the ISNI data come from?

ISNI data comes primarily from the VIAF (Virtual International Authority File) database. VIAF contains name authority work carried out by agencies worldwide, many of which are national libraries (over 40), but there are non-VIAF contributors to ISNI as well.

Databases

Sept. 26, 2017: Description of the 3 databases has been updated, it is more nuanced than previously described!

Within ISNI there are 3 primary views or databases:

1. **ISNI public database** = public view, www.isni.org, no need for a user ID; includes only records with status "Assigned". Maintenance is via the yellow box only. [Show this view]
2. **Web version**
 - a. ISNIQT view – access to full level of maintenance; entire database is available, including data from sources considered as "private" (ISNI production/QT permissions)
 - b. Member view – access to a basic level of maintenance (merges, data correction of own source data, creating new records); entire database is available, but data from some sources is considered as "private" and cannot be seen (ISNI production/Member permissions)
 - c. Accept – test version (ISNIQT view mirrors 2a; Member view mirrors 2b)
3. **WinIBW**
 - a. ISNIQT view – access to full level of maintenance; entire database is available, including data from sources considered as "private" (ISNI production/QT permissions)
 - b. Member view – access to a basic level of maintenance (merges, data correction of own source data, creating new records); entire database is available, but data from some sources is considered as "private" and cannot be seen (ISNI production/Member permissions)
 - c. Accept – test version (ISNIQT view mirrors 3a; Member view mirrors 3b)

Which view you see depends on what your membership is authorized for and which URL you use.

ISNI Web Interface

See [How to use the ISNI web portal](#). For more detailed information, continue below:

Logging on

See [ISNI web links \(restricted access\)](#)

What you'll see

The first screen is a **Search** screen. Notice also other tabs for **Results** (of your search)

Advanced (shows other search options with filters for different combinations of search terms—note drop-down menus under each)

Help: offers detailed information about the search options and how best to use them. Also offers explanation of the search indexes in the drop-down menu (APH, CN, etc.)

Searching

See [How to use the ISNI web portal](#). For more detailed information, continue below:

Search terms

It can be helpful to experiment with the searching options on your own to get an idea of different results based on different search terms/combinations. See also ISNI Search: Guidelines and Examples: http://www.isni.org/filedepot_download/139/470

- Use search index *APH (any phrase)*: to search by forename or surname or by ISNI number.
- Use search index *NA: (name)* to search for a person: enter surname forename (comma is optional); to search for an organization, enter name (or name of parent organization, child organization)

Search results are sorted by relevance; for example: Results for **John Huston**:

- APH: 8 (direct order)
- APH: 14 (surname, forename) and (surname forename –no comma)
- NA: 1 (direct order)
- NA: 14 (surname, forename) BUT surname forename – no comma=0)

Note: Results display 10 per screen/click on [next](#) to see remaining results in the search

More information

- Tab: **Shortlist**–takes you back to the Search results list (or use back arrow)
- On left: Show Hints or Hide hints

For additional information about the names in the list go to the Filter box: Click on the + and see:

- **Type of id:** person;
- **Status:**
 - **if assigned:** 16-digit ISNI number
 - **if provisional:** Record no. (click on either one to see the results)
- **Creation class** (similar to RDA content type)
- **Creation role** (clicking on any one of the links takes you to the record that is coded for that class or role)

Click on a name: the record displays with [Labels](#). Also look at:

- Tab: [Sources Data](#) (PICA data format)
- Tab: [Marc21 format](#)

Of interest

ISNI is designed to uniquely identify an entity; it is not intended to provide access to comprehensive information about a public identity. It can provide links to sources where detailed information is held, and provides a link for occurrences of the public identity across databases on the web.

- Fields in the Sources/Marc21 formats are arranged in numeric order
- There is **no 1XX field** because there is no “authorized form” as we know it and are used to seeing in the NAF. Instead, the “Name” appears in the 7XX field, and there can be multiple 7XX fields (one from each source).
 - Each form of the name in the 7XX field is followed by a code for the source.
 - The 4XX fields are the name variants as determined by the institutions that contributed the data. It also doesn’t matter if the forms repeat, or if the same form appears in both the 7XX and 4XX field...what is important is the source of the data. In the end, all of the forms of the name in this record are linked to this one specific ISNI.
- We cannot change data contributed by any other source. If we have data that contradicts what is already in a record, we can add it. We can notify the central QT of an error, if we think it is important. For example, a contemporary architect listed as born in 1850 was reported; the difference of two years in a birth date probably would not be.

Creating a new record

See [How to use the ISNI web portal](#). For more detailed information, continue below:

Avoid duplicates

Do a thorough search to avoid creating a duplicate. Perform the search several ways.

Note! fairly extensive searching, outside of ISNI, may be part of the process to clarify the identity: Google search, IMDb, or other resources depending on where the name is coming from. Then, in ISNI:

- Search by **Name**:
- Search **Browse** Index to double check
- If you find no matches, select the **WebCat** tab at the top of the search screen.

Creation

Select **Add an identity: Person or fictional character**, or: **Add an identity: Organisation**

- The template is pre-populated with **Identifier type** which is a code for the contributing institution; for PCC contributors, this code is PCC
- **Identifier (number)**: leave blank

Name: enter the name you are creating

- Name is required! (even when editing an existing record and the name is the same as the name already supplied by another source)
- This form of name will appear as the 700 field in the record
- Forename and surname as found in the source, plus other information that you have

Forenames are preferred over initials for **Names** (real names or pseudonyms)

Note:

- Filled in fields will be assigned a source code in subfield \$2 associated with the sign-on of the user

- Fields with a + sign are repeatable; click on the sign to open another blank field
- Where there are codes for an element, these are indicated by a pull down box (Creation role) or by the "i" Information icon next to a field that contains information about the data that can be entered.

Creation Class (defines the repertoire such as musical, a-v, textual similar to RDA's content type. Some examples are given if you hover over the "i" information icon, but according to the ISNI data element values document creation class is not yet defined; the default is "cre" BUT it is an optional field and most of us are choosing not to enter any value in this field.)

Creation Role (such as author, performer, publisher, illustrator): use the drop-down menu which is fairly comprehensive, for the HFA project there are numerous options in addition to director, such as film director, film producer, etc.

Work: Titles of works created by person (as found in the source of information you have)

Name Variant: Additional names known to the ISNI member providing the information

- This form will appear as a 400 in the record

Related person: co-authors, co-performers, real names, collaborators, etc.

Relation: is related

Relationship type: choose from drop-down list

Related organization: if person is affiliated or member of or otherwise related

Language, Gender, Nationality: optional

External Information and Notes: You can add outside sources such as a website in the Information Box, with an indication of the source such as Wikipedia and the URL to the source providing a link to more detailed information about the Public Identity.

General note: messages for the ISNI quality team, such as information that should be deleted from a record, records that should be merged or separated, etc.

When completed, click **Save Changes**. (Not necessary to save after adding information in each tab)

Results:

- When a new name is entered, the ISNI algorithm checks the database for possible duplicates. If a possible duplicate is found a record with status provisional is entered and presented on the screen with its possible dup. If you are able to resolve the duplicate you will get an assigned ISNI (16 digits).
- If there is no potential duplicate identified, the ISNI server checks for completeness, so if data required for assignment is missing, the status of the record is set to Provisional. Instead of an ISNI number, the record will present with its **Record no.**

And you have created a record!

Enhancing a record

See [How to use the ISNI web portal](#). For more detailed information, continue below:

What is enhancing a record:

- To change record status from provisional to assigned;
- To provide additional info about the identity that will help to distinguish it from other identities.

How to enhance another institution's record

1. *Find* existing record created by other source
2. Check record status: provisional/assigned
3. Add institutional identifier (e.g., PCC) and the Name; Save. This may be sufficient. If record status is still provisional, then
4. Add the entity's web page as additional information, for example

How to enhance your institution's record

1. *Find* existing PCC-created record
2. Add a Relationship (Related; Relationship Type); Save

How to create links between records

1. *Find* existing record > (Related; Relationship)
2. Add relationship. If related identity is also in ISNI, follow the prompts to:
 - search; compare/choose; add see also or colleague/collaborator relationship; link); Save

Identify and report problems and duplicates

There are four ways possible duplicates can arise:

1. Your search results list contains a possible duplicate in ISNI, and ISNI has flagged it for comparison
 - click Compare, and decide, as per [ISNI Web Interface Usage Guidelines - version 20161216](#) (page 19)
2. Your search results list contains an obvious duplicate in ISNI, but ISNI has not flagged it
 - make a General Note on the External Info & Notes tab of the duplicate record: "Please merge with [isni #]," which generates an email message to the ISNIQT
3. Your search results list may contain a duplicate but you're not sure
 - make a General Note on the External Info & Notes tab of the duplicate record: "Please merge with [isni #]," which generates an email message to the ISNIQT
4. When you create a new record, the ISNI algorithm sees a possible duplicate and presents it to you
 - click Compare, and decide, as per [ISNI Web Interface Usage Guidelines - version 20161216](#) (page 19)

Also make a General note when you have found a mixed identity (names of different persons in one ISNI record), or another error you wish to see corrected.

See also & documentation

For beginners, see in particular the documents noted with "[useful!](#)" on the [Pilot 2017-18 documentation and training](#) page.