**Primary Question:**  What is the difference between the custodian and the author roles?

**Linked Question:**

* Where can information, including examples and use cases, on the distinction between author and custodian be found?

The CDA R2 standard defines the **custodian** role in section 4.2.2.3. According to the standard, the custodian “represents the organization that is in charge of maintaining the document. The custodian is the steward that is entrusted with the care of the document. Every CDA document has exactly one custodian.” In that same section, the standard clarifies, “The custodian participation satisfies the CDA definition of Stewardship. Because CDA is an exchange standard and may not represent the original form of the authenticated document, the custodian represents the steward of the original source document.” Stewardship is one of the 6 design principles of a CDA document (CDA R2 section 1.1). Stewardship is closely related to the design principle of Persistence.

The CDA R2 standard defines the **author** role in section 4.2.2.2. The author “represents the humans and/or machines that authored the document.” An author is a party that originates the Act and therefore has responsibility for the information given in the Act. The role assigned author (AssignedAuthor class) role is a person (Person class) or a device (AuthoringDevice class). The entity scoping the role is an organization (Organization class), and is the organization from which the document originates.

In short, the author has responsibility for the information contained in the document, while the custodian has responsibility for the document containing the information. The organization scoping the entity playing the AssignedAuthor could be the Custodian Organization playing the role of the AssignedCustodian, but there is no requirement that the same organization play both roles.

**Examples:**

Section 4.2.2.13 of the CDA R2 standard provides several scenarios and describes who would play various roles in the header participations of a CDA created to document each scenario. It is noted that, “several CDA Header participations can be played by the same person. In such cases, the person should be identified as the player for each appropriate participation. For instance, if a person is both the author and the authenticator of a document, the CDA Header should identify that person as both the author participant and the authenticator participant.

In the case of a discharge summary, the author could be a doctor working for the hospital and the hospital could be the custodian for the document. In the case of a Public Health Case Report, a doctor at a hospital could be the author of the document and the state Public Health Department could be the custodian of the document. In the case of a patient generated document, the author could be the patient and the custodian could be the organization maintaining the patient’s PHR.