Formalizing the Role of Federation Proxies within the InCommon Federation

InCommon Steering Committee - 9/11/2023

What is a Federation Proxy?

- Before FPs, relationships between IdPs and SPs were direct and unmediated.

IdP <==> SP

- FPs are mediators, modifying the relationships. They may not pass InCommon obligations on to their mediated SPs.

IdP <==> FP <==> SP

- FPs typically provide one or more of the following functions:
  - protocol normalization and translation to achieve interoperability,
  - enhanced user information for use within collaborations and communities of interest,
  - management of access and other policies, and
  - integration of multiple service providers into a single meta-service, avoiding the need to federate each service.

Our Recommendations

- Charter a working group to propose enhancements to InCommon policies and agreements to address specific concerns that attach to Federation Proxies (FPs):
  - They may onboard services that otherwise would need their own membership agreement with InCommon.
  - They may enable a mission not entirely aligned with that of InCommon.
  - They may profit monetarily by selling their federation access to other services.
  - Their proxied services need not share the same requirements for identity attributes and thus data minimization may not be realized.
  - They need not provide transparency of the proxied services available to current and prospective InCommon Participants.
  - **This is particularly urgent, as we are unprepared for likely events in the near to medium term.**
- We also recommend the following as part of the InCommon Futures effort:
  - Expand InCommon's documentation of best practices for IdPs and SPs to include FPs.
  - Consider a modified fee structure for cost-sharing with FPs.

Why Is This Important?

- We are behind the curve with respect to FPs; we need to change that.
  - We are, at times, obstacles to progress, rather than solution providers.
  - FPs can help regionals that are planning to operate support federation for smaller institutions.
  - US government agencies are moving in this direction. We are not prepared for that.
  - InCommon Catalyst partners are already deploying Federation Proxies for their customers. They need guidelines to help them do this without impacting Participants' expectations for mutual trust.
- FPs enhance the "network effect" of federation by reducing the cost of incorporating services, thereby increasing the value of federation overall.

Thank You

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