

InCommon Update, Fall 2008

A report about collaboration activities supporting federated access.

October 13, 2008

The InCommon Federation, in conjunction with Internet2, supports a number of collaboration activities aimed at increasing the use of federated access to protected resources. Here is an update on the focus and activities of these groups. You can find more information about these projects and others at www.incommon.org.

Interfederation

As a follow-on from the Federation Soup conference in June 2008, InCommon has worked closely with JISC, the United Kingdom's federation, to interfederate and work towards interoperability. A successful conclusion of this effort should pave the way for interfederation agreements between InCommon and other federations. The agreement will not automatically support interoperation between commercial Service Providers in one federation and Identity Providers in the other federation. However, non-commercial Service Providers, such as protected research web sites and managed educational resources held by educational institutions, will be able to rely on Identity Providers in either federation.

TeraGrid

The TeraGrid plans to enable federated authentication of a user when that person makes the initial contact to request an allocation. This will be done by Shibbolizing the TeraGrid User Portal. The second phase will allow the use of Shibboleth to maintain more up-to-date contact attributes for users (e.g. phone, postal address). The third phase will allow for full federated access to cyberinfrastructure resources.

InCommon Collaboration Activities

- Interfederation
- TeraGrid
- NIH
- Student Services
- Library Services
- Apple iTunes U Pilot
- SharePoint

For more information, see www.incommon.org or the collaboration wiki: <https://spaces.internet2.edu/display/InCCollaborate>

NIH

The National Institutes of Health has developed a federated SharePoint application: the NIH Public Information Officer Network (NIH PIO-Net). The project is currently in production. Test users from both the NIH and external communities are evaluating the site and providing feedback. In addition to offering news, the NIH PIO-Net application allows public information officers at organizations receiving NIH funding to quickly obtain information on funded grants and to find contact information for the public information officer at the funding institute or center, or at another research organization. It is anticipated that the site will grow and the community itself will start to use the powerful tools that are a part of SharePoint 2007. At this moment, the site makes use of many of the more innovative features such as the blog and wiki. NIH has 14 universities interested in participating in the pilot, and is looking for more interested partners.

Student Services

The InCommon Student Collaboration Group is growing and making contributions to developing an understanding of the benefits of federated applications by both registrars and IT professionals. A summary of since the last Member Meeting includes an ongoing discussion exploring FERPA and attribute release in a federated context and participation in the development of the February 2009 Internet2/EDUCAUSE CAMP entitled, "Delivering, Sourcing, and Securing Services Throughout the Student Identity Life Cycle." www.edcause.edu/camp091

The group has also developed an article on Identity Management governance scheduled for the American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) Journal, and participated in the development and delivery of an Identity Management workshop through AACRAO, Internet2 and EDUCAUSE. In addition, the student collaboration group has written "Several Things You Should Know about Identity Management," which includes an overview of IdM and federated identity discussion scenarios for student services staff.

Library Services

In 2007, the Library Shibboleth Pilot Project was assembled to investigate problems related to online

Turn the page for more summaries.

InCommon Update, p. 2

access of library services and resources, and explore how federated authentication could improve the user and library experiences. In the past year, the participating campuses have primarily focused on issues surrounding remote access to library-licensed electronic resources, enumerating user scenarios and implementation issues for remote authorized users and on-site library patrons. The group has also tested Shib-enabled vendors and supporting technologies in support of a simplified user experience. Information about Shibboleth and the project's activities has been presented to librarians, IT personnel and vendors at multiple conferences, and a summary of the presentation given at NASIG 2008 will be published in *Serials Librarian* in 2009.

The project has assembled preliminary recommendations for service providers and piloting institutions, and is identifying opportunities for future collaboration with other federations and organizations, as well as facilitating additional testing.

SharePoint

Microsoft's SharePoint server collaboration tools are becoming more widespread on campuses. Universities are interested in federating this collaboration platform, allowing users from multiple IdPs to collaborate with those from the host IdP. Some government entities, notably the NIH, are moving toward using SharePoint in conjunction with information-sharing about grants and awards. SharePoint presents some federation challenges, but there are several possible techniques which might be used to support federated/Shibboleth access (e.g. membershipProvider, ADFS), with at least one commercial offering. But supporting federated authentication is just one piece of the puzzle, and the issues around scaleable delegated authorization management remain.

The working group is currently determining its scope – whether the group will remain focused on SharePoint or reconstitute itself more broadly as a collaboration tools working group; particularly since the more complex authorization component is an issue that all federated collaboration tools need to resolve.

About InCommon

InCommon provides a framework of shared policies, trust-establishing processes, and technology standards for universities and service partners to follow. This greatly streamlines collaboration with multiple organizations. For example, institutions and service providers could spend time establishing operating principles, technology hooks, and agreed-upon data exchange elements with each partner, or they could do it once by joining InCommon and then leveraging these common elements for many relationships.

InCommon Benefits

- InCommon supports Web-based distributed authentication and authorization services, such as controlled access to protected content resources.
- Participants exchange information in a standardized format, reducing or removing the need to repeat integration work for each new resource.
- Access decisions and user privacy controls are decided on a case by case basis for each resource, providing higher security and more granular control.
- Institutions experience reduced account management overhead by eliminating the need for separate accounts to access particular resources.
- Campus and company IT professionals provide protected content to multiple organizations using a single authentication framework.
- The home institution controls when an identity is disclosed, and how much information is revealed.

Who can join InCommon?

Any accredited two- and four-year higher education institution can join InCommon. Additionally, higher education participants can sponsor their online service providers. For more information, and a list of participants, see www.incommon.org.

InCommon Web: www.incommon.org

Collaboration Wiki:
<https://spaces.internet2.edu/display/InCCollaborate>

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