Steward Program Proof of Concept Ends

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In December of 2016, MCNC and InCommon launched a proof of concept of the InCommon Steward Program, an effort to extend federation to K-14 (K-12 and community colleges). The proof of concept was intended to last for six months, followed by a recommendation on how to proceed. Both MCNC and InCommon agree that the next step will be a six-month business development phase to complete the assessment of the program's value for the Steward and Represented Constituents (read on and I will define those terms).

The Steward Program, as it is now defined, emerged from several pilots that were conducted a few years ago. Under this program, a Steward (in this case, a regional network, MCNC) provides a way for its K-14 members (Represented Constituents) to enable federated identity, including operating an identity provider for the K-14 organizations. The Steward takes on some of the administrative and onboarding functions normally done by InCommon, as well.

During the proof of concept:

- MCNC staff were trained in the InCommon registration and onboarding process, then provided registration authority services related its member K-12 school districts and community colleges (also known as "Represented Constituents" or RCs).
- On behalf of its Represented Constituents, MCNC also manages Identity Providers and Service Providers and the associated metadata, and provides other technical services. Stewards are also responsible for direct support for their RCs.

Overall, the proof of concept has gone very well. Operational issues have been minimal and communication within the Registration Authority "virtual team," comprised of personnel from InCommon and MCNC, has worked well. There was considerable preparation put into training of MCNC personnel that contributed significantly to successful operation.

There were no significant impacts on InCommon's trust model observed during the proof of concept, largely due to prior community outreach and consultation. In general, though, impacts (positive or negative) of the Steward Program on K-12 have been difficult to observe, due to the timing of the proof of concept late in the school year. For this reason, we plan for the next phase to focus on business development, while continuing the assessment of impacts.

Completing the business development phase will also allow for finalizing some business and legal issues. The goal is to have a complete program description early in 2018, including the impacts on all parties (InCommon, MCNC, and the Represented Constituents), and engage with other regional networks that have expressed an interest in the Steward Program.