

Common Identity and Trust Collaborative (CommIT)

Project Executive Summary

Technology can help solve several of the biggest challenges we face related to the electronic process for the higher education admissions. The key to creating a smooth, reliable, and easily implemented experience begins with a quality electronic authentication solution.

Contrast that vision with today's reality: applicants establish separate accounts for every service they consume and at nearly every institution they apply to creating a cumbersome and challenging approach but are rarely expected to *prove* their identity until after they have been accepted. Simultaneously, stakeholders incur significant costs in provisioning and support without reaping the rewards of identity assurance and are ultimately left with the challenge of accurately matching records to applicants.

Single sign-on (SSO) is a technology that provides users with a single set of credentials that can be used across various services because the services are in a trust relationship. Alone, SSO implementation for the application process would represent a significant advancement for all involved, however combined with the voluntary assignment of a unique identifier and vetting events already being performed, the validation of that applicant's identity is significantly increased. The CommIT project strives to provide a scalable secure approach to matching electronic records for all college applicants and institutions and the creation of a unique electronic credential to:

- resolve matching problems at the university level,
- simplify the entire application process for students, parents, colleges and universities, and their external service providers, and
- do away with the last remaining vestiges of dependency on the social security number.

A partnership of PESC and Internet2, the Common Identity and Trust Collaborative (CommIT) project was established to address these challenges utilizing the data standards expertise of the PESC community and the national reach of Internet2's InCommon federated identity solution. CommIT is now moving forward with a one-year demonstration pilot project (Phase one) that invites several select university and vendor partners to join, leading to a larger product release in the summer of 2014. Participation in CommIT is voluntary, is currently limited to admissions in education, and involves international applicants (without storing nationality). Identity assurance support is targeted to be included in the Phase two pilot in 2014.

The initial goal of the CommIT Project is to support and enhance *identity and trust* as foundational services for higher education by addressing the challenges of the higher education admissions process. Through the creation of an identity store, a unique student identifier, an identity provider, and an ecosystem for "Digital Notaries", CommIT can bring identity verification and trust into the marketplace, and, when combined with corresponding policies and technologies, will protect user control and privacy. With CommIT, only the applicants themselves will initiate record aggregation and release, which enhances security and privacy by preventing third party access without student authorization.

The CommIT project will provide a person registry to store the minimum data required (and only the minimum data) to support user uniqueness and password resets. In essence, the CommIT project provides an enabling service for some identity management and is not a central student/applicant data repository.

The CommIT Core Team Deliverables

The CommIT Core Team is made up of representatives of Internet2, InCommon, PESC, and University participants that will develop the infrastructure, provide support and documentation, and deliver a successful pilot project to which partners can connect their services.

- Internet2 has contracted vendors to provide virtual machines to host the pilot project and to provide technical assistance.
- PESC will lead the business development and community outreach components.
- Georgetown University will provide oversight to the project.
- Pennsylvania State University will be responsible for implementing the central person registry.

The Core Team will deliver a documented, working infrastructure by late May 2013, and will then assist the pilot participants with production implementation and testing in order to be ready for the summer 2013 application cycle.

University Participants Deliverables

Universities participating in Phase one of the CommIT Project will have the following requirements:

- Through the admissions office, the institution must provide a process for willing prospective students with the option to create and utilize the CommIT process
- The university will utilize the unique CommIT identifier to match applicants with records provided through their admissions applications tools.
- The university will allow any applicant who possesses a CommIT identity to use their credentials to authorize access to online applications.
- Representatives from participating universities will be encouraged to share their experiences and lessons learned at various conferences

University participants are invited to participate in various working groups during development of the pilot to assist in the definition of the business, technical, and governance models for the project. Participating in the pilot project does not obligate a university to participating in any subsequent product release.

Organizational Partners Deliverables

To participate in CommIT Project Phase one, organizational partners will be responsible for:

- Accepting the CommIT credential from applicants who login with them,
- Support the storing of this unique identifier, and
- Support the capability to attach the unique identifier to all applicant documents that are passed to CommIT participating institutions.