Value Proposition for Joining InCommon

The InCommon Federation is the U.S. education and research identity federation, providing a common framework for trusted shared management of access to on-line resources. Through InCommon, Identity Providers can give their users single sign-on convenience and privacy protection, while online Service Providers control access to their protected resources.

What is the value proposition for joining InCommon? Bottom line, it’s about streamlining and increasing efficiency by providing a common framework for trusted shared management of access to on-line resources.

**Two Important Elements: Running an Identity Provider and Joining a Federation**

For an organization or consortium, there are two important steps in the process: Running a SAML Identity Provider or “IdP”, and joining a Federation such as InCommon. Running an IdP allows you a specific set of benefits (usually running Shibboleth, SimpleSAMLphp, ADFS, etc.). Joining a Federation such as InCommon provides a trusted community of organizations – universities, colleges, research organizations, vendors, etc. – that you can interact and collaborate with.

### Benefits of using a SAML IdP:

* **Single Sign-On** to all SAML-enabled Web Applications
  + A user only needs to login to their IdP once until their SAML assertion expires or the user logs out of their browser
* **More Secure Transactions**
  + You login at your home organization, not at the vendor site
  + Your credentials are never “held” by the vendor
* **User Data is maintained locally – in one place**
  + You don’t (necessarily) need to update user accounts at a vendor
  + Accounts (and access) are managed locally
    - Terminated users can’t access hosted resources once they’ve left your institution
  + Changes to a user’s attributes (e.g. grade level, status, entitlements to vendor applications) are all handled in the local data and are available immediately to the IdP when the user logs in
* Once you’ve set up your IdP, **it’s fairly simple to add new vendors**

### Benefits of Joining InCommon:

* All members have been vetted and follow standards
* You have a community of peers for support
* Access to vendors already in the federation can be configured more easily
* You have more leverage to get a vendor to use SAML
* Many Higher Education institutions (and vendors) are already participants
* Additional fee-based benefits and services available

### K-12 Benefits:

* Many education vendors (with more coming) already participate in InCommon so configuration is simplified
* Use of Hosted Shared Applications by all state school districts could save the state money (depending on whether districts receive state funding for purchasing learning resources)
* If State Applications were SAML-enabled, accounts could be maintained locally (assumes all districts using an IdP)
* State applications for K-12 employees could be accessed through a federation
  + Professional Development applications/resources
  + Benefits applications
  + Retirement applications
* If Higher Education institutions in the state were already members of InCommon and had SAML-enabled applications, students in K-12 could potentially access them with their own credentials
  + Only one set of credentials to maintain (District level)
  + Less support required at the Community College or University
  + Examples include
    - Early College High School Programs
    - In-State Admissions process for Higher Education
    - Virtual Public Schools
      * Access to courses using local district credential

The Quilt InCommon Pilot initiative is paving the way with models, resources and a peer support mechanism for furthering efforts towards K-12 federation. For more information see: https://spaces.internet2.edu/display/InCQuiltFed/Home

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