Goal of the Task Force

The goal of the Task Force is to improve service, lower unit costs, and ensure security through the implementation of e-Authentication and e-Authorization technology and practices. The result is a common e-Authentication/e-Authorization framework for data exchanges that cooperating parties can implement to support the broader goal.

The Task Force expects to achieve this goal by (1) identifying opportunities for improved exchange of information that will improve the effectiveness and usability of open standards, (2) identifying and encourage projects that, with support, could better meet the Task Force goal, and (3) broadening the understanding of the issues in higher education and the opportunities that technology has to contribute to solutions.

The Task Force Meetings

The emerging consensus from the first face-to-face meeting March 8, 2007 was:

- Focus on federation—applications that cross institutions or between institutions and external suppliers (e.g. journal publishers and financial institutions).
- Developing trust and resolving policy issues is the most significant barrier to federated applications. Resolving liability is difficult and time consuming.
- The Task Force should identify high-value applications and encourage broad implementation.
- Applications that serve student are likely the highest value.
- The Task Force should consider applications that transit K-12/higher education.
- Federated use will depend upon colleges and universities having implemented identify management and established Levels of Assurance.

As Brett McDowell subsequently described this effort:” I would like to stick with the phrasing ‘bring about.’” The Task Force is not developing new technology, not developing new standards, but helping other organizations “bring about” success where success is measured in tangible benefits to students and institutions.

At the first meeting the Task Force heard two presentations: the Meteor network and the InCommon federation. Subsequent discussions suggest these should be expanded, the experience made available to others, and the same technology be applied to similar applications.
The Task Force also heard from the General Services Administration and again, the emerging consensus is to both benefit from that experience and to encourage colleges and universities to follow GSA’s leadership in policy.

In the two subsequent conference calls, the Task Force is following the work of the GSA, National Institute of Standards and Technology and other government efforts to develop appropriate policies and anticipate the forthcoming NIST 800-63 Special Specification would be useful to higher education. The Task Force would then suggest the Meteor project follow this guidance as they extend the Meteor network into student and staff use via the local institutional portal.

Current Activities

The Task Force members are themselves currently supporting the goal of the Task Force through communications, personal influence, and their participation in projects.

At yesterday’s Data Quality Campaign presentations on data interoperability hosted by the U.S. Department of Education, Michael Sessa summarized the approach as supporting those who champion data interoperability and are taking risk in implementation, and choosing an incremental implementation that ensures success. He defined success in terms of benefits to students, teachers and faculty, and schools, colleges and universities. He also made the observation that benefits are coming in terms of improved policy, increased efficiency, and better service. Likely this summary reflects the Task Force discussions and is an example of what Task Force members are doing to advance appropriate interoperability.

Publisher’s Note

This document was provided to the Educause Fed/Ed Meeting held June 14, 2007 in Washington, DC.