

## Findings: Higher Education Institutions Should Prepare for Identity Federation

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The global nature of higher education research includes funding from national and international bodies. These bodies are streamlining their application processes by electronic means, demanding digital identities from the applicants.

## **FINDINGS**

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Research agencies (such as the National Science Foundation [NSF], National Institutes of Health [NIH] and European Union [EU]) are funding research worldwide and making their application and audit processes more efficient. As they take advantage of IT, the need for secure digital identities becomes obvious. To avoid bureaucratic and monolithic identity systems, the research community is turning to federated and interfederated identity solutions.

## **ANALYSIS**

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A trend that indicates research community globalization is that funds are increasingly coming from international funding agencies such as the NSF, NIH and EU.

As these agencies seek cost-efficient processes for grant proposals, reporting and so on, they implement IT solutions. The NSF FastLane (a well-established example launched in the mid-1990s) is already the required means of interaction.

With the U.S. government seeking ways to "further improve government's ability to deliver services to the American public and save taxpayer dollars," NSF FastLane is (as of 7 September 2006) one of the first services included in the E-Authentication Federation (EAF). The academic community involved in the InCommon federation has already identified the benefits of interfederation between these two, rather than have each university establish its own trusted link with the EAF. It is not hard to envision the administrative benefits for those individual researchers that have this transparent access to services such as NSF FastLane. The federation model with the most momentum is Shibboleth. It is possible that, in five years, a federated identification approach will be the only way to interact with the world's most-important funding agencies.

## **WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW**

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Research institution CIOs should ensure that their identity and access management solution is ready for federation in five years. Institution access to funding agencies may depend on it. Institutions should be aware of the interfederation efforts between InCommon and the EAF.

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