SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

SeamlessAccess Academic IT & Library Surveys

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Outreach Committee

Technology Outreach Working Group

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS - SEAMLESSACCESS ACADEMIC IT & LIBRARY SURVEYS

Seamless Access (SA) recently conducted two surveys, one aimed at academic library staff and one at academic IT staff. The goal of these surveys was to better understand current practices around the use of federated authentication, as well as how libraries and IT are collaborating around federated authentication.

290 responses were received: 159 for the library survey, and 131 for the IT survey. The two surveys contained different questions, geared specifically to the two populations - library or IT. More specific information about methodology and demographics is below.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **USE OF IP-BASED ACCESS FOR LIBRARY RESOURCES IS ALMOST UNIVERSAL**
  - 97% (143) of library respondents indicated use of IP-based access.
  - 87% (99) of IT respondents indicated the libraries at their institutions use IP-based access.

- **BOTH LIBRARIES AND IT ARE AWARE VENDORS ARE MOVING AWAY FROM IP-BASED ACCESS**
  - 87% (99) of IT respondents said they were aware of this, and 84% (122) of library respondents.

- **FEDERATED AUTHENTICATION MORE LIKELY TO BE IMPLEMENTED FOR LIBRARY RESOURCES AT LARGE INSTITUTIONS**
  - This was true for both the library and IT surveys.

○ Small institutions were much less likely to have implemented federated authentication for library resources: 29% (13) of library respondents from small institutions; 33% (7) of IT respondents from small institutions.

○ The majority of large institutions had implemented federated authentication for library resources: 62% (29) of library respondents at large institutions; 84% (49) of IT respondents at large institutions.

● **LIBRARY STAFF ARE NOT VERY FAMILIAR WITH FEDERATED AUTHENTICATION**

○ 76% (108) of library respondents reported they were either unfamiliar or only somewhat familiar with federated authentication.

○ Only 24% (34) indicated they were "very familiar" with federated authentication.

● **NEITHER LIBRARY NOR IT STAFF WERE VERY FAMILIAR WITH THE RA21 NISO RECOMMENDATION**

○ 65% (83) of library respondents indicated they were not very familiar with the NISO recommendation.

○ 80% (80) of IT respondents were not very familiar with the NISO recommendation.

● **MOST INSTITUTIONS WHO USE FEDERATED AUTHENTICATION HAVE A PRIVACY POLICY FOR ATTRIBUTE RELEASE**

○ Of the 68 IT respondents who indicated their institution had implemented federated access, 74% (50) said their organization had a privacy policy for attribute release.

○ This question was not asked on the library survey.

● **LIBRARIES ARE MOSTLY UNSURE WHETHER OR NOT THEY APPLY A PRIVACY POLICY WHEN SETTING UP NEW VENDORS**

○ 40% (53) of library respondents answered "unsure" to the question *"Does your library have a privacy policy that is actually applied when setting up new vendors?".*

○ Only 32% (39) of library respondents indicated they did apply a privacy policy; 28% (36) indicated they did not.

- This question was not asked on the IT survey.

- **IT AND LIBRARIES RARELY COMMUNICATE ABOUT FEDERATED AUTHENTICATION**

  - Both the library and IT surveys included a question asking how often the two departments communicate about federated access for library resources.

  - This was only asked of respondents who indicated their institutions had implemented federated authentication for library resources. 55 library respondents answered this question, and 45 IT.

  - A majority of library respondents 53% (29) indicated they only communicated with IT about federated authentication "several times a year." None indicated they communicated more than 3-4 times a month, and 36% (20) indicated either 3-4 times or 1-2 times monthly.

  - IT responses also indicated communication was infrequent: 67% (30) said they communicated with the library either "several times a year", or "never" and 23% (10) indicated either 3-4 or 1-2 times monthly. Only 2 respondents said they communicated more than once a week, and 3 were unsure.

- **LIBRARY STAFF ARE ONLY MINIMALLY INVOLVED BY IT WHEN SETTING UP FEDERATED ACCESS TO LIBRARY RESOURCES**

  - The question *"How involved are library staff in configuring federated access for library service providers?"* was only asked of the 49 IT respondents who indicated their institution had implemented federated authentication for library resources. 45 IT respondents answered this question.

  - 51% (23) said that the library staff were either "minimally involved" or "completely uninvolved" in setting up federated access to library resources.

  - 27% (12) said library staff were "somewhat involved"; and only 20% (9) said library staff were "very involved".

- **IN THE COMMENTS SHARED, LIBRARIANS EXPRESSED MORE CONCERNS OVER FEDERATED AUTHENTICATION THAN IT STAFF**

- ○ Both surveys included a section where participants could leave comments. 18% (28) library respondents wrote in comments, as compared to 9% (12) IT respondents (9%).

- ○ Library respondents expressed concerns about:

    - ■ Difficulty and cost of federated authentication implementation

    - ■ SeamlessAccess project seen as vendor-driven

    - ■ Need for adoption by all library vendors, particularly smaller vendors

    - ■ The need to support walk-in users

    - ■ Privacy

    - ■ Usability

- ○ IT comments were overall more supportive, with several respondents indicating they were eager to move libraries away from IP-based access. IT commenters also took the opportunity to add more information about their technical configurations and/or data release policies.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you would like more information about these survey results, please contact SeamlessAccess at contact@SeamlessAccess.org.

SURVEY BACKGROUND, METHOD, AND DEMOGRAPHICS

BACKGROUND

The purpose of the two surveys was to enable SA to better understand how federated authentication is (or is not) implemented at academic institutions, in order to improve outreach and communication with these audiences. Research questions were:

- ● How many libraries have implemented federated authentication for library resources?

- ● How well do libraries and IT understand federated authentication?

- ● How well do libraries and IT communicate about federated authentication?

- ● How much do libraries and IT know about the NISO RA21 recommendation?

METHODOLOGY

A SA working group was tasked with creating and administering two surveys, one targeted at academic library staff, and one at academic IT staff. Everyone who participated in the surveys had the opportunity to comment, and the surveys were tested by and commented on by several institutions before being sent out globally.

The surveys were sent to organisations and mailing lists targeted at either libraries or institutional IT, particularly in the areas of access management and electronic resource management. Recipients were asked to either fill out or forward the surveys, in the hope of reaching as many institutions worldwide as possible.

SA sent the surveys to the following lists:

- FIM4L

- REFEDS

- eduGAIN

- All Dutch IdP managers

- EZProxy

- Code4Lib

- LITA

- Collib-L

- Internet2

- EDUCAUSE IDM

Some lists have subscribers from individual institutions, while others are for members of national bodies. For the latter, SA asked recipients to forward the surveys to their individual national institutions. Because of this, SA was unable to ascertain exactly how many people from libraries or IT received the surveys.

The surveys were administered between February 10 - March 27, 2020.

RESPONSES

290 responses were received: 159 for the library survey, and 131 for the IT survey.

The response rate was not calculated because the surveys were shared with third parties who then shared it out to their lists. The total number of list subscribers could not be easily obtained. As a result, the survey data and summary should be considered directional.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Geographic distribution

Responses were received from 20 different countries.

The majority of responses for both surveys came from the United States and Europe (98% for IT survey, 88% for library survey). However, for the library survey, all major geographic regions were represented. The IT survey had representation from every region except for Asia and South America.

Institution size

- The library survey had very even distribution across large, mid-size, and small institutions (32%, 29%, and 30% respectively). Of the 9% who indicated "other," most worked for consortia.

- The IT survey had a less even distribution, with 74% of respondents saying they worked at either large or midsize institutions.

- The size of an institution plays a role in, for instance, the amount of available resources (money, time), available as well as internal expertise about access mechanisms, etc.

LIMITATIONS

SA is aware that caution should be exercised with drawing conclusions based solely on the responses received from these two surveys. Limitations in survey design and responses include:

- Limited responses: The responses to these surveys are a small fraction of the total number of academic institutions worldwide. In particular, responses were primarily received from Western regions (US / UK / Europe) and thus have a strong regional bias. In addition, not all respondents answered all questions, as the survey design allowed respondents to leave questions blank.

- Question design: Although the survey team did their best to find question wording that would be accurate and clear, it is possible that some respondents could have interpreted some questions differently than others. This was especially true for questions that tried to describe the complex authentication mechanisms in use at academic institutions.

- Institution size: Respondents were asked to self-identify as working at "small", "medium", or "large" colleges or universities. Because of wide disparities in how institutions are classified across geographical regions, more specific parameters were not provided. It is possible that some participants may have identified as "large" or "small" whose identity would be differently interpreted by others.

- Minimal institutional overlap across the two surveys: Since the IT and library surveys were sent to listservs rather than targeting specific institutions, there was no attempt to receive responses from the same institutions. There was only one institution for which both library and IT staff filled out the surveys.

Despite these limitations, SA believes that the results from the surveys provide us with valuable insight.

RELATED INFORMATION

- In June 2019, RA21, the predecessor of SA, published a white paper to understand and offer insight into the unique requirements around content access when in a hospital or medical clinic setting: "*Final Report & Recommendations: Resource Access in the 21st Century, RA21 Hospital Clinical Access Working Group - June 4, 2019*"