

REFEDs Research and Scholarship Comments

Comments on the REFEDs Research and Scholarship Proposal

The REFEDs Research and Scholarship (R&S) specification is an extremely positive step forward for the global R&E community. The InCommon Technical Advisory Committee fully supports this effort and offers the following comments and suggestions for further consideration by the larger REFEDs community.

InCommon Technical Advisory Committee

Comments

The following comments and suggestions pertain to the content on the REFEDs Research and Scholarship wiki page:

https://refeds.terena.org/index.php/Entity_Categories/R%26S

1. The final URL to this spec should not contain any URL-encoded characters (such as "R%26S").
2. Edit the content for consistent use of operative terms. Examples: Capitalization of "Registrar" throughout the document; use of "Service Provider" vs "SP" and "Identity Provider" vs "IdP".
3. Suggested change to first paragraph to (1) ground the academic context for this category and (2) omit a statement that anticipates a question some readers might have but does not add to the logical content.

Traditionally, the three dimensions of academic endeavor are: research and scholarship, instruction, and service. A candidate for the Research & Scholarship Category is a Service Provider that supports research and scholarship as an essential component.

4. Suggested replacement for the second bullet in section "Semantics":

Data collected about a user of the service, whether asserted by the Identity Provider or collected by the Service Provider, are not used for any unrelated purpose without the permission of the user.

5. Suggested replacement for the last sentence in section "Semantics":

By asserting the Entity Category Support Attribute, an Identity Provider claims that it supports the release of attributes to R&S Service Providers as outlined in the "Attribute Release" section below.

6. Since the use of contact information in metadata varies widely across federations, perhaps the strict requirements regarding contacts in metadata should be removed.
7. It is recommended that the Service Provider provide an `mdui:InformationURL` in metadata. The reason for this is simple: a user that relies on service metadata (on a consent interface, for example) has no way of knowing what the service does without additional information. Note: A value for `mdui:InformationURL` (rather than `mdui:Description`) is recommended here since the former can provide arbitrary information about the service (including a link to the service home page).
8. Here is a reformulation of the content in the "Provenance" section:

When a Service Provider's Registrar (normally the Service Provider's home federation) registers the Service Provider in the Entity Category, the Registrar must perform at least the following checks:

- The service enhances the research and scholarship activities of some subset of the Registrar's user community.
- Service metadata has been submitted to the Registrar and published in the Registrar's public metadata aggregate.
- The service meets the following technical requirements:
 - The SP refreshes and verifies federation metadata at least daily.
 - The SP supports SAML V2.0 Web Browser SSO. In particular, the SP supports the SAML V2.0 HTTP-POST binding.
 - The SP provides an `mdui:DisplayName` in metadata.
 - The SP provides requested attributes in metadata.

R&S Service Providers must resolve issues of non-compliance within a reasonable period of time from when they become aware of the issue. Failure to do so may result in revocation of their membership in the R&S category.

9. A new section entitled "Deployment Considerations" is recommended:

R&S services generally have a broad user community, often including people who do not have a close relationship with the Service Provider, or whose Identity Provider operators do not have a close relationship with the Service Provider. For this reason, R&S Service Providers are encouraged to consider the following deployment guidelines:

- The R&S category is most useful to those services that do not require out-of-band negotiation with Identity Providers.
- The service should request a subset of R&S Category Attributes, and furthermore, the service should request only those attributes it absolutely needs.
- The SP should *fully support* SAML V2.0 Web Browser SSO.
- The SP should provide a *complete set* of user interface elements in metadata. In particular, an Information URL, a Privacy Statement, and a Logo are highly recommended.
- Both technical and administrative contacts in metadata are recommended. These contacts should be familiar with the Service Provider's status and usage of the R&S category.
- The service should strive to provide a good, overall federated user experience. In particular, the SP should intelligently handle errors involving the release of attributes.

10. The following normative statements regarding conformance are suggested:

The syntax and semantics of both the R&S Entity Category Attribute and the R&S Entity Category Support Attribute MUST conform to the MACE-Dir [Entity Attributes for Entity Categories](#) specification. In particular, the **names** of both attributes MUST conform to the MACE-Dir specification.

An Entity Category Attribute or an Entity Category Support Attribute that conforms to this REFEDs specification MUST have the following **value**:

`http://refeds.org/category/research-and-scholarship`

The semantics associated with the above entity attribute value are wholly defined by this REFEDs specification. Wherever this REFEDs specification conflicts with the MACE-Dir specification (if any), the former takes precedence.

The Registrar is authoritative for the Entity Category Attribute. A Registrar SHALL NOT insert an R&S Entity Category Attribute into Service Provider metadata unless that service meets the requirements of the current version of this specification.

11. Should this category specification, and perhaps others, define some way to ensure currency and appropriateness of category membership over time, or should that need be addressed in the future, when it is more relevant?

12. Use numbering rather than bullets for lists of statements to facilitate cross-referencing.