

Open Identity Exchange and Open Forum Foundation Build Trust in Online Constituent Identity

Washington, DC – January 18, 2010 –Open Identity Exchange (OIX) has funded the Open Forum Foundation to study the development of an online constituent identity trust framework, a critical piece of online citizen engagement infrastructure that will facilitate access for authenticated constituents and advocacy groups to have meaningful online interactions with their elected officials.

The grant comes just days after Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke announced the National Strategy for Trusted Identities in Cyberspace (NSTIC) will begin implementation with a National Program Office that will work with online industry leaders to establish a framework for streamlined trusted e-commerce. The OIX-Open Forum Foundation partnership will begin research into a similar framework for trusted constituent correspondence.

In the case of online constituent identity, a trust framework enables constituents and elected officials to trust each others online identity, security, and privacy. Providing a distributed but reliable system by which citizens can prove their constituency will lend credence to their voice and enable offices to filter constituent communications from the rest of the messages that they receive.

The grant enables the Open Forum Foundation to identify parties working in the citizen engagement and identity spaces, educate them about the work, gauge their interest for future involvement and support, and establish a roadmap for further work.

“Online constituent identity verification is a highly significant use case that couples open source and open identity technology in the service of open government. OIX sees its partnership with the Open Forum Foundation as a promising first step to a larger commercial and governmental good,” says Don Thibeau, Chairman of the Open Identity Exchange.

“We’re excited to be working with OIX on this,” says Wayne Moses Burke, Executive Director of the Open Forum Foundation. “Today, it’s not unusual for the House email servers to be overwhelmed and effectively shut down during hot debates such as health care last spring. As citizens and offices adopt social media, this ‘firehose’ of communication will only become more difficult to manage. One step towards representatives understanding and responding to their constituents is a trusted online constituent identity system. Having support from OIX makes accomplishing this vital piece of infrastructure a strong possibility.”

About Open Identity Exchange

The Open Identity Exchange (OIX) is a neutral, technology agnostic, nonprofit provider of certification trust frameworks for online identity. Its certification credentials can be used across multiple sites, jurisdictions and networks. OIX was founded by grants from the OpenID and Information Card Foundations and support from companies including Google, PayPal, AT&T, Equifax, VeriSign, Verizon, and CA technologies. For more information, visit www.openidentityexchange.org.

About Open Forum Foundation

The Open Forum Foundation is a DC-based nonprofit focused on how technology is changing citizen engagement. They are working with software developers to facilitate the creation of a communication ecosystem that provides meaningful and legitimate connections between citizens and government. They also educate and support US Congressional representatives and staff, federal appointees, and civil servants to better understand and utilize technology. For more information, visit open4m.org.

Why is online constituent identity important?

The ease with which constituents can send messages to Congress today, combined with the evolution of software for advocacy groups that is intended to deliver large volumes of communications has resulted in a virtual deluge in the offices of elected offices. While today it is difficult for offices to sort and make sense of the incoming messages, the use of social media will further increase the volume of incoming communications, making it nearly impossible.

A distributed but reliable system by which citizens can prove their constituency will lend credence to their voice and enable offices to filter constituent communications from the rest of the messages that they receive. While this is not a complete solution to the problem of meaningful communication between citizens and their elected officials, it is a core piece that will improve trust in the system and reduce the volume of messages that need to be sorted.

What will the grant accomplish?

The grant agreement provides \$5000 to the Open Forum Foundation so that they may complete the following work. Expected completion date is May 1, 2011:

1. **A Database** of companies and organizations that may be interested in supporting the creation and implementation of an online constituent identity trust framework, including:
 - Technology developers and vendors that create, maintain, or sell software that sends or receives messages addressed to elected officials.
 - Identity and Trust Providers
 - End users: Citizens, Elected Officials and staff, Advocacy Groups, and Nonprofits
2. **A Survey** of all the actors in the database to gauge their interest in developing, supporting, and sustaining the proposed system.
3. **A Roadmap** for future development and implementation of the trust framework.