

USPS participating in creation of digital Federal Cloud Credential Exchange program

The U.S. Postal Service has been chosen to take part in an innovative cross-agency governmental team established to create a digital Federal Cloud Credential Exchange (FCCX) platform.

This credential exchange will allow individuals to access online services at participating government agencies using their existing commercially issued digital identification.

Because USPS operates one of the world's largest computer networks, it is well positioned to be a part of this transformational pilot project to develop a credential exchange program offering the public secure, private and efficient access to online services for the federal government.

Frequently asked questions

What is a credential exchange?

A credential exchange allows the public to securely access online services at multiple agencies without the need for various passwords and other digital identification for each service.

What is the Federal Cloud Credential Exchange (FCCX)?

Today, individuals logging into federal websites to get government services usually have to get a digital credential from each separate federal agency. FCCX is a software "middleman" that would make it simpler for individuals to bring their own credentials from an approved external credential service provider and use it to log in at federal websites. By streamlining digital authentication, FCCX will reduce costs for government agencies, while also providing a secure, privacy-enhancing, easy-to-use-solution.

How many and which agencies will participate in the pilot?

Participants have not been finalized at this time. However, some of the agencies that have been assisting in developing the requirements for the pilot are the Veterans Administration, the Department of Education, the Social Security Administration and the Internal Revenue Service.

Who is the target user for the FCCX pilot?

Likely participants in the FCCX pilot project are government agencies that currently require individuals to provide credentials to use external-facing federal government web applications, and in turn, the citizens who use the websites and applications of the agencies involved in the pilot.

Why the need for FCCX?

The costs to government agencies to manage agency-specific credentialing systems have grown exponentially in recent years at the same time that agencies face mandates to move more of their services online, and when the number of citizens needing to use public services online is growing. Yet requiring citizens to obtain digital credentials for each federal agency they interact with is burdensome and not a good use of government resources. This scenario is driving the need for a more integrated log-in platform across all government entities.

Why was the U.S. Postal Service chosen as the provider?

USPS runs one of the world's largest computer networks, including one of the largest email systems, handling more than four billion communications annually, with more than 13 million external email messages scanned for viruses every month. This, combined with the unique law enforcement resources of its Postal Inspection Service, makes the Postal Service ideally suited to support the FCCX pilot project and the development of a secure credential exchange for the federal government.

How is the General Services Administration (GSA) involved in the FCCX pilot?

GSA will serve as the FCCX Program Management Office and will be responsible for oversight and policy guidance during the FCCX pilot implementation.

How is the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) involved in the FCCX pilot?

NIST maintains the national program office that facilitates implementation of the President's National Strategy for Trusted Identities in Cyberspace (NSTIC). NSTIC calls for the federal government to be an early adopter of an "Identity Ecosystem." FCCX supports that goal by being a gateway for federal agencies to accept digital credentials from approved third-party credential providers.

What is the National Institute of Standards and Technology "Identity Ecosystem"?

The National Strategy for Trusted Identities in Cyberspace would set up an "Identity Ecosystem," a marketplace of digital websites with more security and privacy that would eliminate the need for individuals to manage multiple user names and passwords.

How will the credentialing work?

The Postal Service will work with various government agencies that have public-facing applications requiring credentials for access. When citizens visit a participating agency website, they will have the option to choose from a list of approved credential providers and use those digital credentials to log into the agency website. The Postal Service will host the technology service that enables the credentials issued by the approved credential providers to be used at the federal agency.

How will FCCX protect an individual's privacy?

The FCCX service is being developed with privacy-enhancing technologies that will prevent FCCX from having any access to an individual's identity, or to store personal information about the individual. It will be designed simply to pass the credentials between the approved credential provider and the federal agency. FCCX also will provide other safeguards around the relationships between a federal agency and its individual customers, such as preventing credential providers from knowing what federal government websites the individuals are accessing using their credentials.