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## 1. Background

REFEDs, Research Education and FEDeration, can be considered the successor of the Cotswold Group [1], which was active in 2003-2004. In 2005, the REFEDs group was established under the TERENA's umbrella, as one of the working areas of the TF-EMC2, the TERENA Task Force on European Middleware Coordination and Collaboration [2].

## 2. Mission of REFEDs

The purpose of REFEDs is to serve the mutual needs of the worldwide community of Research and Education Identity Federations. Collaboration in this area is needed:

- (i) to reach outside the Research and Education (R&E) community to enable federated access in the larger world;
- (ii) to create community best-practices and promote them;
- (iii) to support emerging R&E federations
- (iv) to discuss policy issues and whenever possible to harmonise them to ease inter-operability.

REFEDs will address issues and topics based on the interests and requirements of its members. This includes mostly policy, but also some technical and outreach topics in areas such as interfederation, privacy, assurance, relationships with partner communities, marketing and support of emerging federations. REFEDs will seek to develop consensus on approaches that work for all its participating federations.

In scoping its mission REFEDs recognizes the increasing number of other organizations with interest in federated identity. Giving our dual goals in moving forward with the R&E mission and in shaping a larger identity market place that serves R&E requirements, REFEDs must explore dynamic partnerships with other organizations including GN3 project, ISOC, IETF, Kantara, STORK and other related initiatives that might emerge.

## 3. Motivation

With the growing number and broadening deployment of identity federations in Europe and beyond (particularly in the most recent years), REFEDs has gained momentum and has become a well-established group with participants from all over the globe.

The increased number of participants and the higher activity level of REFEDs have required more organisational support, which has been provided so far mostly by the TERENA Secretariat staff and by some of the REFEDs participants.

More recently, participants have expressed the wish to give REFEDs a higher profile. REFEDs should position itself as the group that promotes the achievements of the R&E community, especially towards external audiences, such as the European Commission, governmental initiatives and publishers and commercial vendors.

Given the global nature of research the lack of identity federations in key countries is an inhibitor. While REFEDs cannot fill these gaps, it can nurture nascent efforts in some of these countries by bringing them in our community.

Due to its geographic coverage, REFEDs is best placed to address more general and non-project-specific federation policies issues.

## 4. Options Evaluation

Whilst policy issues are discussed in various other bodies, none of them seems to encompass the number of R&E Identity Federations that REFEDs gathers and none of them provides the open and independent forum that REFEDs offers.

The table below provides an overview of the possible alternatives with pros and cons for each of them.

<b>Group</b>	<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
<b>TF-EMC2</b> <i>(existing)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strongly focused on middleware</li> <li>International participation</li> <li>Well represented in the federation community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Too broad scope</li> <li>Too focused on technical aspects, which in some cases are not in production</li> <li>Does not attract other communities (i.e. content providers, EC representatives, etc)</li> </ul>
<b>GÉANT</b> <i>(existing)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong EU NREN community backing</li> <li>Well-know, well-established project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GN3 address policy aspects in a very specific way, dictated by the project's objectives, funding constrains and internal procedures.</li> <li>GN3's scope is confined to project's partners [3] only.</li> <li>Main focus is not on identities but on the network.</li> <li>Does not attract other communities (i.e. content providers, eGovernaments etc)</li> <li>Not open to non-GN3 participants</li> </ul>
<b>Kantara Initiative</b> <i>(existing)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established framework</li> <li>Some of REFEDs participants are following Kantara's work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kantara is driven mostly by eGov and industries, so some of the REFEDs participants feel it won't be the best forum to discuss R&amp;E issues. REFEDs plans to create an interface for the R&amp;E community worldwide and to bring the R&amp;E voice to other communities such as Kantara.</li> </ul>
<b>National R&amp;E identity federations</b> <i>(existing)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiences with policies operations</li> <li>Supported at national level to deploy the federations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focused at national community</li> <li>In most of the cases decisions dictated by national laws and constrains</li> <li>Lacks international perspective, but each of the national R&amp;E federations would bring their valuable experience to REFEDs</li> </ul>

<b>REFEDs</b>  <i>(existing)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongly focused on R&amp;E Federations, since the very beginning;</li> <li>• Attracts policy experts;</li> <li>• Wide participation, not only EU</li> <li>• Well-established group in the international R&amp;E community</li> <li>• Produced some documents already</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not currently have a proper Web presence currently</li> <li>• Requires additional funding to fulfill community requirements</li> <li>• No government or industry participation</li> </ul>
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The table shows that REFEDs is the best choice as the forum to address R&E federation policies at the worldwide level. REFEDs can provide the basis to discuss policies within an environment that permits participation by a wide constituency of organisations.

REFEDs can also gather all other existing groups in more open and independent fashion, according the rules defined in Appendix I of this document.

There is also a view held by some of the REFEDs participants that policy issues should be discussed in a global forum to prevent “groupthink” and solutions that would impede interoperability.

Due to its nature, TERENA is perceived by many as the natural organisational home for REFEDs. Furthermore REFEDs’ scope matches TERENA’s mission.

## 5. Intended Audience

REFEDs targets the following audience:

- **Federations Operators:** In most cases/countries NRENs are the entities that bear the responsibility for deploying, maintaining and operating R&E federations. They can benefit from REFEDs by using any promotional material developed by REFEDs and by any best practice produced.
- **Content Providers:** They can benefit from REFEDs as well, as REFEDs offers a single interface to discuss common issues with the academic community, which would otherwise be discussed at national level. REFEDs could also offer a forum for testing specific solution at a more international level.
- **Software vendors:** They could benefit from have first-hand knowledge of best practices and policy requirements.
- **Other potential organisations beyond the academic space:** They would have a central point of contact with the HE community.

## 6. Funding and Resourcing

The current official status of REFEDs is that it is one of the work items of TF-EMC2. As such, the TERENA Secretariat is providing support to the organisation of the REFEDs activities. That support is partly funded from TERENA’s own resources (i.e., basically from the membership fees paid by the TERENA member organisations) and partly by the European Union through the GN3 project<sup>1</sup>.

However today, REFEDs is not able to meet all the requirements identified in chapter 1. Several reasons have been identified for this, namely:

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<sup>1</sup> GN3 funding is only available to the support the partial costs of TERENA’s staff in the function of secretary of TERENA Task-Forces.

- Currently all the work done within REFEDs is done on voluntary basis. Although considered important, it is difficult to expect substantial persistent commitment from individuals and their sponsoring organisations to voluntary work on behalf of the whole community. It is expected that funding would allow to sub-contract specific experts for carrying out specific tasks in a defined period;
- So far, the TERENA Secretariat has supported, promoted and organised REFEDs meetings. However, because of TERENA's limited means and the increased commitment of the TERENA Secretariat staff to other activities, the resources that TERENA can offer to support REFEDs are limited. It is expected that funding will make it possible for other individuals to travel to relevant events and report on REFEDs' work.
- Lack of proper web presence:
  - o REFEDs does not have a proper web presence, other than some pages embedded deeply in the TERENA website;
  - o REFEDs content is not particularly visually appealing and in any case not enough to be used to promote R&E identity federations to other communities;
  - o Insufficient resources are available to offer the type of promotional support that is deemed necessary.

There have been repeated calls from the community to make REFEDs a self-standing activity and to identify a number of topics and to seek funding to advance the work in these areas.

Based on the objectives identified in the previous section of this document, on the inputs received during the last REFEDs Meeting (May 2010) and subsequently on the comments provided via the REFEDs mailing list, a proposed budget for the August 2010 – August 2011 period has been drawn up (see the document 'REFEDs Support, Priorities and Funding' ref. **TSec(10)011**). The estimated funding needed for this period is **40,850 euro**. The document referred to above ('REFEDs Support, Priorities and Funding' ref. **TSec(10)011**) also contains a proposal for a possible REFEDs governance structure.

TERENA can provide the manpower for contributing to the maintenance of the REFEDs wiki and for maintaining and hosting the REFEDs website. TERENA is willing to collect funding, maintain a transparent financial administration and report, both financially and content-wise, on work carried out. TERENA is willing to select suitable candidates to carry out the work as subcontractors of TERENA or otherwise paid through TERENA's administration. The selection of candidates will of course be done in consultation with REFEDs participants.

## **7. Proposed Implementation Plan**

Work on some of the identified areas does not require immediate funding and can therefore start before funding is available. Other work would require external experts to be contracted through TERENA. As soon as funding becomes available, TERENA will proceed contracting experts.

## References

[1] **Cotswolds group**

The Cotswolds group included members from CERN, Finland, Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom as well as AARNet (Australia) and Internet2 (US). The Cotswolds group met in early 2004 and agreed that a number of actions were needed to drive forward the establishment of trust between different countries' Research and Education federations. The Cotswold Group envisaged that policy coordination on a global scale would become an important aspect of Identity Federation. One of main objectives of this group was to develop a policy framework that would allow the emerging Identity Federations to easily interoperate.

[2] **TF-EMC2**

<http://www.terena.org/activities/tf-emc2/>

[3] **GN3 Project's Partners**

[http://www.geant.net/About\\_GEANT/Partners/pages/home.aspx](http://www.geant.net/About_GEANT/Partners/pages/home.aspx)

[4] **eduID**

[https://refeds.terena.org/index.php/EduID\\_Working\\_Group](https://refeds.terena.org/index.php/EduID_Working_Group)