



Access 4 Learning Community

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NEWSLETTER

September 2021

CONNECTING & SECURING EFFECTIVE LEARNING ECOSYSTEMS™

IN THIS ISSUE

Two can become one...

by Larry Fruth II, PhD—Exec Director/ CEO, A4L Community & SDPC

“Connecting and Securing Effective Learning Ecosystems®”. You will be seeing that mantra for the Community a LOT in the coming months (see Marketing Update enclosed).

The SIF Specification Project began in 1997 and became the now official Access 4 Learning (A4L) Community non-profit in 2004. Then in 2015, the Community voiced the need to address a pressing real world, on the ground issue not solvable by technical specifications – student privacy and the agreements required for marketplace provider tools. That drove the creation of an A4L Special Interest Group, the Student Data Privacy Consortium (SDPC). I give you that brief history because we are aware many have not fully grasped the relationship between the A4L Community and the work on the SIF Specification and SDPC.

Recently as part of a set of strategic direction setting by the Community's Management Boards, both the leadership and an engaged outside marketing firm de-

termined it is time to bring the interoperable (“connecting”) and privacy (“securing”) components under the A4L Brand. The Community has already reaped some benefits from this move underway; awareness of technical specifications by LEAs is higher than ever, vendor awareness of the Community's work is up (SIF is NOT dead), and the awareness that you must address interoperability and privacy together. Oh and did we mention that membership is up 18%!

So, look through this Newsletter and see how the various topics connect the dots (communications, membership, projects, etc.) between “connecting and securing” as we collectively address new global challenges in these challenging times. Enjoy and keep up the great work!

MUCH more to come.

Global Community News

Updated Infrastructure Specification documentation coming soon; Welcome new Members!; Update: Marketing & Communications Plan; Project Team updates

[Page 2](#)

AU Community News

EduTECH 2021 overview; Save the Date for the AU Community Day; Project Team updates

[Page 5](#)

NA Community News

North American Data Model development back to normal?; Project Team updates; All about Unity...

[Page 6](#)

Student Data Privacy Consortium (SDPC) News

SDPC 2021 Elections; Update: National pK20 Student Data Privacy Symposium; SDPC Resource Registry enhancements; National Research Data Sharing Agreement (NRDPA) update; Project Teams Updates

[Page 8](#)



Student Data Privacy Consortium

Global Community News



Updated Infrastructure Specification documentation coming soon...

The International Technical Board has agreed to review the upcoming Infrastructure Specification Draft in a different form than we have ever published before. Part of what makes this possible is the one piece that will remain the same... although it wasn't reintroduced to the Global SIF Infrastructure until our last release, the format used for our data models (globally) will be submitted. From this we will produce API documentation and OpenAPI files similar to that which is being included with our most recent data model releases. This will both make things much clearer to developers and further align all our documentation into a consistent style.

What continues to be unique about the Infrastructure is the documentation on how to combine SIF Services

into solutions. With this release we will start the transition from narrative volumes shared as PDFs to topical articles shared on a Confluence website. While you may need to dig up some detail not yet migrated from an older release, initial reactions to this approach have been very positive!

Now that we have covered form, let's take a quick look at the additional functionality expected in SIF Infrastructure Specification 3.4.

A new concept for our ecosystem, Admin Directives, empowers endpoint Providers to 'inform' or 'direct' endpoint Consumers what needs to happen. This opens the possibility to prompt the resending of data, expose what objects have been updated, and initiate functional services etc. This

inversion of control is joined by the ability to simply acknowledge a message from a queue without getting the next message. Empowering proper shutdown when retrieving messages while still allowing the incredible scalability is what our Infrastructure is known for.

If you would like to get involved in the Infrastructure Project Team, please contact [John Lovell](#), Technology Director.



Welcome new members!

A4L Community Member



Focus Holdings

A4L & SDPC Community Members



Putnam County Schools,
WV



Special Education
Association of Peoria
County, IL

SDPC Community Members



Mesa Public Schools,
AZ



Global Grid for
Learning (GG4L)



LightSpeed Systems



NetSupport Inc.



nualang

SDPC Partner Member



Project Wayfinder



SAM Labs



EDDS

UPDATE: National pK20 Student Data Privacy Symposium

Following guidance from health professionals, the current state of the pandemic and your input, we must announce the postponement of the National pK20 Student Data Privacy Symposium on November 2-3, 2021. We thank you for your support of what would have been the first event of its kind the event.

As you may be aware, we previously had to cancel our Interoperability & Privacy Symposium (scheduled for March 2020) due to the pandemic,

and so we are planning to hold this event in Spring 2022. Initial thoughts are to offer 1.5 days focussed on privacy and 1.5 days focussed on interoperability... So we hope you will join us then!

Our Community Director, Penny Murray, will be in contact with each Delegate and Sponsor directly to arrange a refund or transfer of registration and/or sponsorship fees.



UPDATE: Marketing & Communications Plan

In March 2021, the North America Management Board approved the appointment of an external design & marketing Agency to help the Community 'create a marketing and communications plan promoting the current A4L/SDPC brands within the education software marketplace' on a short-term contract.

The initial phase of this work involved conducting member interviews and producing a Community Survey covering membership satisfaction; website functionality and user-friendliness; communications; engagement; and key priorities. Thank you to everyone who responded to the Community Survey!

Next, a Marketing Communications Plan, looking at the A4L Community and Student Data Privacy Consortium (SDPC) brands, websites and collateral, was then presented to the Management Boards. Two key areas were identified following this call:

- To ensure that the Community Mission Statement, Vision and Goals were aligned, and
- That the Community should move forward as one entity not be split into two separate organizations (keeping the SDPC as a Special Interest Group under the A4L Community 'umbrella').

The Marketing & Communications Plan has been split into the following phases:

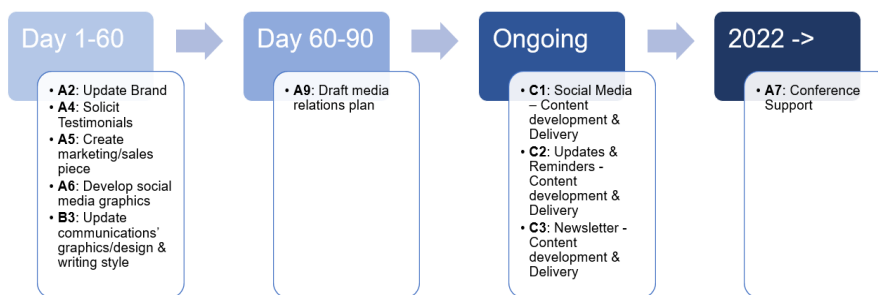
Day 1-60: Creation of a marketing/sales piece, develop a social media graphics portfolio, and update the communications graphics/design and writing style. Once these are completed, we will be looking to update the A4L Community website for our global audiences.

Day 60-90: Development of a media relations plan to ensure all Community communications are aligned and will utilize elements from the previous phase.

Ongoing: Updating content development and delivery for Newsletters, Updates & Reminders and social media items.

2022 -> One element of the Marketing & Communications Plan has been deferred until at least 2022 due to the current COVID situation.

The Management Boards are currently reviewing and aligning the Mission Statement etc. following the decision to move as one entity, and we hope to bring those to you very soon!



<https://www.A4L.org>

Connecting and Securing Effective Learning Ecosystems™

<https://privacy.A4L.org>



Project Teams Update (Global)

International Technical Board (ITB):

The ITB has been fostering and reviewing the new documentation formats, helping to clarify and increase the international consistency of our standards.

Infrastructure: The Infrastructure Project Team is working hard on developing and maturing the Infrastructure Specification documentation. More details can be found on page 2.

Data Model, Mapping & Migration (D3M):

The group is currently focused on reducing differences in how we develop our data models internationally, especially around JSON and Attributes.

A4L Data Privacy: The A4L Data Privacy Project Team are currently discussing various items around NIST, ISO and other standards. If you are interested in joining these discussions, please feel free to drop in.

Open Source Developers Network (OSDN):

This group have done considerable work adding infallibility to the specification generation tool chain so that it can be used across our standards accurately.

Details of each Project Team mission, objective and meeting information can be found in the [Guide to A4L & SDPC Project Teams](#) (PDF)

News from the Australian Community



EduTECH 2021: Overview

The Safer Technologies 4 Schools (www.st4s.edu.au) initiative recently presented to the Australian EduTech conference. ST4S is a national assessment framework providing schools with security and privacy assessments of 3rd party products and services used in school classrooms, front/back offices and regional and state support agencies.

The ST4S Team are working with a range of local and multi-national ven-

dors to determine risks in product usage and configuration and continually improving the assessment framework to ensure it aligns with global standards (ISO, NIST) and meets the expectations of schools.

The assessment framework is publicly available here: <https://st4s.edu.au/st4s-vendor-guide/> and the EduTech presentations are available online [here](#).



Save the Date!

The A4L AU Community Meeting will be held virtually on **Thursday, 2 December 2021 at 1pm AEST**. Further details will follow...

Project Team Updates (Australia)

Australian (AU) Management Board / SIFAAMB: This Board will be meeting in the next month and discussing update on AU activities and making further plans for the Community Meeting in December.

Australian (AU) Technical Board / DSWG: This group have recently made updates to support State enrolment activities and will be seeking to make further updates subject to directions from revisions to the data standards manual (DSM) and inter-

state student data transfer note initiatives.

Details of each Project Team mission, objective and meeting information can be found in the [Guide to A4L & SDPC Project Teams](#) (PDF)



News from the North American Community



North American Data Model development back to normal?

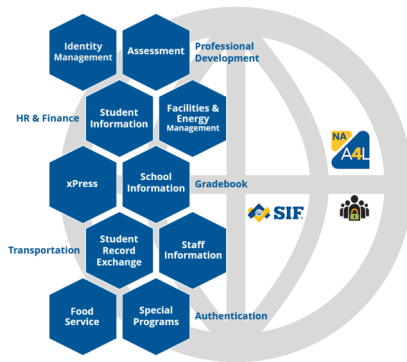
It has been a decade since the A4L Community set to work on a new major release. Fast forward to today, we

have an incredibly modern and scalable Infrastructure. Additionally, North America (NA) has a united data model with inputs from the old, the new, and the outside.

circling back to what use case we are developing for and what others we may want to keep in mind as we do.

While our project teams may have broader titles, what is going on inside them is becoming specific. One example is that Unity Adoption is focusing on updating our Grade Pass Back capabilities. Right now, we are checking that our official development process is the one we want. Then, all that will be missing is you!

To figure out where you best fit in, see the Project Teams overview below.



From a data model work perspective, the last decade has been dominated by projects creating large, or incorporating large, data model changes. Because of this, the community norms for developing the data model have been put to the side. However, things are now returning to normal...

Conversations and documentation are slowly turning topical. We keep

STATS-DC Presentations

A big thank you to all our Community Members who helped promote interoperability & privacy through a series of presentations during STATS-DC in August 2021, we really appreciate the time and effort to plan, participate and deliver!

If you would like to catch-up on any session you missed, or just revisit a session you attended, we have added the links to our Presentation Archive. We are currently working on obtaining unrestricted access to the session recordings, and hope to have those available for you shortly!

All presentation slides are available in the [Presentation Archive >>](#)



Project Team Updates (North America)

North American (NA) Management Board: The current focus for the NA Board is on strategic direction setting for the continued development and delivery of marketing plan. This includes organizational mission/vision statements and the development of a proposal that will streamline and simplify member rates and value adds.

North American (NA) Technical Board: Endeavoring to communicate the lighter lift and real world benefits of adopting Unity.

Unity Adoption: Currently focused on a more robust Grade Pass Back exchange choreography for Unity.

CEDS Alignment: This group is currently refining the elements of the Privacy Obligations Document (POD) for contribution to and creation of the

Common Education Data Standards (CEDS) Privacy Domain.

Details of each Project Team mission, objective and meeting information can be found in the [Guide to A4L & SDPC Project Teams](#) (PDF)



All about ...

Following the successful release of the latest Unity Specification, John Lovell, A4L Community Technology Director, has been chatting to our Vendor Members and finding out exactly what aspects they love about SIF Unity...

The Unity Data Model is Backwards Compatible

We understand that backwards compatibility is seriously important to vendors. To make the move to newer data models easier on vendors we have removed dependencies on the infrastructure and are working to add more fields along optional paths. You no longer need to go through an extensive mapping exercise just to move up versions of the spec – making it easier than ever to update your SIF offerings. Learn more by going to <https://www.a4l.org/page/MA-Data-Hub> for an example.

Unity Scales from the Bottom Up

With backwards compatible established, you need to know what is gained by adopting Unity. After an upgrade, the thing we hear about most is its scalability. Core gains are nearly unavoidable through the simple exchanging of multiple objects with each API call. From there you have numerous scalability features to choose from, provided by the Global SIF Infrastructure. Start fast knowing the accelerator pedal will be there when you need it!

You Can Contribute Data to a Unity Ecosystem without being a Server

You can send data into Unity ecosystems without becoming a server. In ecosystems with an Operational Data Store (ODS) or Data Lake, you can easily add data to be shared. Around the globe, vendors are experiencing great success in this model. This model also allows Data Stewards to main-



tain full control over the data they are responsible for leading to proper data governance. For more information or to talk to an expert, contact staff@A4L.org and we'll help you out.

Unity has Privacy Built-In

With over 8,000 schools and 4,000+ resources using similar Data Privacy Agreements (DPAs). The A4L Community is making complying with DPAs easier through the data privacy features built into Unity and the Global SIF Infrastructure. Streamlining the on-boarding process by aligning contract clauses to technical obligations to security standards - and automating it. Unity stands ready to do this through the privacy features available in the Global SIF Infrastructure and Unity Data Model. As always, members can join us in contributing to this crucial work aligning the Common Education Data Standards (CEDS) through one of A4L's many project teams. [Contact A4L](#) for more information.

A4L and Unity Move With You

The education community is constantly changing and growing as the world moves at lightning speed. The global SIF community is always working to support the latest areas of education data requirements. For example, in the latest release of Unity the A4L Community focused on the Administration of Remote Learning. This included: planning, scheduling, attendance, and digital equity. The updates in these areas heavily affected the data model leading us to need to modify the design on nine objects.

By expanding and growing the A4L community supports the efforts of end users who seek to modernize their data ecosystems. Learn more about the changes the newest release of Unity checkout the [full delta](#).

Unity is built for REST API Developers

Vendors need to respond to the needs of their clients rapidly. When an educational organization asks a vendor to implement Unity, there are many resources to help the developers and technical team get started quickly.

Extensive API documentation reduces development time through familiarity for developers, and the combination of transport and payload by which to build your solutions. Access to Open-API files can be used for mock server and code generation, along with first class support for PESC Compliant JSON including examples, schema, and conversion resources.

This means vendors don't have to spend excessive amounts of time in development to get started using Unity. This can lead to many new sales opportunities and ways to grow your business as a vendor.

To find out more about the Unity Specification, please visit: <https://www.a4l.org/page/unity>

News from the Student Data Privacy Consortium



SDPC 2021 Elections

The Consortium has had phenomenal leadership over the past few years. The leadership, guidance and overall dedication to the Consortium prove critical to our collective successes, but now it is your chance to get involved and nominate yourself, or a colleague, to be part of this great leadership team!

We are delighted to confirm that nominations for the Student Data Privacy Consortium (SDPC) Management Board are now open!

Nominations can be submitted from September 7 - October 1, 2021 (inclusive).

What is the commitment? The SDPC Management Board meets once a month in virtual calls for 60 minutes, but also may be asked opinions or

votes 'off-cycle' during their tenure. We appreciate the leadership and the 'brain lift' they provide!

What is the term? The Management Board is elected for two-year terms.

How many positions are available? This year there will be three (3) seats open for the Management Board, joining the six(6) candidates elected during last years SDPC Elections cycle.

What are the candidate requirements? To be eligible to run for the Management Board, the individuals shall be at least eighteen (18) years old and be an SDPC Voting Participant or employed by/ representing an SDPC Voting Participant and duly authorized to represent that SDPC Voting Participant, but need not be residents of the District of Columbia. An SDPC

Voting Participant Member institution (including associated subsidiaries of an SDPC Voting Participant) may have at most one representative on the Management Board at one time.

For the 2021 SDPC Election process, the following dates apply:

Sept 7, 2021: Nominations open

Oct 1, 2021: Nominations close

Oct 4, 2021: Ballot confirmed by Community Director

Oct 7, 2021: Ballot released

Oct 21, 2021: Voting closes at 5:00 pm Eastern

Oct 28, 2021: Community Director confirms results

Nov 2, 2021: Elections results announced during the National pK20 Student Data Privacy Symposium Opening Session

We will use a virtual election tool and all nominations must be submitted electronically. Any SDPC Member can submit a nomination in the virtual election tool. The Primary Business Contact will be the official vote for each SDPC Voting Participant. Further information is available on the [SDPC Group Blog >>](#)

You can download the policies and procedures for the SDPC Elections [here](#).

Please consider nominating yourself, asking someone to nominate you or nominate someone else to run for one of these leadership positions within the Consortium!



UPDATE: National pK20 Student Data Privacy Symposium

Following guidance from health professionals, the current state of the pandemic and your input, we must announce the postponement of the National pK20 Student Data Privacy Symposium on November 2-3, 2021. We thank you for your support of what would have been the first event of its kind the event.

As you may be aware, we previously had to cancel our Interoperability & Privacy Symposium (scheduled for March 2020) due to the pandemic,

and so we are planning to hold this event in Spring 2022. Initial thoughts are to offer 1.5 days focussed on privacy and 1.5 days focussed on interoperability... So we hope you will join us then!

Our Community Director, Penny Murray, will be in contact with each Delegate and Sponsor directly to arrange a refund or transfer of registration and/or sponsorship fees.



Thank you to our Sponsors:



SDPC Resource Registry Enhancements

[About the Consortium](#)
[Resource Registry](#)
[Resource Center](#)
[Join the Community](#)
[Blog](#)
[Member Login](#)

SDPC Resource Registry Roadmap

We are working hard to update the SDPC Resource Registry and improve its functionality for all users.

In Progress

AUGUST 2021	Functionality & Speed 40% Updating the functionality and speed of the SDPC Resource Registry. Includes: Repair DB Indexing, Query improvements, Front End Query Design. Estimated date for completion: September 2021
AUGUST 2021	Add Additional Admin Controls 20% Add Additional Admin Controls Including the ability for impersonation abilities for easier clean-up and assistance, additional methods for alliance database cleanup, ability for alliance admin to create reports for agreements uploaded in specific time frame, holding area for agreement approval, ability to have statewide agreements added to district registries.

Completed Tasks

SEPTEMBER 2021	DPA Renewal Workflow enhancement 100% DPA Renewal Workflow enhancements. Build a workflow to manage expiring DPA renewal including Originating LEA and Subscribing LEAs. Currently only available for Utah Alliance, planned roll-out for other Alliances in the next couple of months. View the Technical Guides for more information on this feature.
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The Community asked – and we listened!

The SDPC Resource Registry is maturing and it is all because of the great input from you on Registry “wish list” features and functionality. We also want to make sure you know what improvements are being made, the timelines and an opportunity to continue to provide suggestions to the great tool now in use by tens of thousands across the globe.

We have developed a “Resource Registry Roadmap Update” page for you to review and even submit future suggestions. The page link can be found on the [SDPC Community Site group page](#) and soon will be accessible directly off the Registry when you log into the site.

Check it out frequently!

National Research Data Privacy Agreement (NRDPA)



The NDPA Research Project Team has developed, and the Community has commented on, the first draft of a National Research Data Privacy Agreement (NRDPA) which ideally will serve as a standardized template for researchers and schools addressing FERPA's studies exception. The Project Team is reviewing the new draft informed by this submitted Community input. The current draft of the

NRDPA mirrors the NDPA approved and in use by thousands of schools addressing FERPA's school business official exception requirements. Expect some big news on its public release after final edits are made and the SDPC Management Board gives it an official "thumbs up". Thanks for all members who have helped in this effort!

Project Team Updates

SDPC Management Board: This group is currently addressing, with the NA Management Board, strategic direction and alignment with SIF Unity work of ONE organization. Ongoing conversations around Alliance support and greater marketplace engagement including potential partner projects.

SDPC Alliance Leadership: This group is currently convening through the NDPA PPU group every other week.

NDPA Policy, Procedures & Usage (PPU): The NDPA PPU group continue to review redline documentation and address any issues that State Alliances are experiencing. If you are a SDPC Alliance Leader, feel free to drop in and meet your peers!

Legislative Activity: This group is currently placed on 'pause'.

Research Data Sharing Agreement:

This group is currently reviewing comments received during the National Research Data Sharing Agreement Community Review that ideally will become a standard template for FERPA's studies exception.

Resource Registry Roadmap (R3):

This group have been working through a list of suggested enhancements to the SDPC Resource Registry and prioritizing their functionality and benefits to the Consortium. Work is currently underway to improve the response time for search queries on the Registry. A summary of all SDPC Resource Registry enhancements can be found here: https://privacy.A4L.org/sdpc-rr_enhancements

SDPC Vendor: This group currently meets once per quarter and is a great place for Vendors to convene and discuss any issues they are dealing with relating to data privacy, the NDPA and redlines. Topics are identi-

fied at the end of each call for the next gathering.

Details of each Project Team mission, objective and meeting information can be found in the [Guide to A4L & SDPC Project Teams](#) (PDF)



Community Meetings Schedule

<u>Day</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Group</u>	<u>Staff Liaison</u>
INTERNATIONAL			
<i>meetings are based on US Eastern time zone</i>			
Tuesday	TBD	Association Board of Directors	Larry Fruth
Tuesday	2 nd Tues, monthly	Data Privacy	Penny Murray
Tuesday	4 th Tues, monthly	D3M	John Lovell
Tuesday	4 th Tues, monthly	Policy & Procedures	John Lovell
Wednesday	Bi-weekly	Infrastructure	John Lovell
Thursday	Bi-weekly	Open Source Developers Network	John Lovell
Thursday	Every 4 weeks	International Technical Board	John Lovell
NORTH AMERICA			
<i>meetings are based on US Eastern time zone</i>			
Monday	Bi-weekly	State Requests	John Lovell
Tuesday	1 st & 3 rd Tues, monthly	Unity Adoption	John Lovell
Wednesday	4 th Weds, monthly	NA Management Board	Larry Fruth
Thursday	1 st & 3 rd Thurs, monthly	CEDS Alignment	John Lovell
Thursday	2 nd & 4 th Thurs, monthly	NA Technical Board	John Lovell
STUDENT DATA PRIVACY CONSORTIUM			
<i>meetings are based on US Eastern time zone</i>			
Tuesday	3 rd Tues, monthly	Research Data Sharing Agreement	Larry Fruth
Tuesday	1 st Tues, Qtrly (3 rd month)	SDPC Resource Registry Roadmap (R3) Project Team	Larry Fruth
Tuesday	4 th Tues, monthly	SDPC Management Board	Larry Fruth
Wednesday	1 st Weds, Qtrly (2 nd month)	Consortium Updates	Larry Fruth
Wednesday	2 nd Weds, Qtrly (2 nd month)	Alliance Leadership	Larry Fruth
Thursday	Bi-weekly	Alliance Leadership (NDPA Policy, Procedures & Usage)	Larry Fruth
Thursday	1 st Thurs, Qtrly (1 st month)	Vendor Project Team	Larry Fruth

Connect with us!

Access 4 Learning (A4L) Community



Student Data Privacy Consortium (SDPC)



About the Access 4 Learning Community

The Access 4 Learning (A4L) Community, and its special interest group the Student Data Privacy Consortium (SDPC), is a unique, non-profit collaboration composed of schools, districts, local authorities, states, US and International Ministries of Education, software vendors and consultants. The Community is "Powered by SIF" as its major technical tool to help manage learning data simply, securely and in a scalable, standard way regardless of platform. The SDPC is designed to address the day-to-day, real-world multi-faceted issues faced when protecting learner information by setting common expectations between market providers and end users. The A4L Community has united these education technology end users and providers in an unprecedented effort "**connect and secure effective learning ecosystems**" to give teachers more time to do what they do best: teach. For further information, visit <https://www.A4L.org> and <https://privacy.A4L.org>

Contact Us

Larry Fruth II, PhD
Executive Director/CEO

Provides direction and leadership toward the achievement of the organization's philosophy, mission, strategy, and its annual goals and objectives. Support includes Board Administration and Support, Program and Service Delivery, Financial and Human Resource Management, Community Relations and Fundraising.

lfruth@A4L.org

John Lovell
Technology Director

Technical liaison and resource for all things A4L, the Technology Director encompasses areas from IT to ensuring collaboration on local and international efforts. Lead software developer for the Community, supporting the on-going use of the Test Harness by developers to assure quality.

jlovell@A4L.org

Penny Murray
Community Director

Provides membership services, develops communications, supports member working activities including particular SIF implementations, organizational meetings and strategic partnerships to ensure initiative success.

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NEWSLETTER

Issue 52

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Access 4 Learning Community

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