# Level of Assurance Authentication Context Profile for SAML 2.0

## Working Draft 0~~3~~2

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**This Version:**

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**Related Work:**

This specification profiles the SAML 2.0 Authentication Context [SAMLAC] mechanisms to allow SAML authentication requests and assertions to carry assurance policy information. ~~Specifically, we profile SAML's Authentication Context for NIST 800-63.~~

**Declared XML Namespace(s):**

~~urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:2.0:post:ac:classes:nist-800-63:v1-0-2~~

**Abstract:**

This document profiles the use of SAML's Authentication Context mechanisms to express assurance policy on authentication requests and assertions. Level-of-Assurance (LOA) schemes are expressed as a set of authentication context classes. A general schema pattern by which assurance levels for arbitrary assurance frameworks can be expressed is presented~~, along with~~

~~specific authentication classes corresponding to the NIST 800-63 levels of assurance [NIST 800-63]~~.

**Status:**

This document was last revised or approved by the SSTC on the above date. The level of approval is also listed above. Check the current location noted above for possible later revisions of this document. This document is updated periodically on no particular schedule.

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# Table of Contents

# 1 Introduction

The *Level of Assurance Authentication Context Profiles for SAML 2.0* describes two profiles of the SAML Authentication Context [SAMLAC] specification:

- A general, restricted version of the AuthnContext schema that may be used as the basis for representing levels of assurance (or other abstract authentication models) defined by external documentation of any given assurance framework.

  ~~A specific set of `AuthnContext class` schema derived from the general case which corresponds to the 4 NIST 800-63 [NIST 800-63] levels of assurance.~~

## 1.1 Motivation [Non-Normative]

Many existing (and potential) SAML federation deployments have adopted a “levels of assurance” (or LOA) model for categorizing the large number of possible combinations of registration processes, security procedures, and authentication methods that underly a given authentication statement. LOA serve to compress this large number into a smaller more manageable number of levels. Different combinations of processes and technology are rated according to the level of assurance they can engender. Typically, 3-5 sets are defined, with corresponding assurance level ranging from low to high. Relying parties then decide which level of assurance is required to access specific protected resources, based on an assessment of the risk associated with those resources – high risk requires high assurance etc.

The SAML authentication context mechanisms provide a variety of possible options for representing the details of a LOA scheme. However, this profile is motivated by two related considerations:

- The SAML authentication context scheme is comprehensive, but quite complex. Deployers find that this complexity is a barrier to designing authentication contexts that match their LOA requirements.
- Representing the details of a LOA scheme using the full expressiveness of the authentication context schema results in XML documents that must be passed in-band with authentication events and parsed by SAML implementations. In most cases, the processing requirements are not sustainable and interoperability issues have not been explored.

The approach taken here simply represents each level in a LOA scheme as a separate authentication context class. Each level class is characterized by a URI, and the body of the schema simply contains a reference to the external documentation that defines the LOA scheme. These URI values are conveyed in the `<RequestedAuthnContext>` element of an authentication request and the `<AuthnContextClassRef>` element in the assertion within any authentication response

## 1.2 Limitations [Non-Normative]

A limitation to using this approach is that:

- The URIs representing the levels must be configured into every system in the deployment, and the ordering of the URI levels must be decided and configured out-of-band.

## 1.3 Terminology

The keywords "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this specification are to be interpreted as described in IETF [RFC 2119]:

> …they MUST only be used where it is actually required for interoperation or to limit behavior which has potential for causing harm (e.g., limiting retransmissions)…

These keywords are thus capitalized when used to unambiguously specify requirements over protocol and application features and behavior that affect the interoperability and security of implementations. When these words are not capitalized, they are meant in their natural-language sense.

```
Listings of XML schemas appear like this.
```

```
Example code listings appear like this.
```

Conventional XML namespace prefixes are used throughout the listings in this specification to stand for their respective namespaces as follows, whether or not a namespace declaration is present in the example:

| Prefix | XML Namespace | Comments |
|---|---|---|
| `ds:` | http://www.w3.org/2000/09/xmldsig# | This is the XML Signature namespace . |
| `xs:` | http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema | This namespace is defined in the W3C XML Schema specification [Schema1]. In schema listings, this is the default namespace and no prefix is shown. |

This specification uses the following typographical conventions in text: `<SAMLElement>`, `<ns:ForeignElement>`, `Attribute`, **Datatype**, `OtherCode`.

## 1.4 Normative References


**[RFC 2119]** S. Bradner. *Key words for use in RFCs to Indicate Requirement Levels*. IETF RFC 2119, March 1997. http://www.ietf.org/rfc/rfc2119.txt.

~~**[NIST 800-63]** NIST Special Publication 800-63 Version 1.0.2, *Electronic Authentication Guideline*, NIST, April 2006. See http://csrc.nist.gov/publications/nistpubs/800-63/SP800-63V1_0_2.pdf~~

**[SAMLAC]** J. Kemp et al. *Authentication Context for the OASIS Security Assertion Markup Language (SAML) V2.0*. OASIS SSTC, March 2005. Document ID saml-authn-context-2.0-os. See http://www.oasis-open.org/committees/security/.

**[SAMLCore]** S. Cantor et al. *Assertions and Protocols for the OASIS Security Assertion Markup Language (SAML) V2.0*. OASIS Standard, March 2005. See http://docs.oasis-open.org/security/saml/v2.0/saml-core-2.0-os.pdf

**[Schema1]** H. S. Thompson et al. *XML Schema Part 1: Structures.* World Wide Web Consortium Recommendation, May 2001. See http://www.w3.org/TR/2001/REC-xmlschema-1-20010502/. Note that this specification normatively references [Schema2], listed below.

**[Schema2]** Paul V. Biron, Ashok Malhotra. *XML Schema Part 2: Datatypes*. World Wide Web Consortium Recommendation, May 2001. See http://www.w3.org/TR/2001/REC-xmlschema-2-20010502/.


## 1.5 Non-normative References


**[Reference]** [reference citation]

**[Reference]** [reference citation]

# 2 General Level-of-Assurance Profile

The following schema redefines the basic abstract `AuthnContextDeclarationBaseType` to limit the allowed elements to the `GoverningAgreements` element. It will be through this element that the appropriate external LOA scheme documentation will be referenced.

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
<xs:schema xmlns:xs="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema"
    finalDefault="extension"
    blockDefault="substitution" version="2.0">
    <xs:redefine schemaLocation="saml-schema-authn-context-types-2.0.xsd">
        <xs:annotation>
            <xs:documentation>
               Base class for building level-of-assurance style AuthnContext
               class definitions.
            </xs:documentation>
        </xs:annotation>

        <xs:complexType name="AuthnContextDeclarationBaseType">
            <xs:complexContent>
                <xs:restriction base="AuthnContextDeclarationBaseType">
                    <xs:sequence>
                        <xs:element ref="Identification"
                            minOccurs="0" maxOccurs="0"/>
                        <xs:element ref="TechnicalProtection"
                            minOccurs="0" maxOccurs="0"/>
                        <xs:element ref="OperationalProtection"
                            minOccurs="0" maxOccurs="0"/>
                        <xs:element ref="AuthnMethod"
                            minOccurs="0" maxOccurs="0"/>
                        <xs:element ref="GoverningAgreements"
                            minOccurs="1" maxOccurs="1"/>
                        <xs:element ref="Extension" minOccurs="0"
                                    maxOccurs="unbounded"/>
                    </xs:sequence>
                    <xs:attribute name="ID" type="xs:ID" use="optional"/>
                </xs:restriction>
            </xs:complexContent>
        </xs:complexType>

        <xs:complexType name="GoverningAgreementRefType">
            <xs:annotation>
                <xs:documentation>
                    A specific restriction of this type specifying or
                    enumerating the governing document(s) and/or section
                    within such document(s) that define this particular
                    level of assurance.
                </xs:documentation>
            </xs:annotation>
            <xs:complexContent>
                <xs:restriction base="GoverningAgreementRefType">
                   <xs:attribute name="governingAgreementRef"
                                 type="xs:anyURI"  use="required"/>
                </xs:restriction>
            </xs:complexContent>
        </xs:complexType>
    </xs:redefine>
</xs:schema>
```

The functional definition of the `GoverningAgreementRefType` is not changed from the original schema in [SAMLAC], but documentation is added to serve as a reminder that definitions derived from this schema should redefine `GoverningAgreementRefType` to suit a particular LOA purpose.

# 3 Example LOA Framework classes

We show here a set of LoA classes for a fictional FAF (Foo Assurance Framework) with three different levels of assurance. The 3 LOA schemas will extend the base LOA schema defined above. Each LOA schema will reference the corresponding section of the FAF documentation.

We define the following URIs to represent the 3 LOA

- http://foo.example.com/assurance/loa1
- http://foo.example.com/assurance/loa2
- http://foo.example.com/assurance/loa3

As an example, the schema for the level 1 might look like

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
<xs:schema
    targetNamespace="http://foo.example.com/assurance/loa1"
    xmlns:xs="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema"
    xmlns="http://foo.example.com/assurance/loa1"
    finalDefault="extension"
    blockDefault="substitution"
    version="2.0">

    <xs:redefine schemaLocation="saml-schema-authn-context-loa-profile.xsd">

        <xs:annotation>
            <xs:documentation>
                Class identifier:
                    http://foo.example.com/assurance/loa1

                Defines Level 1 of FAF
            </xs:documentation>
        </xs:annotation>

        <xs:complexType name="GoverningAgreementRefType">
            <xs:complexContent>
                <xs:restriction base="GoverningAgreementRefType">
                    <xs:attribute name="governingAgreementRef"
type="xs:anyURI"
                        fixed="http://foo.example.com/foo_assurance.pdf#sect
ion1"
                        use="required"/>
                </xs:restriction>
            </xs:complexContent>
        </xs:complexType>
    </xs:redefine>
</xs:schema>
```

The class schemas for the other 2 FAF LOA would refer to the corresponding section of the FAF documentation.

# 4 NIST 800-63 LOA Using SAML LOA Profile

The [NIST 800-63] LOA class schemas will extend the base LOA class schema. Each of the 4 NIST LOA class schemas will reference a particular section of the NIST 800063 document that stipulates the LOA requirements.

We define the following URIs to represent the four levels of assurance:

- urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:2.0:post:ac:classes:nist-800-63:v1-0-2:1
- urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:2.0:post:ac:classes:nist-800-63:v1-0-2:2
- urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:2.0:post:ac:classes:nist-800-63:v1-0-2:3
- urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:2.0:post:ac:classes:nist-800-63:v1-0-2:4

The above URIs correspond to the class schema in the respective following sections. Each class schema extends the base LOA profile schema listed in section 2.

## 4.1 NIST 800-63 Level 1 Schema

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
<xs:schema
    targetNamespace="urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:
2.0:post:ac:classes:nist-800-63:v1-0-2:1"
    xmlns:xs="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema"
    xmlns="urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:2.0:post:ac:classes:nist-800-63:v1-0-2:1"
    finalDefault="extension"
    blockDefault="substitution"
    version="2.0">

    <xs:redefine schemaLocation="saml-schema-authn-context-loa-profile.xsd">

        <xs:annotation>
            <xs:documentation>
                Class identifier:
                    urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:
2.0:post:ac:classes:nist-800-63:v1-0-2:1
                Document identifier:
                    saml-schema-authn-context-nist-level1.xsd

                Defines Level 1 of NIST LOA scheme.
                See Section 8.2.1 of SP800-63V1_0_2.pdf (URL below)
            </xs:documentation>
        </xs:annotation>

        <xs:complexType name="GoverningAgreementRefType">
            <xs:complexContent>
                <xs:restriction base="GoverningAgreementRefType">
                    <xs:attribute name="governingAgreementRef"
type="xs:anyURI"
                        fixed="http://csrc.nist.gov/publications/nistpubs/80
0-63/SP800-63V1_0_2.pdf"
                        use="required"/>
                </xs:restriction>
            </xs:complexContent>
        </xs:complexType>
    </xs:redefine>
</xs:schema>
```

## 4.2 NIST 800-63 Level 2 Schema

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
<xs:schema
    targetNamespace="urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:
2.0:post:ac:classes:nist-800-63:v1-0-2:2"
    xmlns:xs="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema"
    xmlns="urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:2.0:post:ac:classes:nist-800-63:v1-0-2:2"
    finalDefault="extension"
    blockDefault="substitution"
    version="2.0">
    <xs:redefine schemaLocation="saml-schema-authn-context-loa-profile.xsd">
        <xs:annotation>
            <xs:documentation>
                Class identifier:
                    urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:
2.0:post:ac:classes:nist-800-63:v1-0-2:2
                Document identifier:
                    saml-schema-authn-context-nist-level2.xsd

                Defines Level 2 of NIST LOA scheme.
                See Section 8.2.2 of SP800-63V1_0_2.pdf (URL below)
            </xs:documentation>
        </xs:annotation>
        <xs:complexType name="GoverningAgreementRefType">
            <xs:complexContent>
                <xs:restriction base="GoverningAgreementRefType">
                    <xs:attribute name="governingAgreementRef"
type="xs:anyURI"
                        fixed="http://csrc.nist.gov/publications/nistpubs/80
0-63/SP800-63V1_0_2.pdf"
                        use="required"/>
                </xs:restriction>
            </xs:complexContent>
        </xs:complexType>
    </xs:redefine>
</xs:schema>
```

## 4.3 NIST 800-63 Level 3 Schema

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
<xs:schema
    targetNamespace="urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:
2.0:post:ac:classes:nist-800-63:v1-0-2:3"
    xmlns:xs="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema"
    xmlns="urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:2.0:post:ac:classes:nist-800-63:v1-0-2:3"
    finalDefault="extension"
    blockDefault="substitution"
    version="2.0">
    <xs:redefine schemaLocation="saml-schema-authn-context-loa-profile.xsd">
        <xs:annotation>
            <xs:documentation>
                Class identifier:
                    urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:
2.0:post:ac:classes:nist-800-63:v1-0-2:3
                Document identifier:
                    saml-schema-authn-context-nist-level3.xsd

                Defines Level 3 of NIST LOA scheme.
```

```
                See Section 8.2.3 of SP800-63V1_0_2.pdf (URL below)
            </xs:documentation>
        </xs:annotation>

        <xs:complexType name="GoverningAgreementRefType">
            <xs:complexContent>
                <xs:restriction base="GoverningAgreementRefType">
                    <xs:attribute name="governingAgreementRef"
type="xs:anyURI"
                        fixed="http://csrc.nist.gov/publications/nistpubs/800
0-63/SP800-63V1_0_2.pdf"
                        use="required"/>
                </xs:restriction>
            </xs:complexContent>
        </xs:complexType>
    </xs:redefine>
</xs:schema>
```

## 4.4 NIST 800-63 Level 4 Schema

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
<xs:schema
    targetNamespace="urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:
2.0:post:ac:classes:nist-800-63:v1-0-2:4"
    xmlns:xs="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema"
    xmlns="urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:2.0:post:ac:classes:nist-800-63:v1-0-2:4"
    finalDefault="extension"
    blockDefault="substitution"
    version="2.0">

    <xs:redefine schemaLocation="saml-schema-authn-context-loa-profile.xsd">

        <xs:annotation>
            <xs:documentation>
                Class identifier:
                    urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:
2.0:post:ac:classes:nist-800-63:v1-0-2:4
                Document identifier:
                    saml-schema-authn-context-nist-level4.xsd

                Defines Level 4 of NIST LOA scheme.
                See Section 8.2.4 of SP800-63V1_0_2.pdf (URL below)
            </xs:documentation>
        </xs:annotation>

        <xs:complexType name="GoverningAgreementRefType">
            <xs:complexContent>
                <xs:restriction base="GoverningAgreementRefType">
                    <xs:attribute name="governingAgreementRef"
type="xs:anyURI"
                        fixed="http://csrc.nist.gov/publications/nistpubs/800
0-63/SP800-63V1_0_2.pdf"
                        use="required"/>
                </xs:restriction>
            </xs:complexContent>
        </xs:complexType>
    </xs:redefine>
</xs:schema>
```

# 5 SAML LOA Profile Conformance

To conform to this profile, implementations MUST implement the provisions of sections 3.3.2.2.1 of [SAMLCore] concerning the processing of `<RequestedAuthnContext>`.

## 5.1 ~~NIST 800-63 LOA Profile Conformance~~

~~To conform to the NIST 800-63 LOA profile, implementations MUST understand the URIs described in section 3, and MUST process these according to their relative ordering, where level 1 is weakest and level 4 is strongest.~~

# Appendix A. Acknowledgments

The following individuals have participated in the creation of this specification and are gratefully acknowledged

**Participants:**

- [Participant name, affiliation | Individual member]
- [Participant name, affiliation | Individual member]
- [Participant name, affiliation | Individual member]

# Appendix B. Revision History

- Draft 01 – first draft
- Draft 02 - minor tweaks to text. Removed editorial comments. Removed example class derived from base class.
- Draft 03 – removed the NIST 800 63 specific references and schema.

# Appendix C. Non-Normative Text