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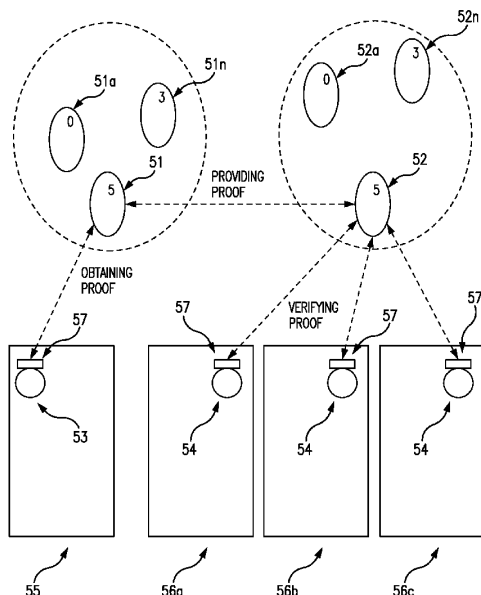


FIG. 4

(57) Abstract: Methods of providing a secure service at a computing node for a requesting party external to the computing node are described. One method comprises receiving a service request comprising a request to generate a credential. Service requirements of the requesting party are determined from the service request. The credential is then generated, and any further data needed to meet service requirements of the requesting party is obtained. A credential data format is determined to meet the service requirements and a code value for the credential data format is established. The code value, the credential and the further data are then stored in the credential data format, and a message comprising the credential in the credential data format is sent to the requesting party. Another method comprises receiving a service request comprising a request to validate a credential, wherein the credential is provided in a credential data format. The credential data format is determined from a code value stored in the credential data format. The credential and further data relating to service requirements are extracted from the credential data format, and the credential is validated. A message comprising a validation result is then sent to the requesting party. Apparatus suitable to perform these methods is also described.

WO 2024/191507 A1