

# How the Foundational Assessment Makes Starting or Improving a Cybersecurity Program Easier

## What is the Foundational Assessment?

“Our organization has a security roadmap planned out, but the Foundational Assessment was helpful in prioritizing activities.”

K-12 School District

As cybersecurity maturity becomes a larger goal for organizations across the U.S. State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial (SLTT) landscape, many are using assessment solutions to outline which cybersecurity activities they should start with at a high level. For example, the [Nationwide Cybersecurity Review \(NCSR\)](#) has been used as a baseline, management-level assessment for many years; however, the 100+ question set can be overwhelming for organizations just starting out. In response, the Foundational Assessment was created.

The Foundational Assessment contains 32 foundational cybersecurity questions aligned to the NIST Cybersecurity Framework and the CIS Critical Security Controls (CIS Controls). These questions come with three answer options: “Not Implemented,” “Partially Implemented,” and “Fully Implemented.” This assessment will guide SLTT entities through the first 12-24 months of developing their cybersecurity plan as an on ramp to, but not a replacement of, follow-on assessment framework engagement like the NCSR.

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## The Impact

“Thank you for your time and for providing all this wonderful information today. I was certainly feeling overwhelmed previously. This looks to be a much more structured outline to follow.”

City Government

**Assessments:** The Foundational Assessment officially became available to end users on September 22, 2022 in alignment with the [State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program \(SLCGP\)](#) webinar announcement. While the NCSR remains a post-award requirement of this grant program, the Foundational Assessment can help those who have not approached a wholistic view of their cybersecurity program with an assessment. Since the official opening period on September 22, 30 organizations have signed up for the Foundational Assessment, with 21 completions, and 11 maturity reviews held.\* The feedback on the Foundational Assessment has been overwhelmingly positive; it fits the needs of organizations just beginning or refamiliarizing themselves with their cybersecurity program. The personalized walkthrough of an organization’s initial findings within the Foundational Assessment has helped ease the burden of starting the larger NCSR assessment.

**Maturity Services:** Maturity Reviews were started in June 2022. The intent was to foster more direct engagement with members that are interested in taking their NCSR or Foundational Assessment results and putting them into action. Since then, there have been 25 Maturity Reviews held virtually along with a number of in-person reviews held at the 2022 ISAC Annual Meeting.

**Next Steps:** Due to the NCSR being the official requirement for the [Homeland Security Grant Program \(HSGP\)](#) and the post-award requirement for the SLCGP, we anticipate a high rate of participation in both the Foundational Assessment and the NCSR. Participants of either assessment are encouraged to then request a Maturity Review that will serve as a one-on-one consultative engagement outlining resources and prioritized activities specifically for an organization. The Foundational Assessment aligns with the MS-ISAC mission of improving the overall cybersecurity posture of SLTT government organizations through coordination, collaboration, cooperation, and increased communication.

To sign up for the Foundational Assessment, email [foundationalassessment@cisecurity.org](mailto:foundationalassessment@cisecurity.org).

\*Totals specific to Foundational Assessment Engagement as of 11/08/22.

“Cybersecurity was not a focus previously, but with new leadership, aligning to both the CIS Controls and NIST Cybersecurity Framework is a goal. We are starting a cybersecurity program from scratch, so the Foundational Assessment was helpful to get started.”

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