



[Enter Organization Name]

CISA Tabletop Exercise Package Elections – Early Voting

Updated October 2022

<Exercise Date>

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Handling Instructions

Delete instructions that are not applicable

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Exercise Overview

Exercise Name	Exercise Name	
Exercise Date, Time, and Location	Exercise date	
	Time (e.g. 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.)	
	Exercise location	
Exercise Schedule	Time	Activity
	Time	Activity
	Time	Activity
	Time	Activity
	Time	Activity
Scope	X hour facilitated discussion-based tabletop exercise	
Purpose	Identify best practices and areas for improvement in incident planning, identification, and response to cyber and physical security threats impacting elections infrastructure.	
INSERT: <NIST, FEMA, or Mission Capabilities>	For example, areas such as Identify, Protect, Respond, etc.	
Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assess the preparedness of the state and local officials to respond to and manage cybersecurity incidents. 2. Discuss processes for identifying potential cybersecurity incidents or issues. 3. Examine information sharing processes between state and local officials and with external partners. 4. Inform the development of state and local-level processes and plans to address elections-related cyber and physical security incidents. 	
Threat or Hazard	Cyber and physical security threat	
Scenario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions taken upon receipt of cybersecurity alerts • Disruption and alteration of voter registration information systems • News and social media manipulation • Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks and web defacements impacting election entity websites • Ransomware and infection of computer systems 	
Sponsor	Exercise Sponsor	
Participating Organizations	Overview of organizations participating in the exercise (e.g. federal, state, local, private sector, etc.).	
Points of Contact	Insert Organization POC(s) Contact info	National Cyber Exercise Program CEP@hq.dhs.gov

General Information

Participant Roles and Responsibilities

The term *participant* encompasses many groups of people, not just those playing in the exercise. Groups of participants involved in the exercise, and their respective roles and responsibilities, are as follows:

Players have an active role in discussing or performing their regular roles and responsibilities during the exercise. Players discuss or initiate actions in response to the simulated emergency.

Observers do not directly participate in the exercise. However, they may support the development of player responses to the situation during the discussion by asking relevant questions or providing subject matter expertise.

Facilitators provide situation updates and moderate discussions. They also provide additional information or resolve questions as required. Key Exercise Planning Team members may also assist with facilitation as subject matter experts during the exercise.

Note-takers are assigned to observe and document exercise activities. Their primary role is to document player discussions, including how and if those discussions conform to plans, policies, and procedures.

Exercise Structure

This exercise will be a multimedia, facilitated exercise. Players will participate in the following:

- Cyber threat briefing (if desired)
- Scenario modules:
 - **Module 1:** Cyber preparedness and cybersecurity alerts
 - **Module 2:** Cybersecurity incidents that could impact voter registration and ePollbooks
 - **Module 3:** Impacts to voting procedures at polling locations.
- Hotwash
- ***Structure Note:** Modules, timeline dates, and discussion questions included in each module may be modified as desired. Additional discussion questions for each module can be found in Appendix A.*

Exercise Guidelines

- This exercise will be held in an open, no-fault environment. Varying viewpoints are expected.
- Respond to the scenario using your knowledge of existing plans and capabilities, and insights derived from your training and experience.
- Decisions are not precedent setting and may not reflect your organization's final position on a given issue. This exercise is an opportunity to discuss and present multiple options and possible solutions and/or suggested actions to resolve or mitigate a problem.
- There is no hidden agenda, and there are no trick questions. The resources and written materials provided are the basis for discussion.
- The scenario has been developed in collaboration with subject matter experts and exercise planners from your organization.

- In any exercise, assumptions and artificialities are necessary to complete play in the time allotted, to achieve training objectives, and/or account for logistical limitations. Please do not allow these considerations to negatively impact your participation in the exercise.

Exercise Hotwash and Evaluation

The facilitator will lead a hotwash with participants at the end of the exercise to address any ideas or issues that emerge from the exercise discussions.

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Module 1

Day 1

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) release a technical alert that is forwarded by the Elections Infrastructure Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EI-ISAC) regarding a phishing campaign targeting state and local election officials. The alert contains initial indicators of compromise regarding a ransomware payload included in malicious attachments to the emails.

In addition, a security company releases an alert on their website describing a cyber campaign against printers and printing companies. The security company believes that attackers are attempting to assemble a new botnet of printers and other Internet of Things (IoT) devices. Once infected, the devices remain available for use in denial of service attacks, or as platforms for further attacker access.

Day 20

<Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), county election office, all of the above, etc.> employees receive an email from the state election office reminding them to expect an influx of citizens arriving at <DMV, county election office, etc.> locations for voter registration. The email includes an attachment consisting of a tip sheet with some helpful reminders about voter registration.

Day 21

State and local election employees receive an email from their election management system (EMS) vendor. It includes guidance on performing updates to EMS software and firmware updates for <electronic voting equipment (e.g., tabulators, BMDs, DREs, as appropriate)>.

Day 22

A newly formed online news website “WeGotTheScoop.Biz” claims that one of the candidates accepted illegal campaign contributions from abroad and bribed <your state’s> election officials to alter ballots. Their stories are being shared on social media by a series of Facebook accounts that belong to a group called “Citizens for Truthful Elections”.

Day 23

Several special interest groups in <Your state> are calling for protests on social media and the hashtags #Rigged<Election Year> #<Your State>RiggedElections are trending.

Discussion Questions

Discussion questions included in each module may be modified as desired. Additional questions can be found in Appendix A.

1. Would your organization receive the cybersecurity alert information presented in this scenario?
 - a. What plans and processes does your organization follow in the case of a cybersecurity alert like the one presented in this scenario?
 - b. What actions would your organization take based on this information?
 - c. What other sources of cybersecurity threat information does your organization utilize?
2. What are your most significant cybersecurity threats and vulnerabilities?
 - a. How has your organization assessed its cybersecurity posture?

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3. Describe your organization's cybersecurity training programs for employees.
 - a. How often are employees required to complete this training?
 - b. What additional training is required for employees that have access to system-level software?
4. How do employees report suspected phishing attempts or other cybersecurity incidents?
 - a. What actions does your organization take when suspicious emails are reported?
 - b. What are some of the challenges your organization encounters with phishing?
 - c. How effective are your organization's methods to protect against phishing?
5. What multi-factor authentication methods (e.g., something you know, something you have, something you are) does your organization utilize to mitigate the potential effects of phishing?
6. What type of cybersecurity clauses do you have in your contract language with vendors?
 - a. What cybersecurity incidents are your organization's vendors required to report to you?
 - b. What type of cybersecurity training are they required to complete before connecting to your networks?
7. What steps does your organization take to monitor social media for threat information?
 - a. How does your organization determine what is a viable threat and what is not?

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Module 2

Day 24

<Before the end of the voter registration period or three weeks before Election Day>

“WeGotTheScoop.Biz” posts a story claiming that citizens can register to vote through their website via a link. The link resolves to <https://elections.<yourstate>.biz/OnlineVoterRegistration>. Social media posts circulate on various platforms advertising the registration site.

Day 25

Your state’s <online voter registration or other state elections website> website is the subject of sporadic high-bandwidth distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks over the course of a week before the <new voter registration deadline or two weeks before Election Day>. As a result, the site becomes intermittently inaccessible. News reports emerge online linking the DDoS attacks to the upcoming election and are attributing them to a foreign actor. The reports also question your state’s preparedness to address the issue and secure the upcoming election.

Day 26

In addition to the DDoS attacks on your <online voter registration or other state elections website>, a breach of <Your State’s DMV or other entity with any connection to the Voter Registration Database> occurs and is reported by media outlets. An internal investigation reports that voter registration data may have been compromised.

Day 27

Many citizens have expressed on social media that they are unable to register to vote despite numerous repeated attempts. These concerns are shared by numerous accounts online and the inability to register is becoming a trending topic on social media.

Day 28

The day before your <state/local jurisdiction> plans to send pollbook information to be <printed or uploaded to ePollbooks, or both> in preparation for the election, elections officials’ workstations are “locked up,” and their contents are encrypted by ransomware. The message displayed says:

“I own your network. You have 72 hours to pay \$500,000 in bitcoin or rebuild from the rubble.”

Discussion Questions

1. In relation to your organization’s severity schema, what must occur for the incident response plan to be initiated?
 - a. Describe what actions would be taken at this point in the scenario according to your organization’s incident response plan.
 - b. What training is conducted to familiarize your organization’s employees with their roles and responsibilities in the incident response plan?
2. How do you protect your voter registration database and/or voter registration portals?
3. At what point, would you or someone in your organization report this as a cybersecurity incident?
 - a. What are the coordination and communication processes between the different levels of government (e.g. local reporting to state, or state to federal)?
4. What additional resources might you need beyond state assistance to address the events in this Module?

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5. What are your public affairs concerns at this point?
 - a. Who is responsible for coordinating the public messaging?
 - b. What offices in your organization would they coordinate with?
6. In the event of complete failure of your organization's network or election network, what backup systems would you need to successfully run an election?
7. What capabilities and resources are required for responding to the scenario?
 - c. What internal resources do you depend on? Are your current resources sufficient?
 - d. Whom do you contact if you need additional third-party assistance?
 - e. How are state and/or local resources requested if available?

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Module 3

Day 35 – First Day – Early Voting – Morning

On the first day of early voting, several <county or local election> websites have been changed with inaccurate information regarding early voting times and locations. The state elections website is also defaced with an image of the hashtag #Rigged20<XX>. IT staff are currently unable to access the websites.

Protests begin forming outside several polling locations. Protesters are trying to distract poll workers and discourage voters. Some protesters show signs of aggression towards voters who admit to voting for certain candidates.

Day 35 – First Day – Early Voting – Early Afternoon

Later that day, the hacktivist group Arbiters of Darkness claim via social media to have “done their part” to protect the nation by successfully purging “all unnecessary voters” from the pollbooks.

Day 35 – First Day – Early Voting – Mid Afternoon

Poll workers report a larger than normal number of voters arriving to vote without appearing in the pollbooks. Many of the voters’ addresses are incorrect.

Day 35 – First Day – Early Voting – Late Afternoon

The news media begins contacting both state and <county or local> officials for comments regarding rumors that the state’s voter registration system has been infiltrated and claims concerning the loss of election integrity.

Day 35 – First Day – Early Voting – Evening

Before polls close, another incident of ransomware has occurred “locking up” all host machines at the local level.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your priority given the events in the scenario?
 - a. How would these events affect election processes?
2. How would you address the protesters at the various polling locations?
3. How would you respond to a <ePollbook/pollbook> being compromised?
4. What are your priority systems for recovery?
 - a. Where is this documented?
 - b. How often is this process reviewed/updated/practiced?
5. What backup systems are utilized in your organization?
 - a. How quickly can they be deployed?
 - b. How often are backups created or updated?
6. What additional resources would you need for your incident response to address the events in the scenario?
7. What ransomware policies and procedures are included in your incident response plan?
 - a. What is the decision-making process to determine ransomware payment and who decides?

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- b. What are the advantages/disadvantages to agreeing/refusing to pay?
 - c. What are the political ramifications of your decision?
 - d. What outside partners/entities do you need to contact?
8. Based on the scenario, what would be your message to the public?
- a. What pre-scripted messaging does your organization have documented?
 - b. What organizations would you coordinate your public messaging efforts with?
9. How does your organization determine an incident is over?

Appendix A: Additional Discussion Questions

The following section includes supplemental discussion questions to guide exercise play. Questions are aligned to the NIST functional areas and leadership roles. Exercise planners are encouraged to select additional, applicable discussion questions to the chosen scenario to bolster participant conversation. *This instructional page, as well as undesired discussion questions, should be deleted.*

Cyber Preparedness and Planning

1. How does your organization integrate cybersecurity into the system development life cycle (i.e., design, procurement, installation, operation, and disposal)?
2. Discuss your supply chain concerns related to cybersecurity.
3. How do you communicate your cybersecurity concerns to your vendors and how do you evaluate their cybersecurity performance?
4. What role does organizational leadership play in cybersecurity? Does this role differ during steady-state and incident response?
5. What level of funding and/or resources are devoted to cyber preparedness? Based on your risk assessment, what is the range of potential losses from a cyber incident?
6. Discuss cyber preparedness integration with your current all-hazards preparedness efforts. Who are your cyber preparedness stakeholders (public, private, non-profit, other)?
7. What mission essential functions depend on information technology and what are the cascading effects of their disruption?
9. Have you had any external review or audit of your IT plans, policies, or procedures within the last year?
10. How are background checks conducted for IT, security and key supporting personnel?
11. Which individual or department is in charge of cybersecurity management?
12. How does your organization recruit, develop, and retain cybersecurity staff?
13. How well-defined is cybersecurity in relation to contracts with third-party support vendors and crucial suppliers?
 - a. How often are contracts reviewed?
 - b. How well do your service level agreements address incident response?

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14. Discuss the status of cyber preparedness planning within your organization.
 - a. Have you completed a business impact analysis? Does the analysis include information technology (IT) infrastructure supporting mission essential functions identified in continuity of operations and continuity of government plans?
 - b. How is cybersecurity integrated in your business continuity plans? Does your business continuity and/or disaster recovery planning have a prioritized list of information technology infrastructure for restoration?
 - c. How have IT specific plans been coordinated with other planning efforts such as an Emergency Operations Plan or Continuity of Operations Plan?
15. How is cybersecurity integrated into both organizational and project risk assessments and management?
16. How does your organization implement a formal sanctions process for personnel failing to comply with established information security policies and procedures? Has this process been communicated to employees?
17. Does your organization have a cybersecurity incident response plan? When was it issued? When was the incident response plan last revised? What authorities require which departments or agencies to follow the plan?
18. Does your organization utilize multi-factor authentication?
19. Does your IT department have a patch management plan in place? If so,
 - a. Are risk assessments performed on all servers on the network?
 - b. Are processes in place to proactively evaluate each server's criticality and applicability to software patches?
 - c. Does this plan include a risk management strategy that addresses the following considerations?
 - i. The risks of not patching reported vulnerabilities?
 - ii. Extended downtime?
 - iii. Impaired functionality?
 - iv. The loss of data?
20. What is your method for tracking and/or identifying problematic pieces of firmware in your organization, should a vulnerability be identified?
21. What processes does your organization have in place for when an employee is terminated or resigns?
 - a. What additional processes are implemented if the employee's termination is contentious?
 - b. How does your organization retrieve all information system-related property (e.g., authentication key, system administration's handbook/manual, keys, identification cards, etc.) during the employment termination process?

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22. What protections do you have in place to protect against malicious intent by those vendors or outside parties that have access to your network?
 - a. What access does any of your third-party vendors have into your network?
23. What are your identified responsibilities for, and capabilities to, prevent cyber incidents?
24. Who is responsible for network and information security management?
25. What key documents that support cyber preparedness at a federal, state, or local level can you identify?
26. Does your organization follow a cybersecurity standard of practice (NIST Cybersecurity Framework/800 Series, ISO/IEC, etc.)? If so, which?
27. What flowcharts showing the high-level relationships and crisis lines of communication (i.e., who calls who) specifically for a cyber incident does your organization have? Are they part of the response or continuity planning documents?
28. What is your organization's formal or informal policy or procedures pertaining to IT account management?
 - a. Do these policies or procedures include protocols for establishing, activating, modifying, disabling, and removing accounts?
 - b. Do these policies or procedures include protocols/steps for notifying IT account managers/administrators when users are terminated?
29. How are IT and business continuity functions coordinated with physical security? How do IT, business continuity, and physical security components collaborate with your public relations, human resources, and legal departments?
30. What processes do you have to ensure that your external dependencies (contractors, power, water, etc.) are integrated into your security and continuity planning and programs?
31. Describe the decision-making process for protective actions in a cyber incident. What options are available? Have these options been documented in plans? How are they activated?
32. What immediate protective and mitigation actions would be taken at your organization in this scenario? Who is responsible for those actions?
33. What protective actions would you take across non-impacted systems or agencies in the scenario presented? Who is responsible for protective action decision-making? How are actions coordinated across parts of the organization?
34. Compare and contrast physical and cyber incident notifications and protective action decision-making.
35. What systems or processes are the most critical to running elections?
 - a. How are these systems or processes codified in your incident response plan?
 - b. What processes are in place to run elections in the event computer systems are compromised?
36. How do you protect the integrity of your voter registration database?
 - a. What entities have access to the database?

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- b. How would those entities report a breach of their systems to your office?
- 37. How do you protect the integrity of your voting equipment?
 - a. What entities have access to your <state, county, local> voting equipment?
 - b. What entity is responsible for securing the voting equipment?
 - c. Does your organization maintain contact information with all relevant parties in case of an incident?
- 38. What is your planned cyber incident management structure?
 - a. Who (by department and position) leads incident management and why?
 - b. How are they notified?
 - c. When did they last exercise their role?
 - d. What is the length of your operational period (i.e., your “battle rhythm”)?
- 39. What are the primary and contingency communication mechanisms necessary to support incident management?

Information Sharing

1. How would your organization receive the information presented in the scenario?
 - a. Through what channels would this information be received and disseminated?
 - b. What are your established mechanisms to facilitate rapid information dissemination?
 - c. What are your known communication gaps? Who in your organization is responsible for addressing those gaps?
 - d. What actions, if any, would your organization take based on this information?
2. What sources of cybersecurity threat intelligence does your organization receive? For example, information from the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), open source reporting, security service providers, others?
 - a. What cyber threat information is most useful?
 - b. How timely and actionable is the information that you receive?
 - c. Who is responsible for collating information across the organization?
3. What mechanisms and products are used to share cyber threat information within your organization and external to your organization (e.g., distribution lists, information sharing portals)?
4. Describe how variables in threat information (timeframe, credibility, and specificity) impact decision-making.
5. How do local government entities report information to state partners?
6. What information, if any, would be shared between the local government IT offices, local election officials, and state officials?
 - a. How would this information be shared and is this process documented and/or formalized?
7. How is information shared among your internal and external stakeholders? Through formal or informal relationships? What information sharing mechanisms are in place?

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8. What are some challenges that are experienced by information technology and business continuity planning in terms of information sharing? Is information flowing in both directions?

Incident Identification

1. How do employees report suspected phishing attempts?
 - a. What actions does your department take when suspicious emails are reported?
 - b. Are there formal policies or plans that would be followed?
 - c. Does your department conduct phishing self-assessments?
2. What process does the general workforce follow to report suspected cyber incidents? Is this a formal process on which they have been trained?
3. What would cause you or someone in your organization to report a cybersecurity incident?
 - a. How are incidents reported?
 - b. What would trigger the reporting requirements established by State law and policy?
 - c. Who has the authority to create and enforce cybersecurity policies in your organization?
 - d. What training have employees received regarding your cyber incident response plan?
4. What cybersecurity incident escalation criteria, notifications, activations, and/or courses of action are defined in your response plan?
 - a. Who would be responsible what actions would they take?
 - b. How and when would your leadership be notified?
5. How does your organization baseline network activity? How would you be able to distinguish between normal and abnormal traffic?
6. How does the organization report cybersecurity incidents to outside organizations? To whom? What, if any, mandatory reporting requirements do you have?
7. How do detection and analysis procedures differ for loss of personally identifiable information (PII), phishing attempts, data exfiltration, data modification, or other incidents?
8. Who is responsible for correlating information across different organizational-level incidents?
9. Discuss your organization's intrusion detection capabilities and analytics that alert you to a cyber incident.
10. What type of hardware and/or software does your organization use to detect/prevent malicious activity of unknown origin on your systems/network?
11. What is your organization's primary concern at this time?
12. What Day, if any, would prompt you or someone in your organization to report a cybersecurity incident?
 - a. How would reports flow between different levels of government (e.g., local reporting to state, or state to federal)?
13. Do you have someone within your organization who monitors the Dark Web? If so, how would you verify the security researcher's claims and confirm authenticity of the sensitive information in question?

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Incident Response

1. What level of leadership/management would be notified at this point in the scenario? Is there a plan in place detailing the thresholds at which different notifications are made and what information is provided?
2. What is your department or agency's primary concern? Mitigation of the incident (resolving the issue) or investigation (preserving the evidence to build a criminal case)? Who would make this decision? Are these mutually exclusive?
3. What response actions would your organization have taken at this point? Are these actions driven by a plan?
4. What impact will the sale of sensitive or Personally Identifiable Information (PII) have on your response and recovery activities?
 - a. Will it alter priorities? Have your public relations priorities changed?
 - b. Will it trigger any additional legal or regulatory notifications?
5. Whom will you notify, internally and externally, of these incidents?
 - a. Is there a process or plan in place that outlines the severity thresholds for which different notifications are made and what information is to be conveyed?
 - b. How will you keep senior leadership updated? What information is provided and how is it communicated?
 - c. How and when would you make a notification to the public?
 - i. How are you coordinating your messaging within your organization?
 - ii. What pre-canned messaging or holding statements does your organization have for such an event?
 - d. How are you ensuring unity of message between your organization, the public sector, and elected officials?
6. How would these events affect your organization's business operation/processes?
7. What concerns have these incidents generated that have not been addressed?
8. How would your organization respond to the discovery of a malicious, unauthorized administrator account on your systems? Who would be informed internally? Who would be informed externally (e.g., law enforcement, cybersecurity insurance partners, etc.)?
9. What resources are required for incident investigation and attribution? Are sufficient resources available in-house?
10. How would the events presented in the scenario trigger activation of your cyber incident response plan or similar document (e.g., emergency operations plan cyber incident annex)? How would the activation alter any roles and responsibilities?
11. At what point in the scenario would you contact law enforcement and/or the state Attorney General?
 - a. How would relationships with law enforcement and other partners be managed? Where is the process documented?

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- b. How does a law enforcement investigation impact containment, eradication, and recovery efforts?
 - c. What processes and resources are in place for evidence preservation and collection?
12. Discuss the difference between network and host forensics. How are you equipped and staffed to address this?
13. What are the roles of your network operations center and security operations center during a response?
14. What are your essential elements of information and key information questions necessary for operational and executive-level responses to cyber incidents?
15. What mission essential functions are impacted by the incidents described in the scenario?
16. How does your organization maintain service availability of key assets (e.g., network connectivity, etc.)?
17. What capabilities and resources are required for responding to this series of incidents?
- a. What internal resources do you depend on? Are your current resources sufficient?
 - b. Whom do you contact if you're in need of additional third-party assistance?
 - c. What resources are available within the state or locally? How do you request these resources?
 - d. Do you have personnel tasked with incident response or a designated cyber incident response team within your organization?
 - i. If so, what threshold must be reached for the cyber incident response personnel to be activated? Does this scenario reach that threshold?
 - ii. Who is responsible for activating the cyber incident response personnel and under what circumstances?
 - iii. What are the cyber incident response team/personnel's roles and responsibilities?
18. In what ways, if any, does this scenario exceed your organization's ability to respond?
- a. What are your organization's established procedures to request additional support?
19. What are your organization's response priorities?
- a. Who would be notified at this point in the scenario? Is there a plan in place detailing the thresholds at which different notifications are made and what information is provided?
 - b. What response actions would the IT/IS department take at this point? Are these actions driven by a plan?
 - c. What response capabilities and resources are required to respond to these incidents?
20. What actions would be taken when the exfiltration is discovered? Does your organization have written plans that would be implemented?
21. What is the decision process to determine if the ransom should be paid or not?
- a. Who decides?
 - b. What is the process?
 - c. What are the advantages/disadvantages?
 - d. What are the political ramifications?

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- e. What outside partners/entities do you need to contact?
- 22. Where do you receive cyber response technical assistance? What plans, procedures or policies are in place to access this assistance?
- 23. How does your organization proactively identify and establish the service provider relationships needed for incident/breach response issues (e.g., credit counseling, forensic/computer security services)?
- 24. What processes are used to contact critical personnel at any time, day or night?
 - a. How do you proceed if critical personnel are unreachable or unavailable?
- 25. If your ePollbook or other critical election information system were disabled, how would you continue elections operations?
 - a. What, if any, additional resources would you need to conduct elections if your elections information was unrecoverable?
 - b. Do you have mechanisms in place (e.g., MOU/MOA, contract, etc.) for arranging additional surge support of both personnel and resources on Election Day, should it be needed?
- 26. How would your organization respond to misprinted <ballots, envelopes, or other printed election materials>?
- 27. How would a breach of another agency affect the <your entity> if they potentially have access to your information?
 - a. Is the agency required to notify <your entity> of their breach or suspected breach? If so, what are the notice requirements?
- 28. Given the events of <Election Day, early voting> what is your greatest priority?
- 29. If the networks were found to be infected with ransomware, how would this impact the certification of election results?
 - a. If election results from your <precinct, municipality, county> cannot be certified, how would you proceed?
- 30. How would voters locate their <polling location> if the locator were vandalized or disabled?
- 31. How would you determine whether unauthorized manipulation of election data has occurred?
 - a. How would you address the absence or alteration of voter data in the pollbooks?
 - b. How would you reconcile a greater number of voters versus available voters registered?
- 32. How would you respond to the allegations that the election <data, results, or other assets> were damaged or destroyed?
 - a. What partners would you involve in the response?
 - b. Have you drafted messaging in advance of an incident?
- 33. If primary communications are compromised, how do you provide information to internal and external entities?
- 34. What actions, if any, would you take based on the ballot addresses being incomplete or ballots being mailed to voters who have moved?
- 35. How would you handle the misprinted ballots?

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36. How are voters able to vote in the event the voter registration database is compromised?
37. In the event of complete failure of your entity's general network or election network, what systems would you need to successfully run an election?
38. How would you respond to the attempts to discredit the elections process on social media?

Recovery

1. When does your organization determine a cyber incident is closed?
 - a. Who makes this decision?
 - b. Would your organization engage in any post-incident activities?
2. What actions would your organization take if your IT/incident response staff could not confirm the integrity of your systems/data?
 - a. Would senior leaders consider re-activating critical business processes and systems? What is the risk associated with doing so?
 - b. Would your organization consider a complete rebuild of these systems? How long and costly would that process be?
 - c. What factors do you consider when making these decisions?
3. What formal policies and procedures does your organization use to decide when and how to restore backed-up data, including measures for ensuring the integrity of backed-up data before restoration?
4. Does your organization have back-ups of vital records (e.g., the voter registration database, etc.) in a location that is separated from your primary working copies of your files?
 - a. How frequently do you run backups?
 - b. How long do you keep any copies of archived files backed up?
 - c. How long of a downtime would exist between your primary files and the restoration of files via your back-up?
5. What redundant systems are in place if the impacted system(s) is compromised?
 - a. What alternative systems or manual processes are in place to continue operations if a critical system is unavailable for a significant period of time?
 - b. Who can authorize use of alternate systems or procedures?
6. What backup systems are utilized in your organization?
 - a. How quickly can they be deployed?
 - b. How often are backups created or destroyed?
7. Describe your role in post-incident activity.
8. How would you work with critical infrastructure providers to determine the incident is over?
9. How does post incident-activity differ when critical infrastructure is involved?
10. Does your organization have a continuity of operations plan (COOP) for conducting its functions at a location other than your main building?

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- a. If so, how would a suspected cyber incursion impact your organization's ability to activate its COOP Plan?

11. What further concerns do you have that have not been discussed?

Training and Exercises

1. What basic cybersecurity and/or IT security awareness training does your organization provide to all users (including managers and senior executives)?
 - a. How often is training provided?
 - b. What topics are covered in your training?
 - c. Is training required to obtain network access?
 - d. What security-related training does your department or agency provide to, or contractually require of, IT personnel and vendors with access to your city's or county's information systems? How often do they receive the training?
2. How does your organization train elections personnel, including volunteers, on cybersecurity threats such as phishing?
 - a. How often is training provided?
 - b. What topics are covered in the training sessions?
3. What special training, if any, do your cybersecurity incident response team members undergo to detect, analyze, and report this activity? Describe this training.
 - a. How is your staff trained to read and analyze your intrusion detection system logs?
4. What training do you provide in support of your Cybersecurity Incident Response Plan, Business Continuity Plan, Emergency Operations Plan Cyber Incident Plan, or other related plans?
 - a. Do employees know what constitutes suspicious cybersecurity activities or incidents?
 - b. Do employees know what actions to take when one arises?
5. If you have a cyber incident response plan, how often does your organization exercise the plan?
 - a. Who is responsible for the exercise planning?
 - b. What agencies are involved in the exercise?
 - c. What level of the organization is required to participate?
 - d. What actions follow the exercise?
6. What are your cybersecurity incident response team's exercise requirements?
7. How does your organization's efforts address both physical and cyber risks?
8. Have senior or elected officials participated in a cybersecurity exercise?
9. What are the additional training and/or exercising requirements for your organization?

Senior Leaders and Elected Officials

1. What is your cybersecurity culture? As a leader in your organization, what cybersecurity goals have you set? How have they been communicated?

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2. As it relates to your jurisdiction, what cybersecurity information do you request? What do you receive?
3. What are your cybersecurity risks?
4. Who develops your jurisdiction's cybersecurity risk profile? What are their reporting requirements? Are they directed to, required by statute, or other? How often do they report?
5. How is your cybersecurity risk integrated with physical risk for an integrated jurisdictional risk assessment?
6. What is your jurisdiction's greatest cybersecurity concern? Why do you rate this concern as your greatest concern? Who reports to you on cyber threats?
7. What, if any, infrastructure does your jurisdiction own, operate, and/or regulate?
8. What relationships do you have with critical infrastructure owners and operators?
9. What priorities have you set related to the cybersecurity of critical infrastructure?
10. What is your most important critical infrastructure?
11. What are your regulatory requirements related to critical infrastructure, if any?
12. What is the greatest threat facing your critical infrastructure? What, if anything, is your jurisdiction able to do to mitigate it?
13. When did you last receive a cyber threat briefing for your jurisdiction?
14. How has your jurisdiction prepared for a cyber incident? Does your jurisdiction have cybersecurity plans in place? How many information security officers do you have? Does the plan indicate how they will work together?
15. Have your information security officers and emergency managers jointly planned for cybersecurity incidents?
16. What are your cybersecurity workforce gaps? How does your jurisdiction recruit, develop, and retain cybersecurity staff?
17. What cybersecurity training do you have planned for cybersecurity staff, managers, and general workforce?
18. What magnitude of incident would require you be notified? How does that notification process work? Is it planned?
19. What requirements or agreements, if any, exist for critical infrastructure to notify you of a cyber incident?
20. Who advises you on cyber threats? What are your essential elements of information or critical information requirements?
21. What is your planned role in protective action decision-making?
22. What is your planned cyber incident management structure? What parts of the government need to be engaged?

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23. Would your jurisdiction's Emergency Operations Center be activated in a cyber incident? How? Why?
24. What is your role in a cyber incident?
25. How does a law enforcement investigation impact your response?
26. What is your role in communicating to the public?
27. How are costs of the response calculated?
28. What information do you need to support your decision-making process?
29. Who is your jurisdiction's cybersecurity liaison to privately-owned and operated critical infrastructure?
30. What are your expectations of the State and Federal Government?
31. Describe your role in post-incident activity.
32. What is your role in restoring and/or maintaining public confidence?

Public Affairs

1. What are your public affairs concerns? Who is responsible for coordinating the public message? Is this process a part of any established plan?
 - a. How would your department respond to the local media reports?
 - b. What information are you sharing with citizens? Employees?
 - c. Are public information personnel trained to manage messaging related to cyber incidents?
 - d. Does your department have pre-drafted statements in place to respond to media outlets?
 - e. Are they trained to manage your social media presence?
 - f. Are all personnel trained to report any contact with the media to appropriate public information personnel?
2. What information would your organization communicate to the public? How would you communicate it?
3. Who is responsible for public information related to the incident? What training or preparation have they received?
4. How would your organization respond to the attempts at disinformation/misinformation concerning elections?
 - a. What established public messaging processes does your organization have as part of a larger communications plan?
 - b. How would your organization respond to the social media posts/rumors and local media reports? Would you use social media or respond by drafting statements?
 - c. What message are you sending employees?
 - d. How are personnel trained to report any contact with the media to the appropriate public information personnel?
5. How would you inform other entities of the fake websites and social media pages?

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- a. How would you contact social media platforms?
 - b. What issues or challenges have you had in working with them?
6. How would your organization respond to the emerging news and social media issues?
 - a. Does your organization have pre-approved messages for immediate release as part of a larger communications plan?
7. What steps are you taking before an incident to build relationships with the media and with voters before an incident happens?

Legal

1. What are the legal issues you must address?
2. What policies should your organization have? Does it exercise these policies? If so, how often?
3. What legal documents should your organization have in place (for example with third-party vendors)?
4. What is the role of the legal department in this scenario?
5. What security breach notification laws does your state have? What do these laws include?
6. What are the consequences if you are unable to certify the official election results?
7. What processes are in place to collect evidence and maintain the chain of custody?

Appendix B: Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
CISA	Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency
COOP	Continuity of Operations Plan
DDoS	Distributed Denial of Service
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
IT	Information Technology
NIST	National Institute of Standards and Technology
PII	Personally Identifiable Information
TLP	Traffic Light Protocol

Appendix C: Case Studies

Emotet Malware Infection

On the morning of March 1, 2020, the city of Torrance, California, fell victim to a cyberattack. Servers were impacted, causing interruptions in computer access to several departments throughout the city. Access to email was lost, credit cards couldn't be processed, and the website completely lost its functionality. Employees had to use temporary email accounts to perform some of their core job functions. The attack caused a major disruption and took many hours to get systems back up and running. Although the attackers were able to take down the city's systems, it's believed that no personal data were compromised during this incident. Torrance did not disclose whether a ransom had been demanded by the attackers.¹

On August 11 and 12, 2020 the Department of Justice of Quebec suffered a cyberattack in which threat actors used malicious software to compromise 14 inboxes under the Department jurisdiction. The attackers gained access the emails addressed to these mailboxes. The hackers used a version of the Emotet malware. In this case the hackers used the stolen information to spread their malware. Cybercriminals sent seemingly legitimate messages to those who contacted the afflicted mailboxes, appearing to originate from the Department, and included malicious attachments. Officials stated, "the hackers allegedly stole the personal information of approximately 300 active and inactive employees (retired or now working elsewhere)."²

Distributed Denial of Service Attack

Elections officials across the country have been working to harden their systems against DDoS and other attacks since 2016. The days just before and after Election Day are the most likely time for adversaries to launch DDoS attacks.³ Beyond voter information portals and registration sites that give voters information about voting hours or where they can vote, prime DDoS targets include election night results websites and communications between boards of elections and polling locations.⁴ According to CISA and the FBI, while attacks on election infrastructure can hinder access to voting information, "the underlying data and internal systems would remain uncompromised, and anyone eligible to vote would still be able to cast a vote."⁵

In May 2018, the website used to display voting results for the Knox County, Tennessee mayoral primary was taken offline by a DDoS attack. This prevented voters from being able to access the site

¹ "The Top Cyberattacks of March 2020". (April 8, 2020). Retrieved February 25, 2021 from Artic Wolf: <https://arcticwolf.com/resources/blog/the-top-cyberattacks-of-march-2020>

² "Emotet strikes Quebec's Department of Justice: An ESET Analysis". (September 16, 2020). Retrieved February 25, 2021 from WeLiveSecurity: <https://www.welivesecurity.com/2020/09/16/emotet-quebec-department-justice-eset/>

³ Starks, Tim, "The lowly DDoS attack is still a viable threat for undermining elections." Scoop News Group, October 27, 2020. Accessed March 3, 2021. <https://www.cyberscoop.com/lowly-ddos-attack-still-viable-threat-undermining-elections/>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ FBI & CISA, "DDoS Attacks on Election Infrastructure Can Hinder Access to Voting Information, Would Not Prevent Voting." Public Service Announcement, September 30, 2020. Accessed March 3, 2021. https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/PSA_DDoS_Final%20-%20CyD_508pobs.pdf

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and view the results of the primary, but voting tallies were not affected by the attack.⁶ According to preliminary analysis of the DDOS attack by Knox County's IT Director Dick Moran, the attack was "extremely heavy and abnormal network traffic was originating from numerous IP addresses associated with numerous geographic locations, both internal and external to this country."⁷ Further investigation determined that the DDoS was a smokescreen to distract the county while another, simultaneous attack was happening behind the scenes accessing county information.⁸

Social Engineering

Attacks were launched against a certain customer base that claimed to be from a violent hate group, directing recipients to vote for a certain candidate in the 2020 election. The attacker had access to the recipient's personal information as well as the ability to identify how the recipient typically votes. This sort of intimidation-based social engineering was similar to strategies seen in extortion attacks. The attacker has some amount of personal information about the recipient, such as their name or address, acquired through data leaks or publicly. In addition, the attackers indicated they had access to something even more concerning, such as a compromising video or a bomb placed at a school or place of business. The sources were mainly compromised mail infrastructure; the only way to identify these messages was through content understanding.⁹

One notorious Arizona voter registration 'error' phishing scam informs recipients that their voter's registration applications are incomplete, luring them into sharing Social Security numbers, license data and other personal information with attackers. The fraudulent emails sent in this campaign appear to come from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, and contain a malicious URL leading to a spoofed web page that steals a variety of personal data including name, date of birth, mailing address, email address, Social Security number and driver's license information. The page is carefully engineered to appear legitimate, and even includes images pulled from ServiceArizona's official site.¹⁰

Ransomware

In October 2020, a U.S. state county was hit with a ransomware attack on their county and election infrastructure. The attack affected the county's voter signature database, as well as the voting precinct map hosted on the county website. In this case, attackers did not specifically target election systems, but the loss of access to the voter signature database significantly slowed down absentee

⁶ Abrams, Lawrence, "Knox County Tennessee Election Site Hit with DDOS Attack During Primary." *Bleeping Computer*, May 5, 2018. Accessed March 3, 2021. <https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/knox-county-tennessee-election-site-hit-with-ddos-attack-during-primary/>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Whetstone, Tyler, "Knox County election night cyberattack was smokescreen for another attack." *Knox News*, May 17, 2018. Accessed March 3, 2021. <https://www.knoxnews.com/story/news/local/2018/05/17/knox-county-election-cyberattack-smokescreen-another-attack/620921002/>

⁹ Day, B. (2020). FBI: The 2020 Presidential Election Is Under Attack by Email Scammers. *Digital Guardian*, October 19, 2020, Retrieved March 1, 2020 from <https://guardiandigital.com/blog/fbi-the-2020-presidential-election-is-under-attack-by-email-scammers>

¹⁰ Author Unknown (2020). Election Interference & Social Engineering, (2020, October 23). *Abnormal Security*. Retrieved March 1, 2021 from <https://abnormalsecurity.com/blog/election-interference/>

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ballot processing. County officials were still able to verify voter signatures using paper copies of voter registration cards and the voting process was not impacted by the ransomware attack. State election infrastructure systems were also unaffected. However, the attack raised concerns regarding the potential impacts of ransomware on election infrastructure systems.¹¹

In September 2020, a U.S. company that sells election results software to cities and states was hit by ransomware. While the company is not responsible for tallying votes, the software is used by election officials to aggregate and report votes in at least 20 locations around the US. The attack initially appeared to be a routine ransomware attack where the company's data was encrypted, but it was later reported that several of the company's clients witnessed unauthorized individuals trying to access their systems. The company launched an investigation into the attack and ultimately paid an undisclosed ransom amount to unlock their systems.¹²

¹¹ Reed, Megan, "How Hall County is Handling Influx of Absentee Voting, Effects of Ransomware Attack on Elections Office." *The Gainesville Times*, October 23, 2020. Accessed 23 February 2021, <https://www.gainesvilletimes.com/news/politics/how-hall-county-handling-influx-absentee-ballots/>; Forno, Richard, "Ransomware Can Interfere with Elections and Fuel Disinformation – Basic Cybersecurity Precautions Are Key to Minimizing the Damage." *Government Technology*, October 30, 2020. Accessed 23 February 2021, <https://www.govtech.com/security/Ransomware-Can-Interfere-with-Elections-and-Fuel-Disinformation-Basic-Cybersecurity-Precautions-Are-Key-to-Minimizing-the-Damage.html>

¹² Perlroth, Nicole and David E. Sanger, "Ransomware Attacks Take on New Urgency Ahead of Vote." *The New York Times*, September 27, 2020. Accessed 23 February 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/27/technology/2020-election-security-threats.html>; Johnson, O'Ryan, "Tyler Technologies Reportedly Paid Ransomware, Like Many Other Victims, Expert Says." *CRN*, October 12, 2020. Accessed 23 February 2021, <https://www.crn.com/news/channel-programs/tyler-technologies-reportedly-paid-ransomware-like-many-other-victims-expert-says>

Appendix D: Attacks and Facts

Distributed Denial of Service

Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks overload bandwidth and connection limits of hosts or networking equipment, specifically through a network of computers making excessive connection requests. DDoS attacks unfold in stages. First, a malicious actor infects a computer with malware that spreads across a network. This infected computer is known as the “master” because it controls any subsequent computers that become infected. The other infected computers carry out the actual attack and are known as “daemons.” The attack begins when the master computer sends a command to the daemons, which includes the address of the target. Large numbers of data packets are sent to this address, where extremely high volumes (floods) of data slow down web server performance and prevent acceptance of legitimate network traffic. The cost of a DDoS attack can pose severe loss of revenue or reputation to the victim.

More information on DDoS attack possibilities within each layer of the OSI Model, as well as traffic types and mitigation strategies, can be found in the resource list below.

Additional Resources

- Understanding Denial-of-Service Attacks (<https://www.us-cert.gov/ncas/tips/ST04-015>)
- DDoS Quick Guide (<https://www.us-cert.gov/sites/default/files/publications/DDoS%20Quick%20Guide.pdf>)
- Guide to DDoS Attacks (<https://www.cisecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Guide-to-DDoS-Attacks-November-2017.pdf>)

Social Engineering

One of the most prominent tactics attackers use to exploit network and system vulnerabilities is social engineering—the manipulation of users through human interaction and the formation of trust and confidence to compromise proprietary information. Techniques for uncovering this information largely involve the use of phishing, i.e. email or malicious websites that solicit personal information by posing as a trustworthy source. Social engineering is effective for breaching networks, evading intrusion detection systems without leaving a log trail, and is completely operating system platform dependent. While technical exploits aim to bypass security software, social engineering exploits are more difficult to guard against due to the human factor. Organizations should take steps towards strengthening employee cybersecurity awareness training, to include training personnel to be cautious of suspicious emails, know where to forward them and keeping software and systems up to date.

Additional Resources

- Avoiding Social Engineering and Phishing Attacks (<https://www.us-cert.gov/ncas/tips/ST04-014>)
- The Most Common Social Engineering Attacks (<https://resources.infosecinstitute.com/common-social-engineering-attacks/>)

Ransomware

Ransomware is a type of malware that denies access to victims’ data or systems through encryption with a key only known by the malicious actor who deployed the malware. Once encrypted, the ransomware directs the victim to pay the attacker, typically in the form of cryptocurrency, so the victim can receive a decryption key. Ransomware typically spreads through phishing emails or by

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unknowingly visiting an infected website. Recovery can be an arduous process and there is no guarantee the victim will receive access to their data or systems if the ransom is paid. For more information on best practices to protect users from the threat of ransomware, as well as recent Alerts on specific ransomware threats, see the resource list below.

Additional Resources

- CISA Ransomware (www.stopransomware.gov)
- Protecting Against Ransomware (<https://www.us-cert.gov/ncas/tips/ST19-001>)
- Indicators Associated With WannaCry Ransomware (<https://www.us-cert.gov/ncas/alerts/TA17-132A>)
- Incident trends report (Ransomware) (<https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/report/incident-trends-report#ransomware>)

Appendix E: Doctrine and Resources

Laws

- National Cybersecurity Protection Act of 2014 (Dec 2014)
<https://www.congress.gov/113/plaws/publ282/PLAW-113publ282.pdf>
- Federal Information Security Modernization Act of 2014 (Dec 2014) <https://www.dhs.gov/fisma>
- OMB Memorandum: M-15-01, Fiscal Year 2014-2015: Guidance on Improving Federal Information Security and Privacy Management Practices (Oct 2014)
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2015/m-15-01.pdf>

Presidential Directives

- Executive Order 13800: [Strengthening the Cybersecurity of Federal Networks and Critical Infrastructure](https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-executive-order-strengthening-cybersecurity-federal-networks-critical-infrastructure/) (May 2017) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-executive-order-strengthening-cybersecurity-federal-networks-critical-infrastructure/>
- Presidential Policy Directive-41: United States Cyber Incident Coordination (Jul 2016)
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/07/26/presidential-policy-directive-united-states-cyber-incident>
- Annex to Presidential Policy Directive-41: Annex to the Directive on United States Cyber Incident Coordination (Jul 2016) <https://www.hsdn.org/?view&did=797545>
- Presidential Policy Directive-8: National Preparedness (Mar 2011), (Updated Sep 2015)
<https://www.dhs.gov/presidential-policy-directive-8-national-preparedness>
- Presidential Policy Directive 21: Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience (Feb 2013)
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/02/12/presidential-policy-directive-critical-infrastructure-security-and-resil>
- Executive Order 13636: Improving Critical Infrastructure Cybersecurity (Feb 2013)
<https://www.hsdn.org/?view&did=731040>

Strategies and Frameworks

- National Cyber Incident Response Plan (Dec 2016) <https://www.us-cert.gov/ncirp>
- National Cyber Strategy of the United States of America (Sep 2018)
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/National-Cyber-Strategy.pdf>
- U.S Department of Homeland Security Cybersecurity Strategy (May 2018)
<https://www.hsdn.org/?view&did=810462>
- Framework for Improving Critical Infrastructure Cybersecurity (Apr 2018)
<https://nvlpubs.nist.gov/nistpubs/CSWP/NIST.CSWP.04162018.pdf>
- National Protection Framework, Second Edition (Jun 2016) https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1466017309052-85051ed62fe595d4ad026edf4d85541e/National_Protection_Framework2nd.pdf
- Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Memorandum: M-16-04, Cybersecurity Strategy and Implementation Plan (CSIP) for the Federal Civilian Government (Oct 2015)
<http://www.thecre.com/forum4/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/OMB-Cybersecurity-Implementation-Plan.pdf>

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Key Points of Contact

- Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) (contact: central@cisa.dhs.gov)
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
 - Field Office Cyber Task Forces (contact: <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices>)
 - Internet Crime Complain Center (IC3) (contact: <http://www.ic3.gov>)
- National Cyber Investigative Joint Task Force (NCIJTF) CyWatch 24/7 Command Center (contact: cywatch@ic.fbi.gov; (855) 292-3937)
- United States Secret Service Field Offices and Electronic Crimes Task Force (ECTFs) (contact: <https://www.secretservice.gov/contact/field-offices/>)

Other Available Resources

- Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center (MS-ISAC) (contact: info@msisac.org; (518) 266-3460)
- Cybersecurity and the States (National Association of State Chief Information Officers [NASCIO]) (<http://www.nascio.org/Advocacy/Cybersecurity>)
- National Governors Association (NGA) (<https://www.nga.org/>)
- DHS Cybersecurity Fusion Centers (<https://www.dhs.gov/state-and-major-urban-area-fusion-centers>)
- InfraGard (<https://www.infragard.org/>)
- Internet Security Alliance (<http://www.isalliance.org/>)
- Information Sharing and Analysis Centers (ISACs) and Information Sharing and Analysis Organizations (ISAOs) (<https://www.isao.org/information-sharing-groups/>)
- International Association of Certified ISAOs (<http://www.certifiedisao.org>; contact: operations@certifiedisao.org)
- National Council of ISACs (<https://www.nationalisacs.org/>)

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<https://www.symantec.com/blogs/threat-intelligence/wannacry-ransomware-attack>