Cybersecurity Survey of State Legislators & Staff

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Report Background

Purpose

The Governing Institute conducted a survey of state elected and appointed officials and their staff to better understand their priorities and knowledge as it relates to cybersecurity.

Key questions included their understanding and knowledge of cybersecurity, primary sources of information about cybersecurity, what cybersecurity threats pose the greatest risk to their state, and barriers to appropriately protect their state from cyberattacks.

The purpose of this survey was to examine current baseline cybersecurity knowledge of state elected and appointed officials in order to identify educational needs regarding this topic.

Methodology

The Governing Institute surveyed a total of 103 respondents – 74 state elected and appointed officials, and 29 legislative staff members, to better gauge their knowledge of cybersecurity and cybersecurity practices at the state level.

Responses were gathered from members of our Governing Exchange and members of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). An online survey was fielded in October and November 2015.

The survey results are reflective of those who subscribe to the Governing Exchange and NCSL.

For the purposes of this survey, cybersecurity was defined to relate specifically to all state networks, state data centers, etc.
Respondent Type Breakdown

Received responses from 74 state elected and appointed officials and 29 staff members

Please select the option that best describes your role/state elected or the appointed official that you report to:

- 70% State legislator
- 28% Staff
- 1% Other elected state official
- 1% Appointed state official
Highlights – Perceptions of Cybersecurity

- Over half of respondents report that they are familiar with cybersecurity.
- A majority believe the quality of their state’s approach to cybersecurity is on par or average with other states.
- A majority agree that cybersecurity is a priority for them.
- Two-thirds believe that their state’s current level of cyber risk is moderate to high.
Familiarity with Cybersecurity

Almost three-quarters of respondents are familiar or extremely familiar with cybersecurity

How would you rate your (your elected or appointed official’s) understanding and knowledge of cybersecurity?
A majority of respondents reported that their state is doing an average job with its approach to cybersecurity.

When it comes to my state’s approach to cybersecurity I believe we are:
Cybersecurity as a Priority

Cybersecurity is a priority for a majority of elected and appointed officials surveyed.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement:
Creating a safer, secure and trusted state network is a critical priority of mine/the state legislator or official to whom I report.

- **46%** Strongly agree
- **37%** Agree
- **12%** Neither agree or disagree
- **4%** Disagree
- **1%** Do not know
Two-thirds of respondents reported that their state’s current level of cyber risk is moderate to high.

I/My elected or appointed official believe/s our current level of cyber risk in the state is:
Cybersecurity Awareness

Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following cybersecurity awareness statements.

- We have good policies in place, but understand it’s a matter of when, not if, we will be attacked.
- We’re one step ahead – our sensitive data isn’t all in one place.
- Hackers are getting smarter, which means our state could be compromised.

![Pie charts showing the percentage of respondents who strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, and strongly disagree with each statement.](image-url)
Cybersecurity Awareness

Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following cybersecurity awareness statements.

- **We’re outnumbered by hackers and expect to always be under attack.**
  - Strongly agree: 1%
  - Somewhat agree: 11%
  - Neither agree or disagree: 29%
  - Somewhat disagree: 44%
  - Strongly disagree: 15%

- **Budgets are tight and resources for cybersecurity are limited.**
  - Strongly agree: 9%
  - Somewhat agree: 26%
  - Neither agree or disagree: 18%
  - Somewhat disagree: 47%
  - Strongly disagree: 3%

- **I sleep well at night; our state’s sensitive data is heavily protected.**
  - Strongly agree: 6%
  - Somewhat agree: 38%
  - Neither agree or disagree: 14%
  - Somewhat disagree: 39%
  - Strongly disagree: 3%
Highlights – Cybersecurity Resources

- Over half of respondents do not know how much of their state’s IT budget is spent on cybersecurity
- Half of respondents acknowledge that their state has an inadequate number of cybersecurity personnel
- Respondents indicated that there is a lack of training and challenges with attracting and retaining personnel
State Cybersecurity Budget

Over half of respondents do not know how much of their state’s overall information technology budget is spent on cybersecurity.

What is your estimate of the overall state information technology budget that is spent on cybersecurity?

- 19% 1-2% on cybersecurity
- 11% 3-5% on cybersecurity
- 4% Greater than 10% on cybersecurity
- 3% Nothing on cybersecurity
Half of respondents acknowledge that their state has an inadequate number of cybersecurity personnel.

In thinking about your state’s staffing levels for cybersecurity personnel, would you say that in your state you have:

- **50%** inadequate number of cybersecurity personnel
- **34%** adequate number of cybersecurity personnel
- **14%** do not know
- **3%** ample cybersecurity personnel
Cybersecurity Staff Training and Retention

Respondents identified cybersecurity staff training and retention as challenges.

They were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statements.
Highlights – Sources of Information

- Media reports were the most reported source for cybersecurity information
- A majority of respondents do not currently sit on a committee with a cybersecurity mandate
- A majority do not know if their state has a cyber emergency incident plan in place
- Over one-third do not know who is responsible for the development of their state’s enterprise cybersecurity strategy
- Almost one-third receive security briefings on a situational basis only
The most reported sources for cybersecurity information was media reports.

What or who are the primary sources of information about cybersecurity in your state government? Please select all that apply.

- Chief information officer (34%)
- Chief information security officer (32%)
- Advocacy groups (27%)
- Federal government (18%)
- Oversight committees (17%)
- Vendors (14%)
- Agency heads (7%)
A majority of respondents are not currently sitting on a committee that has cybersecurity as part of its mandate.

Do you (does your elected or appointed official) currently sit on a committee that has cybersecurity as part of its mandate?

- 74% Do not sit on a committee
- 18% Do sit on a committee
- 8% Do not know
State Cyber Emergency Incident Response Plan

A majority of respondents reported that they do not know if their state has a cyber emergency incident plan in place.

In the event of a cyber attack, we have a state cyber-emergency incident response plan in place.
Over one-third of legislative officials (not staff) do not know who is responsible for the development of their state’s enterprise cybersecurity strategy.

*Who in your state is responsible for the development of the enterprise cybersecurity strategy, plan and controls? Please select all that apply.*

- State chief information officer: 30%
- State chief technology officer: 29%
- Agency head or their designee: 24%
- State chief information security officer: 11%
- Agency chief information officer: 9%
- Decentralized authority: 7%

Over 1/3 do not know who is responsible.
Almost one-third of respondents reported getting information security briefings only during specific situations.

How often do you (does your state elected or appointed official) receive an information security briefing that includes threats, vulnerabilities, risks, controls, incidents or mitigation activities?
Highlights – Sources of Information

- The most reported cybersecurity threat to the state was criminal organizations outside of the U.S.
- The increasing sophistication of threats is the most reported barrier to protecting the state from cyber risks
- A majority of respondents identified interest in learning about at least one area of cybersecurity
Cybersecurity Risks to the State

A majority of respondents reported criminal organizations outside the U.S. as one of the greatest cybersecurity risks to their state.

Please pick the top three cybersecurity threats that pose the greatest risk to your state.
Barriers to Protecting the State from Cyber Risks

Information and education are needed

*What do you see as barriers to appropriately protecting your state from cyber-risks? Please select all that apply.*

- Insufficient funding (43%)
- Lack of understanding about risks and incidents (43%)
- Not seen as a legislative priority (42%)
- Inadequate availability of cybersecurity personnel (28%)
- Organizational silos (27%)
- Not seen as an executive branch priority (26%)
- Lack of visibility and influence within the state (22%)
- Lack of documented processes (14%)
Respondents who identified funding as a barrier identified factors that impede funding.

*If lack of sufficient funding was selected, what is keeping your state from adequately funding cyber security?*

- Other political priorities take precedence: 48%
- Decision-makers lack of understanding or appreciation of the risks: 18%
- Lack of legislation or policy: 9%

N= 44
Future Cybersecurity Education

87% of respondents identified interest in at least one area of cybersecurity

What cybersecurity topics would you (think your elected or appointed official would) like to learn more about? Please select up to five choices.

- Biggest cyber threats facing state government (44%)
- Best cybersecurity methods for helping to protect state networks (42%)
- Top causes of data breaches (38%)
- Protection for mobile devices (36%)
- Data breach response (32%)
- Network security 101 for non-techies (30%)
- Public Wi-Fi security issues and safety measures (26%)
- Social engineering and phishing (24%)
Thank you!

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