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For Small County Governments, Tackling Cybersecurity Basics Can Go a Long Way



In this Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2019, photo a woman types on a keyboard in New York. AP PHOTO/JENNY KANE

By [Andrea Noble](#) | FEBRUARY 28, 2020

The local governments can face unique challenges when it comes to protecting their computer systems from threats.

CYBERSECURITY ELECTIONS COUNTY GOVERNMENT



To a small county with limited resources, it may sound intimidating to overhaul and adopt new cybersecurity standards.

But if county officials begin by taking small steps to improve their government's overall cyberhygiene – such as using secure passwords and training employees on cyber threats – they may be surprised how quickly they fall in line with industry best practices.

Cybersecurity experts shared tips on how local governments could apply the National Institute of Standards and Technology's cybersecurity framework to their networks on Friday at a panel discussion at the National Association of Counties [legislative conference](#) in Washington, D.C.

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Woods, the security assurance lead for state and local government at Amazon World Services.

The [NIST framework](#) was designed as a voluntary guide for businesses, organizations and federal, state and local governments to help promote the protection of critical infrastructure and manage cybersecurity-related risks.

Compliance with the framework “comes organically when you start nailing those fundamentals,” Woods said.

Ensuring that county information technology officials have a working relationship with those overseeing the budget can be critical to ensuring cybersecurity efforts receive sufficient funding, said Barry Condrey, the chief information officer for Chesterfield County, Virginia.

“If the budget department doesn’t understand your cyber posture, you’re missing the boat,” Condrey said. “Make sure you align with the people who control the money.”

Condrey shared his state’s experience developing security standards for Virginia’s voter registration systems and the difficulties encountered by individual counties.

Virginia lawmakers in 2019 [approved legislation](#) directing the state’s Board of Elections to draft regulations securing the state’s voter registration system and requiring local electoral boards to develop their own security plans.

When stakeholders met to discuss potential development of minimum security standards, Condrey said about one-third of the governments represented didn’t have a person on staff who was responsible for information technology security across the government. Officials were also worried about the time and resources that would be needed to develop and meet the new requirements.

Once the state adopted the standards, Condrey said officials were not able to act immediately because they missed the budget cycle for the year. He recommended that any efforts to implement new security standards be closely tied to budget discussions so that there is money to pay for initiatives.

“Anytime a state tries to impose its will on local government, particularly with an unfunded mandate, it generally does not go well,” he said. 🗣️

Andrea Noble is a staff correspondent for *Route Fifty*.



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Here Are Some of the ‘Promising Practices’ in State Broadband Expansion



SHUTTERSTOCK / THOMBAL

By [Andrea Noble](#) | FEBRUARY 27, 2020

A new Pew Charitable Trusts report found that policies like “dig once” requirements can encourage better collaboration with internet service providers to expand access.

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States are helping bring broadband internet to rural areas by enacting a range of policies that identify barriers to expansion and reduce bureaucracy that can hamper build outs, a new Pew Charitable Trusts report has found.

For instance, [the report](#) highlights California’s and West Virginia’s implementation of “dig once” policies, which can encourage collaboration with utility and transportation infrastructure projects and help overcome barriers to connectivity. Eleven states have adopted dig once policies, which can require the consultation or inclusion of broadband infrastructure during road construction,

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California adopted a [dig once policy](#) in 2016 that requires the state Department of Transportation to notify internet service providers of planned roadwork projects.

“Its aim was to streamline the process for these providers to deploy infrastructure along state highways by identifying opportunities to bury fiber-optic cables in ground that has already been opened for roadwork,” the Pew report states.

West Virginia adopted a [similar policy](#) in 2018 that allows the Division of Highways to lease access to rights of way to internet service providers. It also establishes a process to notify utilities, including broadband providers, of upcoming roadwork projects.

In the Pew report, researchers reviewed policies and measures that nine states are taking to expand broadband access in rural areas. The report acknowledges that each state has different resources, may work with different service providers, and are likely in different stages of expanding broadband access. But, overall, it highlights five common “promising practices” that researchers found among the states. Those practices include engaging stakeholders, creating a policy framework, planning and capacity building, providing funding and operations support, and evaluating programs as they evolve.

Other examples of ways that states can address barriers to connectivity through legislation include Tennessee’s decision to allow electric cooperatives to provide internet service. Further, Colorado now allows utility companies to use existing easements on private land for commercial broadband service so long as property owners are notified, the report states.

In its review of state policies, the Pew report also identified the establishment of specific broadband speed definitions and goals as helpful in guiding expansion.

“These measures, often set in statute, create a framework for broadband expansion efforts, providing clarity to providers and communities as they make decisions about investing in broadband infrastructure,” the report states.

The report highlights Minnesota as an example for adopting legislation that establishes the state’s goal to connect all homes and businesses to download speeds of 100 megabits per second and upload speeds of 20 mbps by 2026.



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“While no silver bullet will ensure better broadband connectivity, officials at all levels of government can gain insights from these examples on how to bring this critical service to areas that remain unserved,” the report states.

While the Federal Communications Commission has pledged **\$20 billion** to subsidize the construction of high-speed broadband networks in rural America over the next 10 years, concern about the accuracy of the FCC’s broadband access maps has led states to step up **their own efforts**.

The Pew report emphasizes that while much of the broadband conversation revolves around federal expansion efforts, “states play a critical role in deploying broadband, and their efforts are making a significant difference in expanding access.” 📡

Andrea Noble is a staff correspondent for *Route Fifty*.

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