



ASPEN TECH
POLICY HUB

PROJECT



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this project, please visit
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Big Security for Small Business

Providing the resources small businesses need to improve their cybersecurity

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Small businesses face a difficult challenge: they are held to the same cybersecurity standards as large enterprises, but lack similar resources. They are also frequently the targets of online exploitation by cyber criminals. As such, small businesses are at high risk for business failure in the event of a breach. This project recommends updating government procurement policies—especially at the state and local levels—to require minimum cybersecurity standards for all contracts, including small businesses. Additionally, it recommends the adoption of curated tools designed to help small businesses meet these minimum standards. By increasing the cost of non-compliance and reducing the friction of implementation, these proposals provide a compelling incentive for small businesses to improve their cybersecurity.



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THE PROBLEM

When asked why they do not implement stronger cybersecurity practices, small businesses most often cite the high cost and their lack of expertise. Many small businesses do not realize that cyberattacks are likely and falsely believe that only large companies are targeted. To date, voluntary guidelines have proven insufficient to change the cybersecurity practices of small businesses. Enforceable measures, such as those in California and Europe, have demonstrated some improvement, but adoption remains limited, in part because regulators are not likely to target small businesses for failing to comply.

” *Cyberattacks are an existential threat to small businesses, and they are being targeted to them more than ever—43 percent of all breaches involve small businesses, according to Verizon.*

THE SOLUTION

Modeled off a Department of Defense program, this project proposes a procurement policy for all levels of government that requires bidders to develop a Cybersecurity Plan in order to compete for contracts, similar to existing contract certification practices. The project also puts forward a sample Cybersecurity Plan based on the National Institute of Standards and Technology Cybersecurity Framework; a self-certification model to limit compliance and enforcement costs; and a repository of materials for small businesses, including a new assessment tool that helps small businesses prioritize and execute their cybersecurity upgrades.

ABOUT THE HUB

The Aspen Tech Policy Hub is a Bay Area policy incubator, training a new generation of tech policy entrepreneurs. We take tech experts, teach them the policy process, and support them in creating outside-the-box solutions to society's problems.

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