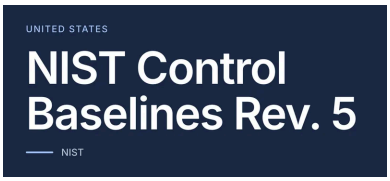
SmartSuite

Framework / Cybersecurity / NIST Special Publications

NIST SP 800-53B, Control Baselines for Information Systems and Organizations

NIST SP 800-53B defines the low, moderate and high security control baselines and the privacy baseline for SP 800-53 Rev. 5, with tailoring guidance and overlays.



What it is

NIST SP 800-53B, Control Baselines for Information Systems and Organizations , published in October 2020 with updates as of December 10, 2020, assigns controls from NIST SP 800-53 Rev. 5 to three security control baselines (low-impact, moderate-impact and high-impact) and to one privacy control baseline. For federal information systems, implementing a minimum set of controls from SP 800-53 Rev. 5 is mandatory under OMB Circular A-130 and the Federal Information Security Modernization Act (FISMA); any other organization that processes, stores or transmits information may use the baselines voluntarily (section 1.1).

At a glance

PUBLISHER
National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), Joint Task Force

TYPE
Control Framework

VERSION
SP 800-53B, baselines for SP 800-53 Rev. 5 (Release 5.2.0, August 27, 2025, no baseline changes)

EFFECTIVE
October 2020 (cover date; the CSRC record says September 2020); updates as of December 10, 2020

DOMAIN
Cybersecurity

FAMILY
NIST Special Publications

REGION
United States

INDUSTRY
Government & Public Sector

ADOPTION MODEL
Regulatory Compliance

IMPLEMENTATION COMPLEXITY
High

Source: csrc.nist.gov/pubs/sp/800/53/b/upd1/final

Why it matters

- **Selection by impact level** Section 2.2 defines a low-impact system as one where all three security objectives are low, a moderate-impact system as one with at least one moderate and none high, and a high-impact system as one with at least one high.
- **A separate privacy baseline** The privacy control baseline applies irrespective of impact level, and footnote 17 warns that using it does not mean an agency has met all its OMB A-130 privacy obligations.
- **Tailoring that leaves a record** Section 2.4 requires the risk-based justification for tailoring decisions to be documented in system security and privacy plans, and says organizations do not arbitrarily remove controls.
- **Stated assumptions** Section 2.3 lists the assumptions behind the baselines, such as persistent information, multi-user and networked systems, and an organization with the resources to implement the controls.

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How SmartSuite supports NIST 800-53 Rev.5 Baselines

Baseline Control Library

Load the controls and enhancements of the selected low, moderate or high baseline, plus the privacy baseline where it applies, as requirements with owner, status and linked evidence.

Tailoring Decisions

Record each tailoring action (common control, scoping consideration, compensating control, parameter value or supplement) with its risk-based rationale and approver, as section 2.4 expects.

Common Control Inheritance

Track which controls a common control provider supplies and which systems inherit them, with the provider's current implementation and assessment information.

System Categorization Record

Hold the confidentiality, integrity and availability impact levels for each system, the high water mark and the baseline selected.

Control Testing and Evidence

Schedule control tests and attach results and evidence to each control in Compliance Management.

Supplier and Acquisition Controls

Track suppliers against the SR and SA family controls in Third Party Risk Management, with assessments and contract requirements.

Common framework mappings

CIS Controls v8.1 | FedRAMP Rev. 5 | HIPAA | ISO 27001:2022 | ISO 27002:2022 | NIST CSF 2.0 | PCI DSS 4.0.1 | SOC 2

Official resources

NIST SP 800-53 Control Baselines

Defines standardized security and privacy control sets for federal information systems.

csrc.nist.gov/pubs/sp/800/53/b/upd1/final

NIST SP 800-53 Rev. 5 publication page

NIST's publication page for SP 800-53 Rev. 5, the control catalog the SP 800-53B baselines select from.

csrc.nist.gov/pubs/sp/800/53/r5/upd1/final

NIST Risk Management Framework (RMF) Overview

Describes the integration of NIST SP 800-53 controls within the Risk Management Framework.

csrc.nist.gov/projects/risk-management

Frequently asked questions

What does NIST SP 800-53B contain?

It assigns controls and control enhancements from SP 800-53 Rev. 5 to three security control baselines (low-impact, moderate-impact and high-impact) and one privacy control baseline in Tables 3-1 to 3-20 of Chapter Three. Chapter Two explains how to select a baseline, the assumptions behind them, tailoring, and capabilities, and Appendix C gives guidance on overlays.

How does an organization choose between the low, moderate and high baselines?

Section 2.2 uses the FIPS 199 security category of the system for confidentiality, integrity and availability, and the FIPS 200 high water mark sets the impact level. A system is low-impact only if all three objectives are low, moderate-impact if at least one is moderate and none is high, and high-impact if at least one is high. The impact level selects the baseline in Chapter Three.

Is SP 800-53B mandatory?

For federal information and information systems, implementing a minimum set of controls from SP 800-53 Rev. 5 is mandatory under OMB Circular A-130 and FISMA (section 1.1). The privacy control baseline itself is not mandated by law or A-130. Nongovernmental organizations may use the publication on a voluntary basis, and national security systems are not subject to FISMA requirements.

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What must be documented when a baseline is tailored?

Section 2.4 requires every control from the selected baseline to be accounted for. Tailoring decisions, with their risk-based justification, are recorded in the system security and privacy plans and approved by responsible officials. Organizations may not tailor out controls that pertain to applicable federal legislative, regulatory or policy requirements.

Did the August 2025 release change the baselines?

No. NIST issued SP 800-53 Release 5.2.0 on August 27, 2025, and its planning note says the SP 800-53B release includes no changes to the baselines. The SP 800-53B version number was updated for consistency with SP 800-53 and SP 800-53A.

License included / downloadable: Yes SP 800-53B is a NIST publication, free of charge and not subject to copyright in the United States; NIST asks for attribution. The Control Baselines spreadsheet and the OSCAL baseline profiles are also free from NIST.

Full framework page and mappings: smartsuite.com/frameworks/nist-800-53-rev-5-control-baselines

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