



AGENCY AUTHORIZATION IN FOUR MONTHS: A CASE STUDY

In collaboration with the FedRAMP PMO, the National Science Foundation (NSF) achieved an agency authorization in four months

BACKGROUND

Over the last year, FedRAMP made a deliberate effort to change the way we interact with our customers. Agencies play a critical role in the process to assess risk and authorize CSPs. Working hand-in-hand with the FedRAMP PMO can yield multiple efficiencies within the FedRAMP Authorization Process. In this case study, you will find the stakes to gain FedRAMP compliance were high for NSF - they were on the verge of undergoing an Inspector General (IG) audit and had to authorize their financial system - fast. This strategic cloud service had widespread impact on internal NSF operations and NSF stakeholders. The visibility and importance of the system created a sense of urgency in the agency to get the system authorized.

“Partnering with NSF changed how we work with agencies - we now publish the agency checklist and share it with agencies in the beginning of the process, so they know what we are looking at when we review packages.”

“Collaborating with the FedRAMP PMO was essential for guidance on meeting expectations.”

RESULT – ACHIEVING AN AUTHORIZATION IN FOUR MONTHS

With the deadline looming, NSF contacted the FedRAMP PMO for help. FedRAMP was able to quickly identify gaps in the various FedRAMP security package deliverables, address vulnerability scanning issues, conduct ad hoc reviews of controls, and help the CSP figure out how to structure content in the System Security Plan (SSP). FedRAMP provided an agency review checklist to NSF to ensure adherence to all of the requirements. After working together consistently for four months, the service was FedRAMP authorized.

NSF'S SUCCESS FACTORS

- ✓ **Acknowledge the expertise required:** Many CSPs are still inexperienced when it comes to compliance with federal security standards. Agencies can help provide guidance to help CSPs understand FISMA, the compliance requirements in an ATO.
- ✓ **Collaborate early and often:** It is critical to get all partners - FedRAMP, the CSP, 3PAO, and the agency, involved as early in the process as possible. This helps establish roles and responsibilities, clarify expectations, and ensure that the project is well organized, with a clear understanding of requirements and gaps from the beginning.
- ✓ **Create a committed and accountable partnership:** NSF and the CSP acknowledged the criticality of achieving an ATO, and both committed to its success. Once this commitment was established, NSF and the CSP were both accountable to the plan, their respective responsibilities, and the way forward.
- ✓ **Engage leadership at all levels:** NSF worked with their own leaders and the CSP leadership to gain buy-in for the plan. Leaders at the highest levels of the organization (i.e., NSF CIO and CFO) were fully supportive and ensured the team had the resources and authority required to be successful.