# TX-RAMP Frequently Asked Questions

December 30, 2021

## Key Information

**How do I get started?**

1.) [Determine the requirements](#)

2.) [Identify timelines](#)

3.) [Submit request](#)

**What resources are available to help collect information?**

The 'Resources' section of the [TX-RAMP website](#) contains:

1.) The TX-RAMP [Program Manual](#)

2.) Training

3.) Templates

4.) The [TX-RAMP Security Control Baselines](#)

**How do I access the TX-RAMP tools?**

DIR has implemented new functionality within the Statewide Portal for Enterprise Cybersecurity Threat, Risk, and Incident Management (SPECTRIM) to facilitate agency TX-RAMP assessment requests, collect assessment responses, and provide insight into certified cloud services.

Existing users with *information security office* or *IRM* permissions do not need additional permissions to access the TX-RAMP solution. DIR has also created a new permission group to restrict access to only the TX-RAMP solution – *procurement group*. If an agency would like to request additional SPECTRIM users, or reactivate an inactive account, an existing user should submit a support request from within the portal or email [grc@dir.texas.gov](mailto:grc@dir.texas.gov) with the request. The designated Information Security Officer of each agency should authorize access requests prior to submitting the request.

# Program Overview

**What is TX-RAMP?**

The Texas Risk and Authorization Management Program (TX-RAMP) is provides a standardized approach for security assessment, authorization, and continuous monitoring of cloud computing services that process, store, or transmit the data of a state agency.

**What requires TX-RAMP certification?**

Only cloud computing services, as defined by Texas Government Code Section 2054.0593(a), are within scope for TX-RAMP certification. Products or services that are not cloud computing services are not subject to TX-RAMP. Consult the TX-RAMP program manual's essential characteristics list found in Appendix E to determine whether a product or service is a cloud computing service subject to TX-RAMP. Certain categories and characteristics of cloud computing services are outside of the scope of Section 2054.0593 and, as such, are not required to comply with TX-RAMP.

**How do I know if a cloud service is in- or out-of-scope?**

**Certain cloud computing services are out-of-scope of TX-RAMP due to the unique characteristics of the cloud computing service. Examples include:**

- Email or notification distribution services that do not create, process, or store confidential information

- Social media platforms and services

- Graphic design or illustration products

The current list of out-of-scope services can be found on page 5 of the TX-RAMP Program Manual.

**Which organizations must comply with TX-RAMP requirements?**

State agencies (as defined by Section 2054.003) means a department, commission, board, office, council, authority, or other agency in the executive or judicial branch of state government that is created by the constitution or a statute of this state, including a university system or institution of higher education as defined by Section 61.003, Education Code.

Agencies need to comply with the statutory requirements of contracting for cloud services with appropriate certification.

Cloud providers need to demonstrate compliance with the security criteria to receive and maintain a certification for a cloud computing service.

**What are the levels of TX-RAMP?**

TX-RAMP consists of three certification statuses.

**TX-RAMP Level 1 Certification** is the required minimum certification level for a cloud

computing service that processes, stores, or transmits agency data determined to be nonconfidential or determined to be a low impact information resource.

**TX-RAMP Level 2 Certification** is the required minimum certification level for a cloud computing service that processes, stores, or transmits agency data determined to be confidential and determined to be a moderate or high impact information resource.

**TX-RAMP Provisional Certification** may be leveraged in place of a TX-RAMP Level 1 or 2 Certification for the term of the provisional certification. Provisional Certification may be sought in one of two ways:

1.) Agency-sponsored request: An agency that has conducted a risk assessment of a cloud service may elect to request to sponsor the cloud service for provisional certification. Agencies may submit the provisional-sponsorship request through SPECTRIM from the TX-RAMP Dashboard.

2.) DIR Review of Third-party Assessment/Audit Documentation. Cloud providers may request a provisional certification by completing the TX-RAMP Assessment Request Form and submitting documentation relating to an objective third party review of security.

**When do the certifications need to be in place?**

- Cloud services subject to TX-RAMP Level 1 certification must obtain a TX-RAMP certification to contract with state agencies on or after January 1, 2023.

- Cloud services subject to TX-RAMP Level 2 certification must obtain a TX-RAMP certification to contract with state agencies on or after January 1, 2022.

- Cloud services that obtain TX-RAMP Provisional Certification must obtain a TX-RAMP Level 1 or Level 2 Certification (or equivalent StateRAMP/FedRAMP authorization) within 18 months from the date that DIR grants Provisional status.

**How long is a TX-RAMP certification valid?**

TX-RAMP Level 1 and Level 2 Certifications are valid for three years from the date the certification is granted, provided the cloud service maintains compliance with the program requirements.

TX-RAMP Provisional Certification is valid for 18 months from the date the certification is granted. Cloud services may request a TX-RAMP Level 1 or Level 2 assessment at any time during the provisional certification period.

**How much does TX-RAMP certification cost?**

There are no fees associated with TX-RAMP.

**Is it the vendor or the product that requires certification?**

Cloud computing services, as defined by Section 2054.0593(a), are the target of asessment and certification. A cloud provider may offer several cloud that potentially require varying levels of certification. Each independent cloud service requires individual assessment and certification.

# Path to TX-RAMP Certification

**How do I request a TX-RAMP Assessment?**

Agencies may request a TX-RAMP assessment or request to provisionally sponsor a cloud service for Provisional Certification through the SPECTRIM TX-RAMP workspace. (PDF Guide)

A cloud service manufacturer may  request an assessment for their cloud service(s) through the TX-RAMP Assessment Request Form. (PDF Guide).
Agencies will be able to see pending assessment requests for cloud services and do not need to submit additional requests for assessment.

**Who performs the assessments?**

DIR provides the assessments for TX-RAMP certification.

**How long do assessments take?**

The process can vary in duration, depending on several factors such as thoroughness of responses and documentation, timeliness of clarification responses, level of assessment being performed, and volume of requests.

**Will I be notified when certification is granted?**

Yes, DIR will notify the requestor when the assessment is completed, and the list of approved services will be updated weekly on the TX-RAMP website.

**What do I need to do to obtain TX-RAMP Certification if my cloud service has an existing StateRAMP/FedRAMP status?**

No action is necessary. DIR will be pulling from the StateRAMP Authorized Vendors List and FedRAMP Marketplace on a regular basis and certify the cloud services with appropriate statuses under TX-RAMP.  If a StateRAMP or FedRAMP cloud service with appropriate status is not listed on the TX-RAMP certified cloud services listing, the provider may contact tx-ramp@dir.texas.gov to investigate the discrepancy.

**What's the difference between TX-RAMP, FedRAMP, and StateRAMP?**

The Federal Risk and Authorization Management Program (FedRAMP) is a government-wide program that promotes the adoption of secure cloud services across the federal government by providing a standardized approach to security assessment, authorization, and continuous monitoring for cloud products and services.

StateRAMP is a nonprofit organization based on the National Institute of Standards and Technology Special Publication 800-53 Rev. 4 framework and modeled in part after FedRAMP.

**If a cloud provider is using a TX-RAMP certified cloud environment, can the underlying cloud provider's certification be leveraged for TX-RAMP certification?**

No, using a TX-RAMP Certified infrastructure does not automatically make the service TX-RAMP compliant. Each layer (i.e., IaaS, PaaS, and SaaS) must be evaluated on its own and obtain the appropriate TX-RAMP Certifications. However, when software sits on a TX-RAMP Certified, it may inherit controls from the underlying certified systems and should be noted in the application for certification.

**Who is responsible for ensuring Shared Technology Services (STS) cloud solutions are in compliance?**

As the agency contracting with the Shared Technology Services providers, DIR is responsible for ensuring cloud solutions are compliant with TX-RAMP.


**How do I know what level of certification is required?**

The minimum certification level for a cloud service is determined by the impact level of the information resources defined by the contracting agency and the confidentiality of the data processed, stored, or transmitted by the cloud service.  Agencies should consult with the appropriate internal stakeholders to determine whether a cloud service is subject to TX-RAMP certification requirements and the impact level of the information resources.

It is possible that one agency may make the determination that a cloud service requires a minimum of Level 1 certification, while another determines a minimum of Level 2 certification. In such cases, the cloud provider should make the determination as to which certification level to seek.

**How are *impact* and *confidentiality* defined?**

Low, Moderate, and High Impact Information Resources are defined by 1 Texas Administrative Code Chapter 202.1 and determined by each agency.

Confidential information is information that must be protected from unauthorized disclosure or public release based on state or federal law or other legal agreement (also per Chapter 202).

**Does each agency need to submit a request if they plan to use the cloud service?**

No, if a TX-RAMP certification exists for a cloud service, any agency may leverage the existing certification.

**Will DIR make available the list of certified cloud services?**

Yes, the list will be publicly available on the DIR website and updated at regular intervals at dir.texas.gov/tx-ramp.

**Will we be able to see the list of cloud services that are in queue to be assessed?**

Yes, however, this information will only be available to authorized users within SPECTRIM.

**Will there be a process to 'bulk submit' assessment requests for multiple products?**

Bulk requests should be reserved for a significant number of requests.  Please contact tx-ramp@dir.texas.gov to determine whether a bulk import option is appropriate.

**Does DIR provide any verbiage to add to contract or solicitation language regarding TX-RAMP?**

The Comptroller's Statewide Procurement Guide provides additional language below that agencies can use for future procurements. See page 3 of Appendix 23 (PDF page 201) for additional information.

*Pursuant to Section 2054.0593(d)-(f) of the Texas Government Code, relating to cloud computing state risk and authorization management program, Respondent represents and warrants that it complies with the requirements of the state risk and authorization management program and Respondent agrees that throughout the term of the contract it shall maintain its certifications and comply with the program requirements in the performance of the contract.*