WHITE PAPER 05 / PROGRAMME GOVERNANCE

Building a Repeatable IAM Assessment Programme

A sustainable approach to assessment coverage, review frequency, evidence reuse and management reporting.

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Executive summary

A single assessment provides a view of a defined scope at a particular time. A repeatable programme keeps that view useful as systems, people and business priorities change. The aim is not to send the same questionnaire more often. It is to reassess the right areas when change or exposure justifies attention, reuse evidence carefully and maintain a clear record of what is known.

What you will take away

- Set review frequency from exposure and change, not a universal calendar.
- Reuse evidence only after checking whether it still applies.
- Measure coverage, uncertainty and verified improvement together.

Written for security leaders, assurance teams and programme sponsors.

The worked scenarios are fictional. The checklists and examples are practical editorial guidance, not customer results or a certification method.

1. Establish what the programme is responsible for

Start with a register of the applications, identity populations and business processes the programme covers. Include employees, contractors and non-human identities where relevant. Record what belongs to another assurance activity so there are no invisible boundaries between teams.

Name a sponsor who can resolve priorities and resource conflicts. Name a programme owner who maintains the assessment schedule and question library. Give business and application owners responsibility for providing evidence and acting on findings. Reviewers need a route to challenge unsupported answers without turning the campaign into an argument about individual performance.

For a fictional example, Cedar Vale Services begins with its finance application and supplier support process. The initial assessment identifies gaps in expiry records. A repeatable programme will track whether the correction continues to work and decide when to assess other applications. It should not assume that the initial campaign represents the whole organisation.

NIST SP 800-137 describes an ongoing monitoring approach that informs awareness of assets, threats, vulnerabilities and control effectiveness. Periodic questionnaires can contribute to assurance, but they are not equivalent to continuous technical monitoring. NIST SP 800-137: Information Security Continuous Monitoring.

2. Combine a review calendar with change triggers

Choose a planned review interval for each area, then identify events that may require an earlier review. The interval should reflect the consequences of failure, the pace of change and the reliability of available evidence. A calendar creates discipline; event triggers keep it relevant.

Trigger	Assessment question
New application or major integration	Are ownership, access approval and removal responsibilities clear?
Acquisition or business reorganisation	Do previous scope and identity-population assumptions still hold?
Control incident or repeated exception	Is the process failing in ways the last assessment did not test?
Material process change	Does the new procedure operate as intended?
Completed improvement initiative	Does fresh evidence support closure and continuing effectiveness?

Document who decides that a trigger requires a campaign, a targeted check or no further work. Not every system change needs a full assessment. A focused review may be enough if the affected control and population are clear. Record the decision so later reviewers understand why the scope was chosen.

Keep urgent operational response separate from scheduled assessment work. If evidence suggests active unnecessary access, route it to the authorised operational owner promptly. An assessment programme should not become a reason to wait for the next reporting cycle.

3. Reuse evidence without carrying old assumptions forward

Reusing a policy or configuration record can save effort when it still answers the current question. Check the effective date, system coverage and intervening changes first. A document that remains valid may still need a new operating sample to show that the process continues to work.

Record the evidence owner, source, observation period and relevant assessment claims. These fields help participants find existing material and help reviewers decide whether it remains suitable. Avoid repeatedly uploading different copies of the same file without a clear version relationship.

In the fictional example, the approved supplier-access procedure remains unchanged. However, the service desk has moved to a new ticket workflow. Reusing the procedure is reasonable for describing the intended requirement. Reusing last quarter’s removal sample would not establish how the new workflow operates.

> **Evidence freshness is contextual**
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> There is no universal expiry period for every assessment document. A rapidly changing configuration may need a recent extract, while a stable policy can remain relevant longer. Record the reason for relying on the evidence in the current scope.

4. Maintain the questions and review method

Treat the question library as controlled working material. Keep a named owner for each important subject area. Review questions that repeatedly cause confusion, produce unsupported yes answers or require reviewers to ask the same follow-up. Better wording can reduce effort without lowering the evidence standard.

When adding AI-generated questions, check them before reuse and retain the scope they were intended to address. A question that works for privileged employee accounts may be misleading for a service account. Reuse the assessment objective where appropriate, but adapt the wording and evidence request to the population.

Calibrate reviewers using a few shared examples. Ask them to review the same answer and evidence independently, then discuss differences in the conclusion. Resolve ambiguity in the rubric rather than treating disagreement as a personal failure. Record significant changes to scoring guidance before comparing results over time.

- Remove duplicate or leading questions.
- Make evidence requests proportionate to the decision.
- Separate “not applicable” from “not known”.
- Retain explanations for material changes in scope or rating method.

5. Report coverage and decisions, not just activity

A programme can complete many campaigns while leaving its most important applications unexamined. Report which priority areas have current assessments and which remain outside coverage. Distinguish a submitted answer from an accepted, evidence-supported answer. Both are useful workflow measures, but they mean different things.

Management measure	What it helps explain
Priority scope assessed	Whether important applications and populations are covered.
Material findings awaiting evidence	Where decisions remain uncertain.
Overdue high-priority actions	Where delivery needs intervention.
Closure checks completed	Whether claimed improvements have been verified.
Recurring findings	Whether earlier corrective work addressed the underlying issue.

Define every measure, including its denominator and reporting date. If the number of assessed applications increases, an increase in findings may reflect improved visibility rather than a worsening environment. Explain the change before displaying a trend as a judgement of performance.

Use a short management review to make decisions: commission a targeted assessment, resolve an ownership dispute, approve a resource request or revisit an accepted exception. A dashboard without those decisions can become a recurring presentation that changes little.

6. Start with a manageable operating cycle

Build the first cycle around a limited set of important applications and one clearly stated business concern. Agree the scope, run the campaign, review the evidence and assign actions. At the next checkpoint, verify a sample of completed work and revise the question library based on what participants found confusing.

AssessX supports campaign work, assessment review, risks, gaps and roadmap planning. These connected activities can provide structure for a repeatable programme. Operating-system enforcement, account removal and technical monitoring remain work for the relevant operational systems and teams; an assessment record should not be mistaken for their execution.

Before expanding, review the workload. If reviewers cannot resolve evidence requests or owners cannot deliver actions, increasing campaign volume may create a larger backlog. Adjust the scope and support first. A sustainable programme makes it clear who must act, what they must provide and when the next decision will be made.

Quarterly discussion guide

Which important areas have changed? Which conclusions rely on ageing evidence? Which findings recur? Which actions were verified? What assessment or delivery decision should we make next? Adapt the interval to your organisation; quarterly is an example, not a requirement.

References and further reading

Primary guidance used for the points cited in this paper. Examples, templates and recommended working practices are AIdentX editorial guidance. Sources reviewed September 2026.

NIST SP 800-137: Information Security Continuous Monitoring

https://csrc.nist.gov/pubs/sp/800/137/final

Put the guidance into practice

Read related articles and watch AssessX product demonstrations at www.aidentx.com/assessx/resources.