

Operationalizing Readiness: A Self-Assessment Tool

To move from planning to implementation and actually operationalize the building blocks, agencies and institutions need a clear sense of where they are, where the gaps lie, and what's needed to move forward.

This diagnostic tool is designed to help agencies surface existing strengths, identify areas of growth, and prioritize next steps. It is not necessarily a checklist to complete, but a practical framework for reflection, coordination, and action. Whether launching a new project or improving an existing one, these questions can help teams align their strategies and structure their efforts.

SCORING INSTRUCTIONS

Each question in the self-assessment tool can be rated on a scale from 0-2, based on implementation.

SCORE MEANING

0	<i>No (not implemented)</i>
1	<i>Partial (some progress: inconsistent or early stage)</i>
2	<i>Yes (fully implemented: consistent and reliable)</i>

NOTE: It is important to calculate scores **by section**. Strong performance in some areas cannot offset critical weaknesses in others.

Setting an Agenda		SCORE
Does the agency or institution:		
1	Share a common understanding of what interoperability is and why it matters?	
2	Have clarity on which initiatives would benefit from interoperability?	
3	Know what datasets and external partners the initiative requires?	
4	Have a defined project plan and timeline for pursuing interoperability?	
5	Articulate specific goals for what interoperability is intended to improve?	

Data Quality		
Does the agency or institution:		SCORE
1	Evaluate the relevance, accuracy, and reliability of current data?	
2	Identify common quality risks (e.g., missing values, inconsistent years, metadata gaps) and take steps to address them?	
3	Establish metrics to track and maintain data quality?	
4	Maintain up-to-date metadata documentation, such as data dictionaries or codebooks?	
5	Provide training for staff to analyze or draw conclusions from data, ensuring they understand the data’s context and limitations?	

Data Governance		SCORE
Does the agency or institution:		
1	Conduct a comprehensive audit of all existing datasets and systems to identify redundancies, gaps, and opportunities for integrations?	
2	Adopt clear policies for how data is collected, stored, accessed, and shared?	
3	Identify data ownership and authority for key datasets and systems?	
4	Communicate with the decision makers whose support and sign-off are needed to access data?	
5	Use a protocol to assess whether new data or systems align with existing ones?	

Technical Capacity		SCORE
Does the agency or institution:		
1	Conduct an inventory of technical tools, assess their performance, and identify gaps?	
2	Include interoperability requirements in contracting or procurement processes?	
3	Map existing technical barriers and outline a plan to address them?	
4	Adopt or evaluate national data standards to support alignment?	
5	Plan to keep platforms, APIs, and software updated over time?	

Risk Mitigation		SCORE
Does the agency or institution:		
1	Assess internal and vendor security protocols to prevent unauthorized access or breaches?	
2	Establish and test protocols for breach response and recovery?	
3	Provide privacy and security training to all staff who handle sensitive data?	
4	Ensure Personally Identifiable Information (PII) is encrypted and de-identified as data moves across systems?	
5	Identify reputational, legal, or operational risks and develop strategies to mitigate them?	

Grounded Leadership		SCORE
Does the agency or institution:		
1	Foster a culture of collaboration and transparency that encourages data sharing and cross-divisional problem-solving?	
2	Identify common quality risks (e.g., missing values, inconsistent years, metadata gaps) and take steps to address them?	
3	Examine what leadership model (e.g., interagency council, advisory group) might best fit the project?	
4	Pursue funding or partnership support to advance or scale interoperability projects?	
5	Track, measure, and communicate the initiative's impact over time?	

Legal Framework		SCORE
Does the agency or institution:		
1	Identify whether formal legal agreements (e.g., MOUs, DUAs, vendor contracts) are required for data sharing or access?	
2	Understand and apply relevant federal and state laws governing data privacy and access (e.g., FERPA, HIPAA, COPPA)?	
3	Consider the role of informed consent and public transparency in supporting responsible data sharing?	
4	Provide training to staff on legal obligations and compliance requirements related to data use?	
5	Monitor evolving laws and regulations to maintain compliance?	

REFLECT ON YOUR SCORES

What Is Your Readiness Level for Each Section?

Calculate the score for each section by adding up your points.

SECTION SCORES

Setting an Agenda

Grounded Leadership

Legal Framework

Data Quality

Technical Capacity

Risk Mitigation

Data Governance

SECTION SCORE	READINESS LEVEL	MEANING
0–3	Curious	Early awareness; foundational work and team-building needed
4–6	Developing	Initial steps taken; structures forming but need strengthening
7–8	Gaining Momentum	Established practices; focus on sustaining and expanding
9–10	Exemplary Implementation	Exemplary implementation; prioritize ongoing improvements

What Is Your Overall Readiness Score?

Add up all seven section scores to calculate your overall readiness score.

TOTAL OVERALL READINESS SCORE

TOTAL SCORE	WHAT TO DO NEXT
0–21	Build foundational capacity by assembling the right team, exploring past efforts, and learning from similar contexts.
22–35	Strengthen policies, protocols, and training. Ensure new partners and technologies are integrated thoughtfully. Update training, partnerships, and agreements to support consistency.
36–56	Evaluate current goals, explore adding partners or datasets, and share lessons externally.
57–70	Maintain strong, consistent interoperability with ongoing improvements and share best practices widely. Regularly evaluate goals to ensure alignment.



Making Sense of Your Score

A strong score in one area does not mean the work is complete—interoperability depends on balance across all domains. Use your results to not only celebrate strengths, but also to pinpoint where gaps may hold back overall progress.