Pillar Technology
PARTNERS

2026 CISO Budgeting Roadmap

Security budgets are under the microscope. This roadmap helps you transition into 2026 with clarity, confidence, and board-ready answers.

IDENTITY & ACCESS

- **Reevaluate your identity framework** (IAM, PAM, Zero Trust Identity) to address cloud sprawl, workforce mobility, and increasing partner/vendor access.
- Don't overlook **machine identities** — they already outnumber human accounts and are often unmanaged. Set aside money for the lifetime automation of service accounts, secrets, and certificates to reduce attack paths and avoid disruptions.
- Plan for **phishing-resistant authentication** (FIDO2, passkeys) and continuous identity threat detection to stay ahead of credential misuse.

Why: Identities are now the #1 attack vector. Mismanaged machine identities and weak authentication controls leave organizations exposed to both outages and breaches.

AI & EMERGING TECH SECURITY

- Allocate resources for **AI security governance** — fund participation in AI risk councils and ensure security review boards have teeth.
- Invest in **AI monitoring tools** that detect model manipulation, data leakage, and bias.
- Expand **red-teaming and pen testing** to include AI-enabled apps, ensuring models and data pipelines aren't new blind spots.

Why: AI introduces new risks — from model poisoning to regulatory scrutiny. Without funding, security leaders risk being sidelined while AI innovation outpaces oversight.

CLOUD & SaaS RISK

- When it comes to shadow, SaaS, and multi-cloud IT systems, give **visibility and control** high attention.
- Budget for **SaaS posture management** and continuous third-party risk monitoring — key areas where attackers and regulators alike are focusing.
- Ensure integration with identity controls, since SaaS misconfigurations and excessive privileges remain top breach enablers.

Why: Cloud and SaaS are now the backbone of business operations, yet remain the leading source of misconfigurations and breaches. What you can't see, you can't secure.

SECURITY OPERATIONS & DETECTION

- Improve your ability to detect threats and respond to them by using round-the-clock monitoring (MDR/XDR).
- To lessen reliance on limited skill and alert fatigue, budget for **automation and orchestration**.
- Allocate funds for **attack simulations and breach readiness exercises** — showing boards and regulators that you're not just detecting threats but proving readiness.

Why: Modern risks are too great for staffing alone to handle. Automation and readiness drills ensure resilience without unsustainable headcount growth.

FINANCIAL PRUDENCE

(the C-Suite must-hear angle)

- Emphasize **spending right, not spending more**: prioritize based on data sensitivity and business impact, not tool sprawl.
- Include **cost optimization** — vendor consolidation, underused tool rationalization, and shifting commodity capabilities to managed services where cheaper.
- Frame investments as **risk reduction with measurable ROI** — reduced downtime, avoided fines, stronger board confidence.

Why: In a cautious economy, boards expect CISOs to act as stewards of financial resources. Smart, risk-driven budgeting builds credibility and protects resilience.

REGULATORY & COMPLIANCE

- Prepare for **emerging regulations**: SEC cyber disclosure rules, evolving AI governance, expanding state and global data privacy mandates.
- Budget for **audit readiness tools** that provide board-level reporting and real-time compliance status — making regulatory prep less reactive and resource-draining.

Why: Regulatory missteps now carry financial, reputational, and legal consequences. Proactive compliance investments prevent costly fines and board-level fallout.

WORKFORCE & CULTURE

- Move beyond checkbox training: fund **measurable awareness programs** tied to risky behaviors (phishing clicks, credential reuse, shadow IT).
- Build **security champions programs** in business units to scale culture change without scaling headcount.
- Include budget for **role-specific training** (developers, data scientists, privileged users).

Why: Most breaches still trace back to human error. A security-aware workforce reduces risk more cost-effectively than adding tools after the fact.

RESILIENCE & RECOVERY

- Strengthen **incident response**: retain IR partners, conduct regular tabletop exercises, and ensure budget covers both technical and communications responses.
- Modernize **backup and recovery** for ransomware scenarios — immutable backups, faster recovery testing, and alignment with business continuity priorities.

Why: Incidents are inevitable. Response time and preparedness for recovery are what distinguish a disruption from a disaster.

Ensuring your 2026 Budget is aligned with the right risks provides your team confidence for the year ahead

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