

Appendix B: Compensating Controls

Compensating controls may be considered for most PCI DSS requirements when an entity cannot meet a requirement explicitly as stated, due to legitimate technical or documented business constraints, but has sufficiently mitigated the risk associated with the requirement through implementation of other, or compensating, controls.

Compensating controls must satisfy the following criteria:

1. Meet the intent and rigor of the original PCI DSS requirement.
2. Provide a similar level of defense as the original PCI DSS requirement, such that the compensating control sufficiently offsets the risk that the original PCI DSS requirement was designed to defend against. (See *Navigating PCI DSS* for the intent of each PCI DSS requirement.)
3. Be “above and beyond” other PCI DSS requirements. (Simply being in compliance with other PCI DSS requirements is not a compensating control.)

When evaluating “above and beyond” for compensating controls, consider the following:

Note: *The items at a) through c) below are intended as examples only. All compensating controls must be reviewed and validated for sufficiency by the assessor who conducts the PCI DSS review. The effectiveness of a compensating control is dependent on the specifics of the environment in which the control is implemented, the surrounding security controls, and the configuration of the control. Companies should be aware that a particular compensating control will not be effective in all environments.*

- a) Existing PCI DSS requirements CANNOT be considered as compensating controls if they are already required for the item under review. For example, passwords for non-console administrative access must be sent encrypted to mitigate the risk of intercepting clear-text administrative passwords. An entity cannot use other PCI DSS password requirements (intruder lockout, complex passwords, etc.) to compensate for lack of encrypted passwords, since those other password requirements do not mitigate the risk of interception of clear-text passwords. Also, the other password controls are already PCI DSS requirements for the item under review (passwords).
 - b) Existing PCI DSS requirements MAY be considered as compensating controls if they are required for another area, but are not required for the item under review. For example, two-factor authentication is a PCI DSS requirement for remote access. Two-factor authentication *from within the internal network* can also be considered as a compensating control for non-console administrative access when transmission of encrypted passwords cannot be supported. Two-factor authentication may be an acceptable compensating control if: (1) it meets the intent of the original requirement by addressing the risk of intercepting clear-text administrative passwords; and (2) it is set up properly and in a secure environment.
 - c) Existing PCI DSS requirements may be combined with new controls to become a compensating control. For example, if a company is unable to render cardholder data unreadable per Requirement 3.4 (for example, by encryption), a compensating control could consist of a device or combination of devices, applications, and controls that address all of the following: (1) internal network segmentation; (2) IP address or MAC address filtering; and (3) two-factor authentication from within the internal network.
4. Be commensurate with the additional risk imposed by not adhering to the PCI DSS requirement

The assessor is required to thoroughly evaluate compensating controls during each annual PCI DSS assessment to validate that each compensating control adequately addresses the risk the original PCI DSS requirement was designed to address, per items 1-4 above. To maintain compliance, processes and controls must be in place to ensure compensating controls remain effective after the assessment is complete.

Appendix C: Compensating Controls Worksheet

Use this worksheet to define compensating controls for any requirement where compensating controls are used to meet a PCI DSS requirement. Note that compensating controls should also be documented in the Report on Compliance in the corresponding PCI DSS requirement section.

Note: Only companies that have undertaken a risk analysis and have legitimate technological or documented business constraints can consider the use of compensating controls to achieve compliance.

Requirement Number and Definition:

	Information Required	Explanation
1. Constraints	List constraints precluding compliance with the original requirement.	
2. Objective	Define the objective of the original control; identify the objective met by the compensating control.	
3. Identified Risk	Identify any additional risk posed by the lack of the original control.	
4. Definition of Compensating Controls	Define the compensating controls and explain how they address the objectives of the original control and the increased risk, if any.	
5. Validation of Compensating Controls	Define how the compensating controls were validated and tested.	
6. Maintenance	Define process and controls in place to maintain compensating controls.	

Compensating Controls Worksheet – Completed Example

Use this worksheet to define compensating controls for any requirement noted as being “in place” via compensating controls.

Requirement Number: 8.1.1 – Are all users identified with a unique user ID before allowing them to access system components or cardholder data?

	Information Required	Explanation
1. Constraints	List constraints precluding compliance with the original requirement.	<i>Company XYZ employs stand-alone Unix Servers without LDAP. As such, they each require a “root” login. It is not possible for Company XYZ to manage the “root” login nor is it feasible to log all “root” activity by each user.</i>
2. Objective	Define the objective of the original control; identify the objective met by the compensating control.	<i>The objective of requiring unique logins is twofold. First, it is not considered acceptable from a security perspective to share login credentials. Secondly, having shared logins makes it impossible to state definitively that a person is responsible for a particular action.</i>
3. Identified Risk	Identify any additional risk posed by the lack of the original control.	<i>Additional risk is introduced to the access control system by not ensuring all users have a unique ID and are able to be tracked.</i>
4. Definition of Compensating Controls	Define the compensating controls and explain how they address the objectives of the original control and the increased risk, if any.	<i>Company XYZ is going to require all users to log into the servers using their regular user accounts, and then use the “sudo” command to run any administrative commands. This allows use of the “root” account privileges to run pre-defined commands that are recorded by sudo in the security log. In this way, each user’s actions can be traced to an individual user account, without the “root” password being shared with the users.</i>
5. Validation of Compensating Controls	Define how the compensating controls were validated and tested.	<i>Company XYZ demonstrates to assessor that the sudo command is configured properly using a “sudoers” file, that only pre-defined commands can be run by specified users, and that all activities performed by those individuals using sudo are logged to identify the individual performing actions using “root” privileges.</i>
6. Maintenance	Define process and controls in place to maintain compensating controls.	<i>Company XYZ documents processes and procedures to ensure sudo configurations are not changed, altered, or removed to allow individual users to execute root commands without being individually identified, tracked and logged.</i>