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—Deena Graeter, Senior Ethics Advisor

Top Insights for Those New to BELA or the Ethics Role

SYNOPSIS

Like all companies in the financial services industry, USAA must navigate a heavily-regulated landscape. It is also one of a growing number of organizations following the emerging best practice of having an office dedicated specifically to ethics as a standalone function, separate from the compliance department.

In this Spotlight, Deena Graeter, USAA's Senior Ethics Advisor, shares the top ways to optimize engagement in Ethisphere's Business Ethics Leadership Alliance (BELA) for someone new to the role or working to build an ethics function and improve a program.

TOP FIVE INSIGHTS FOR SOMEONE NEW TO THE ROLE OR TO BELA

1. Take Advantage of Benchmarking

BELA offers members the opportunity to benchmark programs against the data set from the World's Most Ethical Companies® honorees. The benchmarking uses the same framework—the Ethics Quotient® (EQ) Survey—and provides a view of how the program rates for key areas including governance; leadership and reputation; ethics and compliance program; corporate citizenship and responsibility; and the culture of ethics.

"Even though we went through the World's Most Ethical Companies process, we did ask the BELA team to benchmark our program. The team developed a benchmarking report for us, where they compared us not only against our peers, which included seven insurance companies that were also World's Most Ethical Companies honorees, but also the broader pool of recognized companies."

"We found that benchmarking report to be very helpful. We already have a solid program, but we're always trying to move the needle forward and improve the program."

2. Leverage Benchmarking Results to Engage Others across Your Organization

The BELA benchmarking process addresses all aspects of an ethics and compliance program, and provides data that can be shared with executive leadership and the Board. It provides a comparative analysis of existing practices with commentary from an Ethisphere expert to help companies prioritize their next program initiatives.

"The benchmarking prompts us to consider the ways we can improve as an organization. Not just our ethics program, but on issues such as sustainability, corporate responsibility, third-party management, and other areas."

"In the benchmarking report, there were several areas addressing Board of Director training and the channel through which it is delivered. I shared these best practices insights with my business partners responsible for Board training."

Additionally, Graeter was able to connect with her BELA Engagement Director, Amy Volpe, to learn about relevant Board of Director training resources.

"We were looking for Board of Director-level training for this year, and Amy was able to put me and my coworker in touch with an organization that had recently shared their Board training on the BELA Hub for others to view."

"We found the benchmarking report to be very helpful. I would encourage companies new to BELA to utilize that benefit."

ABOUT USAA

USAA is among the leading providers of financial planning, insurance, investments, and banking products to those in the U.S. Military, active and retired, and their families.

USAA recently celebrated its 97th anniversary. Now 13 million members strong with a large portfolio of offerings, USAA is like many in its industry navigating the landscape of heavily regulated financial institutions.

Highlights of the Ethics Team:

The USAA Ethics team is led by Carlos Vecino, Executive Director and Acting Chief Ethics Officer and has seven members across the U.S.

"I really enjoy being able to check the BELA Hub for resources."

"I've been pleasantly surprised with not only the BELA Hub, but the responsiveness of Amy, particularly, in providing us with connections."

3. Tap into the BELA Member Hub

BELA members have access to a hub of resources, data, and materials contributed by member companies. The BELA Hub is a resource Graeter uses frequently, combing through the articles, research and member-contributed examples.

"I would advise companies that are new to BELA to leverage the resources that are available in the BELA Hub. Because there really are some great resources, and I feel like the more companies we have participating and submitting resources, the better the BELA community and the stronger the ethics community can be as a whole."

4. Ask Your Engagement Director to Connect You to Data and People

Each member of the BELA Community is linked to a BELA Engagement Director. This liaison is available to make connections to other BELA members, facilitate the custom data reports, and point you to relevant resources and expertise to support your program.

"Being relatively new to the BELA community, what I have really found to be valuable is being able to reach out to our Engagement Director Amy Volpe, or look out on the BELA Hub and get resources that other companies are willing to share so that we can continue to improve the ethics program."

5. Network with BELA Members, or at Roundtables and Events

BELA offers many opportunities to connect professionals in the ethics and compliance space, and this can be especially beneficial to those focused on ethics. Unlike compliance, which operates under a specific regulatory framework, ethics officers can speak more freely at events such as BELA roundtables, which Graeter has attended.

"What I have really found valuable is the networking. One of the benefits of BELA is that you're able to have those conversations, and reach out to the ethics community to learn best practices."

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