



Kutak Rock's Elise Dieterich on the Value of the ACC Data Steward Program

Interviews and Profiles

Skills and Professional Development



Banner artwork by *Association of Corporate Counsel*

ACC DATA STEWARD PROGRAM

A free service to in-house counsel developed by ACC, the ACC Data Steward Program (DSP) offers a standardized SaaS-based framework for assessing law firms' data security protocols and scoring their ability to protect sensitive client information. The DSP provides a centralized repository to gather and validate the data security protocols of all outside counsel hired by a legal department. An optional ACC Accreditation of individual law firms is available.

Please visit the [ACC Data Steward Program](#) Page to learn more.

As in-house information security and privacy counsel for Kutak Rock, tell us about your role. How do you describe your responsibility to the firm and its clients?

Kutak Rock is an AmLaw 150 law firm with more than 550 attorneys practicing in 19 US offices. The firm represents corporations, financial institutions and businesses of all sizes, and governmental and municipal agencies in transactional matters and business disputes and litigation. Given our client mix and the priority our clients place on ensuring their data is well-protected, Kutak Rock has invested significantly in meeting our clients' information security requirements.

Having previously led the firm's Privacy and Data Security practice group and having counseled clients on privacy and data security compliance for many years, I had the privilege to transition into the role as Kutak Rock's in-house information security and privacy counsel, with responsibility for ensuring that our information security program remains at the forefront and our clients' expectations are fully met.



Counsel at Kutak Rock LLP, [Elise Dieterich](#)

Information Security & Privacy

I work closely with our extraordinarily capable IT security team, our HR team, and senior firm management to ensure we maintain the systems, training, and personnel that keep our firm ahead in an increasingly challenging information security environment.



Providing support and operating as the main link between other departments is one of Elise Dieterich's primary roles to ensure Kutak Rock's in-house Information Security & Privacy Counsel run efficiently. Gorodenkoff / Shutterstock.com

You spoke at the 2022 ACC Annual Meeting about the firm's involvement with the ACC Data Steward Program. What key takeaways can you offer law firms and in-house counsel about the program?

Assessing a law firm's information security environment can be enormously time- and resource-intensive for clients. We understand the challenges from our experience with Kutak Rock's own vendor management program.

The ACC Data Steward Program offers in-house counsel and their law firms the opportunity to leverage a one-to-many model that allows law firms to complete a single assessment that's relevant and accessible to all their clients, and allows in-house counsel to have the benefit of a rigorous, detailed, and thoughtfully developed assessment tool that provides an apples-to-apples comparison of the information security capabilities of all the law firms they employ, with minimal effort on the part of the in-house legal department.

As strong advocates for the program, [we're happy to make ourselves available to answer questions](#)

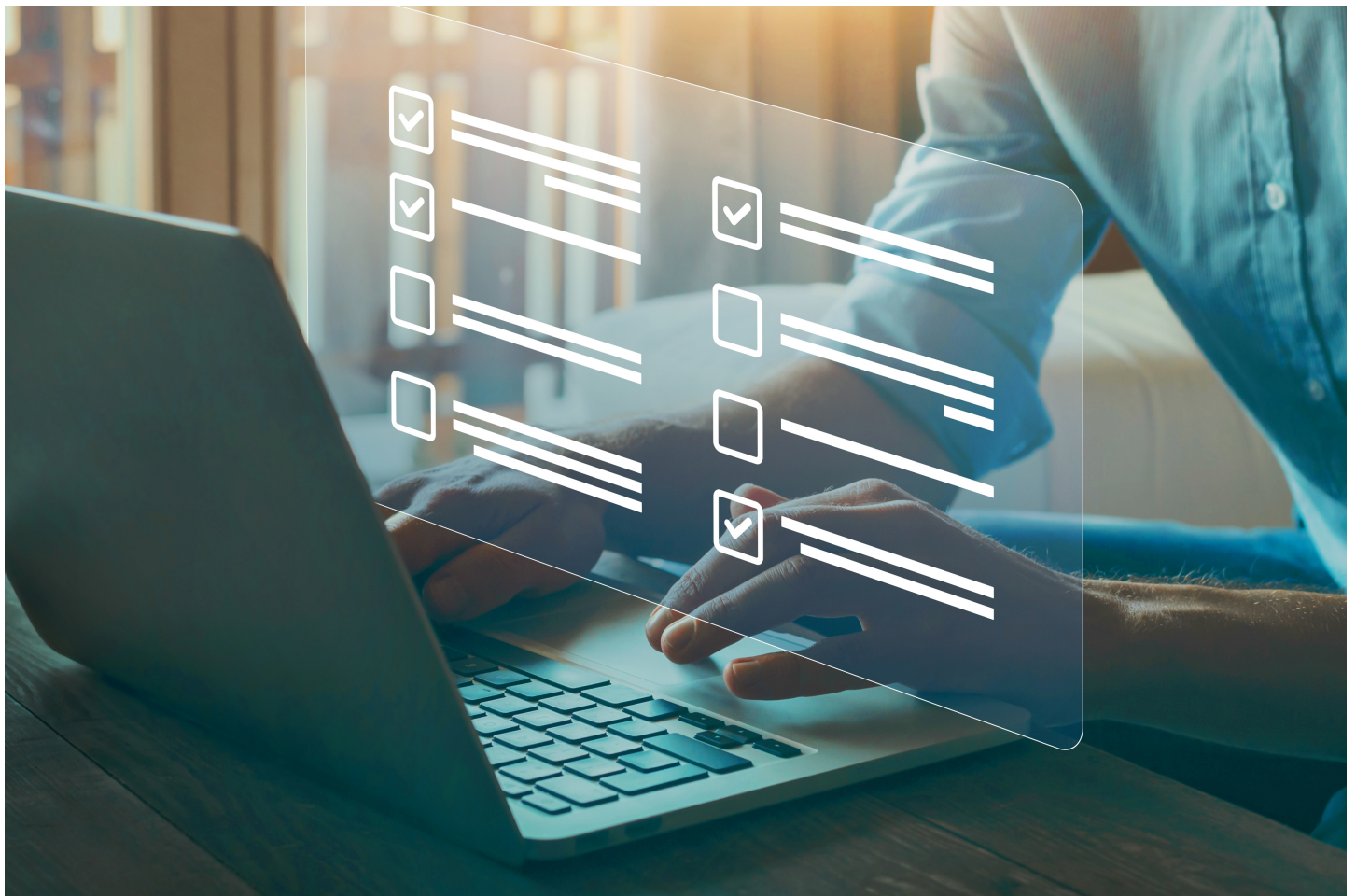
[from in-house counsel and law firms about the Data Steward Program process and benefits.](#)

What changes have you witnessed in how clients are evaluating their law firms' privacy and security practices?

I've seen enormous changes during the time I've been in my current role, as clients' awareness and concern regarding privacy and security have continued to increase and their cybersecurity requirements have grown more sophisticated and detailed. It's been several years now since law firms were identified as a potential "soft target" for cybercriminals, and clients' demands have, understandably, evolved in response.

Many more companies are including detailed security and privacy stipulations in their outside counsel guidelines, and an ever-increasing number are conducting assessments to validate compliance. While most assessments are still in questionnaire form, we have several clients that use external auditors to confirm questionnaire responses, which is the same process the ACC Data Steward Program uses to validate law firms' security measures and grant accreditation. We're excited to see clients begin to adopt the Data Steward Program as their standard, in lieu of one-off questionnaires and audits.

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Questionnaires are one method of assessing security and privacy practices at law firms.
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Kutak Rock was an early participant in the ACC Data Steward Program. What in-house challenges does the Data Steward Program resolve for Kutak Rock and what are its benefits for your clients?

One-off assessments are a huge challenge for us, both because of the time and resources each one requires and because many are generic to all vendor types and not law firm specific, meaning the questions frequently miss the mark.

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What was your experience completing the ACC Data Steward Program core assessment questionnaire and then undergoing the external audit to attain ACC Accreditation? How well does the Program align with outside counsel guidelines issued by Kutak Rock's clients?

The ACC Data Steward Program has been exceptionally easy to work with — they walked us through each step of the process, and their law firm specific questionnaire is tailored to precisely ask the questions our clients need answered, while omitting the questions in other, generic questionnaires that aren't relevant to legal services providers. The program's auditor was professional, thorough, and efficient. We feel good about the process, as well as the outcome.



External auditors are imperative to ACC's Data Steward Program by validating security information and providing exceptional service for clients attaining accreditation. Andrey_Popov / Shutterstock.com

Kutak Rock has made the considerable investment of time and resources to become an ISO 27001 Certified law firm. How does the ACC Data Steward Program align with the firm's security strategy and its clients' stringent requirements for keeping their data safe?

ISO 27001 and other global information security standards, such as the NIST framework, underlie the ACC Data Steward Program assessment, so our existing ISO 27001 Certification facilitated our ACC Accreditation. Because the Data Steward Program questionnaire had been carefully tailored to focus on the needs of legal departments, it aligned almost perfectly with Kutak Rock's information security program.



The ACC Data Steward program has influenced Kutak Rock's information security program by becoming an ISO 27001 certified law firm. Funtap / Shutterstock.com

What process did Kutak Rock use to evaluate the ACC Data Steward Program and how did the firm assess and approve its up-front investment? How will you measure the Program's return on investment?

It was a client that originally approached us and asked Kutak Rock to participate in the Data Steward Program pilot, which we were pleased to do. Once we successfully completed the questionnaire, saw how the scoring works, and experienced the capabilities of the platform, we could see the benefit to both the firm and our clients, so investing in becoming Accredited was an easy decision.

For us, the return on investment will occur when more of our clients adopt the ACC Data Steward Program to assess their law firms. Although we — not our clients — bear the cost of participating in the Data Steward Program, we expect the payoff to come as the number of costly one-off assessments we undergo is reduced and we can redeploy those IT resources to our active security measures.

68%



The percentage of legal departments who have not evaluated their law firms security status but would like to have a method to do so.

How does Kutak Rock plan to inform its clients of the benefits of participating in the ACC Data Steward Program in lieu of relying on outside counsel guidelines or utilizing one-off data security questionnaires?

Our plan is to reach out to our clients to let them know Kutak Rock is now ACC Accredited, the assurance that provides, and the benefits of adopting the ACC Data Steward Program as their standard.

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