

Spotlight on Women in Privacy™



Mary K. Engle, BBB National Programs, Executive Vice President, Policy

What do you love most about being a privacy professional?

Data privacy is such a dynamic field, it's interesting and challenging, and it also involves core values, issues that are important not only to individual autonomy but to our very democracy. I also appreciate getting to work in an area that is so topical – issues that are top of mind for policymakers as well as friends and family.

What was the best professional advice you ever received?

Growing up I was always the shy, studious type and while that served me well enough in school, being quiet can be a detriment in a legal office environment. Early in my career at the Federal Trade Commission – where I ended up working for 30 years – my boss advised me not to be afraid to speak up and make my opinion heard, that I had good ideas and perspectives that I shouldn't hesitate to share. I took that advice to heart and was able to advance up the management ladder. I found, though, that even as a manager I did not have to be the loudest voice in the room.

What one privacy development are you paying close attention to this month?

This month, I'm thinking a lot about the EU-U.S. Privacy Shield Framework. Privacy Shield was a co-regulatory mechanism that provided a legal means for companies to receive EU data in the United States. When I say co-regulatory, I mean that the framework was created by government (in this case jointly by the U.S. and the EU), but included a requirement for an independent accountability organization (such as BBB National Programs) to ensure that voluntary business commitments exceed the minimum requirements and to settle privacy disputes between companies and consumers. This type of voluntary but enforceable mechanism is core to our privacy work. Yet for the past 18 months, the Privacy Shield has not been recognized by the European Union. We have been hopeful that the EU and U.S. can negotiate a new agreement by the end of 2021 because we have seen first-hand how this mechanism has operated to spread best practices among thousands of U.S. companies. It is unfortunate that a dispute over surveillance practices has caused such a robust framework for consumer privacy to be placed on hold. I'm still hopeful for a resolution soon.