



CLOs Are Under Budgetary Pressure, ACC's 2024 CLO Survey Says

Law Department Management

The graphic features a large red semi-circle on a dark background with a grid pattern. The text "2024 ACC CHIEF LEGAL OFFICERS SURVEY" is written in white, bold, sans-serif font, centered within the red area.

2024 ACC CHIEF LEGAL OFFICERS SURVEY

ACC's 2024 Chief Legal Officers Survey, produced in partnership with Exterro, offers unique insights into:

- The biggest challenges CLOs face at the legal department and organizational level; and
- How the CLO role and responsibilities continue to expand as a critical, strategic business partner.

The top three issues keeping this year's respondents up at night are regulations and enforcement, privacy and data security, and cybersecurity threats. Specifically, 34 percent of CLOs reported that data breaches are the biggest data-related threat to mitigate in 2024, followed by privacy/regulatory enforcement (32 percent) and other cybersecurity threats (24 percent).

[Interested in reading the entire survey? Click here to discover more insights:](#)

Forty percent said that they plan on instituting new processes to help defend against these threats.

Despite years of focus and spending on data-related threats, just nine percent of respondents are “very confident” in their organization’s ability to mitigate emerging data risks.

Budget woes

At the legal department level, 42 percent of CLOs said they continue to face intense budgetary pressure to do more with less. In fact, 52 percent shared that their legal department received a cost-cutting mandate from their organization over the past year.



Facing tight budgets, CLOs balance cost-efficiency with steadfast legal diligence. Artwork by Yellow_man / Shutterstock.com

This pressure may help explain why 40 percent of CLOs rank operational efficiency as their law department’s top strategic initiative for the coming year. To improve efficiency, 45 percent of CLOs say they will invest in new technology and 27 percent say that greater collaboration with the organization’s overall operations department would improve business outcomes.

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“ACC’s industry-leading 2024 Chief Legal Officers Survey sheds light on the fact that CLOs are finding themselves in an increasingly difficult position,” said Veta T. Richardson, ACC president & CEO.

“This year’s survey and those in years past have clearly documented the evolution of the CLO role — highlighting that responsibilities continue to expand and diversify and justifiably being seen as a more integral strategic business partner.”

She elaborates: “Yet, as CLOs and their teams take on additional responsibilities, they face intense pressure to do so with less funding, many being asked to cut costs while also facing major rate hikes from outside counsel. This tension is unlikely to be sustainable in the long term. Improving operational efficiency and investing in new technology will certainly help, but it remains unclear if those efforts will be enough.”

ACC President and CEO Veta T. Richardson

“What is clear is the unwavering dedication and resourcefulness of CLOs to represent their organizations to the highest standards possible in a complicated and challenging business and regulatory environment.”

The most comprehensive survey of its kind, the ACC Chief Legal Officer Survey features insights from more than 600 organizations across 20 industries.

Increased workload, positive AI prognostication, and more insights

The survey's additional key findings include:

- **Work remains to help ensure CLOs internationally report directly to the CEO.** This year's results are based on a larger proportion of respondents from outside of the US than in years past. Therefore, while the percentage of CLOs in the US who report directly to the CEO went up slightly (82 percent in 2024 compared to 81 percent in 2023), those outside of the US went down (63 percent in 2024 compared to 66 percent in 2023). This resulted in the overall percentage decreasing slightly to 75 percent in 2024 from 77 percent in 2023.
- **Majority of CLOs (58 percent) oversee at least three additional business functions beyond legal,** with 27 percent overseeing five or more. These most commonly include areas such as privacy (44 percent), ethics (43 percent), and risk (38 percent), but also can include areas such as environmental, social, & governance (ESG) (24 percent), government affairs (22 percent), cybersecurity (14 percent), and human resources (14 percent).
- **Majority of CLOs experienced an increase in workload,** with fifty-nine percent reporting workload "increased significantly" or "somewhat increased" over the past year and just three percent saying their workload decreased. Fifty-nine percent say they are "happy" or "very happy" with their work-life balance. However, only 20 percent of those who experienced a significant increase in workload say they are happy with their work-life balance.
- **Sixty-seven percent of CLOs believe that AI will have a "mostly positive" or "somewhat positive" impact on the in-house legal profession.** The legal applications identified with the most potential to benefit from AI are in document analysis (35 percent) and drafting documents (28 percent).
- **Thirty-eight percent of CLOs say that their CEO would like them to develop greater business acumen and industry knowledge,** followed by leadership (28 percent), and financial acumen (24 percent).
- **Approach to ESG remains widely variable, with 19 percent saying their organization has no ESG strategy.** Although 77 percent of CLOs report being involved in leading their organization's ESG strategy, just 29 percent say they are "very involved," and 36 percent say they are "somewhat involved." CLOs are more actively engaged in ESG strategy outside of the United States with 91 percent having some degree of involvement, compared with 70 percent in the United States.
- **The Chief Legal Officer title is becoming more common, with 28 percent** of participants holding the "Chief Legal Officer" title — an increase of 7 percentage points since 2022.

"As the 2024 CLO Survey clearly highlights, CLO's face a daunting task ensuring their organizations are fully equipped to minimize the risk data poses to their operations," said Bobby Balachandran, Founder and CEO of Exterro. "The competing pressures of 'do more with less' and increased scope of responsibilities dictates a new approach to utilizing people, technology and improved processes to effectively manage legal operations, privacy and data governance, regulatory compliance and

cybersecurity response. Exterro is thrilled once again to partner with the ACC to provide this valuable resource for in-house counsel to navigate these difficult challenges.”

The survey analyzed data from 669 CLOs across 20 industries and 31 countries.

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