

Center for Government Compliance and Ethics at Rutgers University aims to put principles back at forefront of public service

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What's the point of having rules if you're not making sure people are following them?

That's the question behind the creation of the new Center for Government Compliance and Ethics at Rutgers University's School of Law.

Donna Boehme, a member of the center's advisory board, said government bodies have "a huge issue of credibility."

"When you really think about it, ultimately, unless those who are governing ... have an approach to compliance, ethics and integrity, there's a disconnect," said Boehme.

Rayman Solomon, dean of the School of Law and faculty sponsor of the new center, said ethics and compliance programs "grew up in the private sector."

All companies have rules and codes of conduct and are supposed to make sure its employees are fully aware and in compliance with them. But the same guidelines don't always apply to governments.

That shouldn't be, said Solomon. "The regulators should follow the same rules as the regulated."

The center is about much more than establishing a set of rules and guidelines for governments to follow though.

"There's a lot more than having the rules," said Boehme. "That remains a piece of paper unless you make it come alive ... Most companies understand you can't just put it on a shelf."

In a statement, Solomon said the purpose of the center is to "create cultures of integrity at all levels of government ... Enabling people to recognize and respect legal and ethical boundaries is partly about developing awareness and skills, but also involves creating the right infrastructure and processes."

The new center grew out of the establishment of the Jay A. Sigler Fund for Corporate Compliance, which was established in 2008 by Rutgers alumnus Joe Murphy to help business, governmental and non-profit organizations better understand the complexities of compliance and ethics.

While the center is still very much a "work-in-progress," Solomon said, with students and faculty strictly focusing on research at this point, in the future the school hopes to sponsor educational conferences, training seminars and consultation services for government entities.