

CBRE Cares

An Interview with Alison Caplan,
Senior Vice President, Corporate Responsibility, CBRE

EDITORS' NOTE Alison Caplan works closely with corporate leaders and teams to develop and implement strategic objectives in environmental stewardship, community engagement and corporate giving. This includes direct oversight of CBRE Cares, the company's philanthropic organization. Caplan also serves as chief of staff for CBRE's General Counsel, whose organization includes the global Legal team as well as the Insurance, Enterprise Risk Management, Compliance, Internal Audit and Workplace Safety & Well-Being departments. She has an active leadership role in the CBRE Women's Network and serves on its Advisory Board where she oversees programing and operations, and currently leads its Field Delegate Program, which has 100+ delegates across the country. Caplan has worked at CBRE for the past 14 years and has experience in other areas of the business, including Human Resources (Staffing and Employee Relations), Compliance and Legal Operations. She was the recipient of the 2018 Women's Network Endurance of Spirit Award and received her B.S. in industrial and labor relations from Cornell University.



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COMPANY BRIEF CBRE Group, Inc. (cbre.com) is the world's largest commercial real estate services and investment firm, with 2018 revenues of \$21.3 billion and more than 90,000 employees (excluding affiliate offices). CBRE has been included in the Fortune 500 since 2008, ranking #207 in 2018. It has also been voted the industry's top brand by the Lipsey Company for 18 consecutive years and has been named one of FORTUNE's "Most Admired Companies" for seven years in a row, including being ranked number one in the real estate sector in 2019. CBRE offers a broad range of integrated services, including facilities, transaction and project management; property management; investment management; appraisal and valuation; property leasing; strategic consulting; property sales; mortgage services and development services.

How are the corporate social responsibility efforts structured at CBRE?

Corporate social responsibility reports directly into our chief administrative officer, who is a direct report of our CEO.

Corporate responsibility is divided among the following pillars: environmental sustainability; people and culture, which includes diversity, talent and employee engagement; procurement, which is how we're sourcing; community and giving, which is our philanthropic efforts; workplace safety and well-being; and ethics and compliance and governance.

Communities and Giving along with Environmental Sustainability report directly to the corporate responsibility department.

The other pillars report to the same operating board member or to our general counsel, so we have collaboration where we're working together.

The corporate responsibility team designs an overarching CR strategy for the company. The team expands and elevates the company's understanding of the expectations of customers, employees, investors and the broader society with respect to CR. The CR team works closely with senior leaders, leading the effort to fulfill the commitment to CR in the design and implementation of business strategies and operational objectives of the company. We identify trends in the external and internal environment, recognize risks and opportunities and use insights gained to integrate CR practices with the current business strategy.

We use industry metrics to evaluate ourselves and look at the progress we make each year.

Will you discuss CBRE Cares?

CBRE Cares was a grassroots organization that started over a decade ago with a few signature programs. Our current focus is to transform our regional programs into one unified global strategy.

One of our most important programs is our Disaster Relief Foundation. This foundation was set up to provide grants to employees who are personally impacted when there is a disaster.

Our disaster relief also contributes to communities impacted by natural disasters. One of our key partners has been the American Red Cross. This year, with the fires in California and also the hurricane in the Gulf area, we made contributions to help those communities.

How critical is it to get your employees engaged in these efforts?

We have amazing local CBRE Cares chapters, which we rely on throughout the U.S. They get involved in their local communities, which is really important to CBRE as a commercial real estate company. Giving back to our communities is a key foundation to CBRE Cares.

CBRE offers generous policies for our employees relating to donating their time. We want to make sure people know about what is offered, because information can get lost in a very large organization. For instance, we are currently running a campaign reminding employees that we offer two PTO days for employees to donate their time toward a worthy cause.

We also need to remind employees that CBRE has a matching program.

People certainly know about it, but it's not communicated widely enough, so that is a real focus for 2019.

Will you discuss the activities of the CBRE Women's Network?

The Women's Network is founded on the four pillars of mentorship, growth, connection, and advocacy.

CBRE has an amazing network of women. In the U.S., we have over 4,000 members. Women support women at this company in a way I haven't seen elsewhere. Participation in the Women's Network provides connections to women in all levels of the organization. This network provides both formal and informal mentorship, which is a key to success. We have some amazing programs – this year, we unveiled a new professional development program for members that focuses on distinct areas of their careers. This gives them online access to customized professional development and training courses that were not available previously.

You have been at CBRE for more than 14 years. What has made CBRE so special for you?

The Women's Network has been a big part of it. Through my work in the Network, I developed my confidence and leadership skills and was able to grow my career in ways that I could not necessarily have done only through my day job.

I have been fortunate to have sponsorship in my career at CBRE. My sponsor has been instrumental in my career advancement, as has the CBRE entrepreneurial environment which provides endless possibilities once employees prove themselves. ●