



# COALITION OF FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN

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## COFO MONTHLY MEETING MINUTES

**Meeting Date/Time:** December 14, 2022, 1:30-2:55pm (EST)

**Location:** Video/telephone

**Agenda:**

1. Mentoring Committee – please consider applying to serve on the next Mentoring Committee!
2. USOA update
3. Ombuds Day 2023 – national co-chair needed!
4. Voluntary Leave Transfer Initiative reminder
5. Next Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) meeting 12/28
6. Announcements – Training opportunities, job openings, or really any office and ombudsman happenings you'd like to tell the world about
7. General Questions - Space for new and emerging practitioners and programs to ask questions and get feedback from the COFO community in a short discussion format
8. Discussion Topic
  - As 2022 ends, what are you thankful for in the ombuds and ADR sphere? And what are you looking forward to or hopeful for in 2023? Let's close the year out with some gratitude for what went well and hope for what might come next.
  - Your topic here!

**Highlights:**

- 1. Mentoring Committee**
  - Next term begins January 2023 and runs through January 2025, nominations and self-applications are open.
  - Volunteers that started the program and steered it over the years have created a model for other ADR groups. Program that COFO is proud of.
  - If you've been a mentor or mentee in the past and want to move the program forward, please consider submitting a self-nomination.
  - Composition is typically 3-5 people and has been 5 for the past few years.
  - If interested, email the current chair whose email is in the chat, or EC members.
- 2. USOA Update**
  - There will be a speaker at the next meeting December 20 from 11am to 2:30pm ET presenting on "power of facilitation for ombuds."
  - Announcement will be sent by email after today's meeting with information for how to join the meeting through MS Teams.
  - Question about whether it will be recorded for those on leave. USOA will ask presenter.
- 3. Ombuds Day 2023 – national co-chair needed!**
  - Talk about 2023 Ombuds Day already begun because search is out for co-chair.

- Preference is that co-chair be a member of ABA Dispute Resolution Section. Reach out to remaining co-chair if interested.
- 4. Voluntary Leave Transfer Initiative reminder**
  - Connects ombuds who need leave with ombuds from around the federal government who have leave to donate. Helps to avoid awkward scenario where ombuds ask for or donate leave to others in their agency.
- 5. Next Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) Meeting – 12/28**
  - Next meeting will still be held despite holidays. Scheduled for 2-3pm.
  - Safe space to discuss the things going on personally and professionally that impact us.
- 6. Announcements – Training opportunities, job openings, or really any office and ombudsman happenings you'd like to tell the world about**
  - Census Bureau ombuds office is increasing staff. There is a backlog of vacancy announcements in CB so still unsure when it will be announced, but a reminder that the GS-14/15 Associate Ombuds position will be open soon. The position can be based in either Suitland, MD or just outside Louisville, KY.
- 7. General Questions - Space for new and emerging practitioners and programs to ask questions and get feedback from the COFO community in a short discussion format**
  - For experienced ombuds, what is your standard practice for providing feedback about perceived negative behaviors by a senior leader? Provide it directly to the leader in question, or one level up? For instance, someone very high up reporting directly to an agency Director.
    - Someone shared that it depends on the information you are giving, if the person might be receptive to change, and how telling them might impacts others around them.
      - Sometimes though it “falls on deaf ears” so because of the ongoing impact others were brought in to assist with delivering the feedback to help create change.
    - Someone else advised to consider how receptive the leader might be, but that generally it would be best practice to go to the leader directly to be transparent and give them the opportunity to address the feedback.
    - Someone else agreed that a lot is dependent on the nature of the feedback and how negative it is. For instance, if serious allegations such as harassment or hostile work environment, kind of pointless to bring that to the person accused of harassing or harnessing a hostile work environment. Might make sense to go above them or to suggest to the visitor who they might themselves share the information with for reporting purposes.
      - Either way, important to discuss thoroughly with the visitor/inquirer because you don't want to be in a position where you are breaking confidentiality simply by raising it since it could be obvious who it is coming from.
    - Someone in chat suggested that abrasive management coaching from a consultant could be helpful or just to consult those resources to figure out how to speak with that leader.
    - Someone suggested focusing on the impact for the leader because they have a boss too and can't always assume they wouldn't want to address it themselves.
    - Someone in chat said a lot will also depend on what the inquirer wants.
  - Are non-management ombuds members of the bargaining units themselves? Are they happy about it? Are there reasons they are not part of the BU?

- Someone shared that they don't know of any ombuds who are part of the BU and this person would push back on the notion that an ombuds should be. Whether internal or external, it could put the ombuds in a strange position interacting with agency actors and could breach independence.
  - The person asking the question knows of at least one federal ombuds who is a BUE and likes being one, so that's part of the reason for the question.
  - Someone else shared that when they realigned PDs for new ombuds positions, they had to come up with actual reasoning for HR about why they couldn't be in the BU, and one of the reasons given was confidentiality and the sometimes sensitive information ombuds do not disclose, but could be put in a compromising position if a member of the BU.
  - Someone in the chat wondered, "Is there such thing as an ombuds within a bargaining unit? That's where it seems that belonging to the bargaining unit might be advantageous to be a member of the union along with the constituents?"
    - Someone responded that their agency has three unions and at times they've needed assistance from an ombuds but don't have access to the agency ombuds because they aren't actually constituents, so in those times this person also wondered if having an ombuds for the BU would be helpful.
    - Someone else shared that they have helped a few BUs set up new ombuds positions and may be a new frontier.
  - Someone else in the chat said, "Typically employees engaged in personnel work are excluded from the bargaining unit." They then unmuted and said that as far as they know there might be a regulation that prevents HR people or others who work on internal personnel matters from being in BU.
    - Someone else found the regulation, 5 U.S.C. 7103(a) -- (10) (11) (13) BUE, U.S.C. 7112(b) --- (3) (6).
  - Someone else shared they invite union representatives to meetings to maintain good working relationships with the BUs.
    - Someone agreed and added that you don't want to be collaborative so as not to form a partnership but can certainly be cooperative.
  - Someone else shared that there are five exclusions that prevent someone from being in a BU (if a management official, supervisor, confidential employee, personnelist, national security).
  - Someone else shared this came up when they were a state ombuds for CA, and there were attorneys in BUs which raises another interesting level.
8. **Discussion Topic:** As 2022 ends, what are you thankful for in the ombuds and ADR sphere? And what are you looking forward to or hopeful for in 2023? Let's close the year out with some gratitude for what went well and hope for what might come next.
- Someone shared that they are thankful for all of their colleagues and for COFO as well. They recently moved into an ombuds management position and are grateful to their former colleagues now reporting to them for embracing their new role.
  - Someone is thankful for COFO leadership and particularly the Chair for keeping things going during such difficult times and supporting the ombuds community.
    - Chair responded by thanking the whole COFO community and mentioning that it is a community effort.

- In chat someone wrote, “I am appreciative for the mentoring committee and for my mentor! He has been great to work with. I have learned a great deal and appreciate the committee!”
- Someone thankful for the many different levels of support, guidance, and continuing education that COFO offers. Offer wonders where everyone gets the energy to put so much into a volunteer group.
- In chat, “I’m looking forward to a return to in-person conferences with all my Ombuddies in Seattle.”
- In chat, “I’m so appreciative of the COFO community! A special thank you to the people and efforts to create the COFO Peer Network, and to my great trio.”
- In chat, “It’s interesting to me that although our community has grown hugely (higher number of members) but still feels like we are a tightly knit community.”
- In chat, “I have felt thankful for COFO from the beginning and especially in these very very strange days .. You are light to the whole world on issues like mentoring and OSO and theory building.”
- Someone shared they are also really excited about the profession in general moving forward because of all of the recent and really important discussions being had about new and future ombuds positions.
- In chat, “I am hopeful that COFO members will write about their many innovations and successful initiatives.”
- Someone shared they want to be realistic with themselves that 2023 feels like it could be very unpredictable, but they find comfort in knowing that they have the COFO community to fall back on.
- Someone else mentioned they are thankful to all of the other ombuds organizations such as IOA and USOA who are also doing great work, participating with COFO, and helping lead the field.
- Someone on EC mentioned that they too are thankful for EC, but for the community as a whole because over the course of time they’ve been on the EC they’ve noticed more and more quality and sustainable programs created by ideas from those who aren’t on EC and driven by generous volunteers.

**Attendees:**

Last	First	Agency	Call-In
Anderson	Jeff	DOE	1
Behr	Virginia	FDA	1
Berg	Mollie	NGA	1
Bloch	Brian	DOI	1
Bookstein	Monique	Prince William County Public Schools	1
Braden	Lara	CIV	1
Brown	Andrea	USPTO	1
Coffman	Cherina	NGA	1
Enriquez	Elisa	Los Alamos National Laboratory	1
Footman	Aaron	USPTO	1

## UNCLASSIFIED

Harley	Jasmine	National Credit Union Administration	1
Harshbarger	Blayne	APHIS	1
Hartman	Jessie	NARA/ Office of Government Information Services (OGIS)	1
Hendrickson	Caitlan	FEMA	1
Hudson	Antoinette	DC DGS	1
Jarrett	Syreeta	DIA	1
Kamenshine	Wendy	CFPB	1
Katherine	Erica	FDA	1
Katikos	Nicole	Veteran's Health Administration	1
Kinnavy	Noreen	USAGM	1
Lawrence	Steven	DHS Office of Intelligence & Analysis	1
Lenkel	Laurie	FDA	1
Levenson	Dan	OGIS	1
Levine	Lisa	DOJ / Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR)	1
Lewis	Mark	FDA	1
Malone	Marcus	US Marshals Service	1
Manderson	Katie	VA	1
Maurer	Bill	Census	1
McGuire	Carrie	NARA/OGIS	1
Milner	Heather	CFPB	1
Morey	Chauncenette	FBI	1
Patel	Bina	USPTO	1
Patno	Arielle	FDA / Center for Tobacco Products	1
Porch	Susanne	Commerce/National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)	1
Rowe	Mary	Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)	1
Schwartz	David	UNLV	1
Smith	Julie	Census	1
Smith	Tony	Census	1
Smith	Tyler	NIH	1
Sotoudeh	Paul	USPTO	1
Stergio	Marcus	Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs/DOL	1
Thomson	Ronnie	Sandia National Laboratories	1
Trujillo	Sarah	APHIS	1
Vermillion	Chris	DOE	1

UNCLASSIFIED

Walker	Olivia	Army Medical Readiness Assistance Program	1
Weber	Guy	NGA	1
White	Karen	National Education Association	1
Wolfe	Lexi	DOE	1
Wong	Wean Khing	CA Court of Appeals	1
Yuille Banford	Deanna	DOD/Defense Human Resources Activity	1
Yurgelun	Christine	MA Probate and Family Court Department	1
		Total	51