



COALITION OF FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN

COFO MONTHLY MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date/Time: February 8, 2023, 1:30-2:58pm (EST)

Location: Video/telephone

Agenda:

1. COFO Annual Conference date
2. IOA Annual Conference
3. Mentoring Committee update
4. Ombuds Day 2023 – October 12
5. Voluntary Leave Transfer Initiative reminder
6. Next Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) meeting 2/22
7. IOA Call for Authors
8. Announcements – Training opportunities, job openings, or really any office and ombudsman happenings you'd like to tell the world about
9. 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
10. Discussion Topic
 - Has your office utilized contract ombuds to temporarily increase staff/bandwidth? What are some of the pros and cons of this approach? What would you advise an office to consider when contracting with a firm to help provide ombuds services? Are there other ways any of you have used or can suggest to increase your bandwidth for a certain period of time?
 - Your topic here!

Highlights:

- 1. COFO Annual Conference date**
 - Date is not yet definitive but first choice is Friday, October 13.
 - Feedback from 2022 post conference survey was positive regarding mid October and the day after Ombuds Day.
 - Hoping to do in-person for the first time in a few years, but will play that by ear. Either way there should most likely be an option to join virtually.
- 2. IOA Annual Conference**
 - April 3-5 in Seattle.
 - For the upcoming conference, anyone attending in-person is welcome to join the government sector session.
 - The conference committee is looking for volunteers to facilitate the meeting.
- 3. Mentoring Committee update**
 - Cohort five surveys went out.
- 4. Ombuds Day 2023 – October 12**

- Thursday, October 12.
 - No other update from the ABA Ombuds Day subcommittee for now but more information to come, and mark the date on your calendars as a reminder to participate.
- 5. 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.
- 6. Next Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) Meeting – 2/22**
- Scheduled for 2-3pm.
 - Safe space to discuss the things going on personally and professionally that impact us.
- 7. 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 will be two new positions, one in Jefferson, IN at a GS-14/15. Second position in Suitland, MD also GS-14/15 depending on experience level. Hoping the announcements will be out by the next COFO Monthly Meeting. The office is an internal ombuds office.
- 8. 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**
- ABA Dispute Resolution Conference in May, does anyone have thoughts about how worthwhile that would be to attend for an external ombuds?
 - Someone mentioned that they attended a few years ago and enjoyed it but their only concern was that there wasn't a lot of ombuds specific content.
 - Someone else shared that there is always an ombuds thread but just one thread of many. It can be a really interesting conference to go to because, given that it's the wider ADR world and not just ombuds, there will be people speaking and others there to meet that won't normally be in these meetings or IOA for instance.
 - Someone else shared that, as an external ombuds, ABA is a good conference to add some tools to your toolbox and especially if an external without a lot of mediation experience. Value in attending for an external.
 - Given much expanded remote and hybrid type working environments, has anyone had a successful experience trying something new or unique to help undertake some kind of initiative to promote your offices?
 - Someone suggested highlighting anomalies the ombuds is seeing.
 - Someone else mentioned they do a 5-minute quick tip for management or leadership teams where they join their agenda for standing meetings and share about the "magic ratio" and give a handout.
 - Magic ratio is from the Gottman relationship research. Positive work relationships typically have 5 positives for every 1 negative interaction.
 - Someone else mentioned they give a 15 minute conflict management presentation/workshop style during already scheduled staff meetings can be a nice way of getting in front of people to add value and also conduct outreach.
 - The people it is delivered to people who often deal with external stakeholders who might be angry. So the topics are how to talk to someone who is angry, while maintaining empathy.
 - Senior leaders in this organization have told the ombuds office that they are going to become responsible for DEIA efforts. What does DEIA mean to other ombuds offices and do they take on DEIA initiatives?

- Someone mentioned they would be very uncomfortable with an ombuds doing that.
 - First because the ombuds position doesn't take ownership of agency initiatives like DEIA.
 - Second, there is a need for a different and distinct office who would specialize in DEIA.
- Someone else chimed in that they agree with the first person, that DEIA is a specialized field that should be handled by people who specialize in it.
- Someone shared in chat, "It's a delicate balance because we do align our office to work with DEIA initiatives as a support rather than the lead."
 - Others support that, given that fairness and justice include DEIA, can't have one without the other, but leading them is problematic for so many reasons.
- Someone else shared that the ombuds role is to share what they are seeing from a systemic perspective that perhaps relate to DEIA. For instance, hiring or performance issues that are often brought forward with concerns related to DEIA.
- Someone else shared in chat, "We should certainly know the concepts, and even examine ourselves to make sure that we practice in inclusive, unbiased fashion. But we shouldn't be the leader and policy maker."
- Someone else shared in chat, "I suggest looking at supporting the Employee Resource Groups in your org, or even helping initiate and Active Bystander group. It's amazing what DEIA help has stemmed from that and now Kazmere Duffey and I are teaching the 4 Stages of Psychological Safety."
- Are people using standard language in response to emails received after hours about contacting the appropriate authorities with any safety or health related concerns or issues?
 - Someone said they don't do that, but like the idea because they have a lot of people who should actually be reaching out to doctors and psychologists.
 - Someone in chat wrote, "No experience, interested in thinking through it. Wonder about the new 311."
 - Someone else in chat mentioned that 988 is the suicide hotline.

9. IOA Call for Authors

- Chapter in IOA book project will cover government sector. Looking for volunteers to help with writing that chapter.
- The goal is for it to be a starter read for being an ombuds. Will have 26 chapters that hopefully covers soup to nuts of being an organizational ombuds.
- The second section looks at different sectors, and the governmental sector author is still one IOA is looking for.
- Hopefully will look at unique structures and models in the government sector, history of ombuds in the governmental sector, how it differs from higher ed and corporate sectors, and also the things you might need to consider if you are a governmental ombuds at the local, state, or federal sectors.
- First drafts by June 15.
- Question posed about, given there are many different models in the government sector, should the chapter focus primarily on the organizational ombuds or be more of a 30k foot view of all models.

- There's some flexibility there, but there will also be another section covering the different models.
 - Someone in chat asked if there was a plan for vetting content.
 - Will vet out to external reviewers if need be.
 - Someone else shared that too often the models get muddied, because someone writes about a certain model and gets it wrong, and then the perception about ombuds is incorrect.
 - COFO can help by reading a first draft before it is submitted as a first draft within IOA as a way of vetting.
10. **Discussion Topic:** Has your office utilized contract ombuds to temporarily increase staff/bandwidth? What are some of the pros and cons of this approach? What would you advise an office to consider when contracting with a firm to help provide ombuds services? Are there other ways any of you have used or can suggest to increase your bandwidth for a certain period of time?
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Attendees:

Last	First	Agency	Call-In
Anderson	Jeff	DOE	1
Behr	Virginia	FDA	1
Berg	Mollie	NGA	1
Bookstein	Monique	Prince William County Public Schools	1
Braden	Lara	DeCA	1
Brothers	Linda	NIH	1
Brown	Andrea	USPTO	1
Burton	Shannon	MSU	1
Cecil	Tina	FBI	1
Coffman	Cherina	NGA	1
Coleman	Jean	SBA	1
Davidson	Kimberly	George Mason University	1
Enriquez	Elisa	Los Alamos National Laboratory	1
Footman	Aaron	USPTO	1
Gnatt	Sheldon	NSA	1
Gordon	Laurel	DOJ/US Marshals Service	1
Gump	Nevada	US Secret Service	1
Harshbarger	Blayne	USDA	1
Heffernan	Claire	TSA	1
Hendrickson	Caitlan	FEMA	1
Hopkins	Emilee	NGA	1

UNCLASSIFIED

Hurley	Nathan	FDA/Center for Tobacco Products	1
Jarrett	Syreeta	DIA	1
Johnson	Stella	N/A	1
Katherine	Erica	FDA	1
Kinnavy	Noreen	USAGM	1
Kiraithe-Muchene	Irene	Henry M. Jackson Foundation	1
Kirk	Natasha	CIS	1
Lenkel	Laurie	FDA	1
Levenson	Dan	OGIS	1
Levine	Lisa	DOJ / Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR)	1
Magnus	Vicki	Library of Congress	1
Maurer	Bill	Census	1
Megee	Christine	DOD Education Activity	1
Miller	Carla	DOJ/ATF	1
Miller	Ellen	IOA	1
Milner	Heather	CFPB	1
Mitchell	John	OIDO	1
Patel	Bina	USPTO	1
Patno	Arielle	FDA / Center for Tobacco Products	1
Piziali	Jamie	EPA	1
Porch	Susanne	Commerce/National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)	1
Robinson	Belinda	FBI	1
Roth	Lewis	NRO	1
Schwartz	David	UNLV	1
Smith	Julie	Census	1
Sotoudeh	Paul	USPTO	1
Stergio	Marcus	Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs/DOL	1
Taylor	Lelar	VA	1
Thomson	Ronnie	Sandia National Laboratories	1
Vermillion	Chris	DOE	1
Weber	Guy	NGA	1
White	Karen	National Education Association	1
Whittington	Frederick	DOL OIG	1
Wolfe	Lexi	DOE	1

UNCLASSIFIED

Yuille Banford	Deanna	DOD/Defense Human Resources Activity	1
Yurgelun	Christine	MA Probate and Family Court Department	1
		Total	57