



COALITION OF FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN

MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date/Time: March 14, 2018, 1:30pm – 3:00pm

Location: USDA, 1400 Independence Ave, SW, 1st Floor, Room 1052(c) and Dial-in

Agenda:

1. NARA/Records Management Project Update
2. Mentoring Program Update
3. IOA Government Sector Meeting Update
4. Databases and Reporting Tools Update
5. Discussion Topic: COFO Communications and Social Media – should COFO be more active in its communications (e.g., add a LinkedIn or other social media presence)?
6. Culture Related Resources
7. Position Openings and Ombuds News
8. Additional topics raised by Members

Highlights:

1. NARA/Records Management Project Update

- a. Thank you to those volunteering to assist the Executive Committee in working with NARA on developing standard record schedules for ombuds programs. Over the next few weeks 1-2 COFO members will be chosen to participate in the project.
- b. The timeframe for the project has slowed at NARA's request. Efforts are expected to pick up in April or May.

2. Mentoring Program Update

- a. Program design is approaching completion and will be informally shared with a small group of reviewers before going final. The design will address key aspects, including:
 - i. Parameters of the relationship (i.e., what is it? what is it not?)
 - ii. Mentor qualifications
 - iii. Appropriate timeframe for a mentor/mentee relationship
 - iv. Matching mentors and mentees
 - v. Program goals
- b. Generally speaking, designers are looking at 6 month to 1 year commitments of both mentors and mentees, with mentors chosen from ombuds programs that are practicing to IOA standards (with possible exceptions).
- c. The program will be available to current, practicing members of COFO from both internally and externally facing ombuds programs.
- d. Questions and Answers

- i. **How will matching occur?** Examining the use of a COFO mentoring committee that will manage the process, with selection occurring on perhaps a biannual basis.
- ii. **To what degree could these relationships be leveraged for career advancement?** The program is designed to help build skills, not to identify specific job opportunities. It is specifically designed for practicing ombuds, not aspiring ombuds.

3. IOA Government Sector Meeting Update

- a. The 2018 International Ombudsman Association Conference, to be held April 23-25 in Richmond, VA, will include a number of concurrent sector-specific meetings, including one focused on government ombuds. This meeting will be held from 9:30 – 10:30am on Tuesday, April 24.
- b. A small group of COFO members is designing the framework for the government sector meeting around the theme “Tools in Times of Change”, which will include small group discussions around subtopics related to the theme.
- c. The session will also include a networking component.

4. Databases and Reporting Tools Update

- a. The National Institutes of Health utilizes a database system developed by i-Sight. As a result of this relationship i-Sight has piloted a proof of concept product that is designed to align closely with the unique requirements of an ombuds program.
- b. The company will be at the 2018 IOA conference to discuss the proof of concept and to answer questions.
- c. Questions and Answers
 - i. **What is the cost of the current database?** While specific costs are procurement sensitive, the costs are characterized as middle of the road amongst vendors. Costs includes an initial design fee plus on-going license fees based on number of users.

5. Discussion Topic: COFO Communications and Social Media – should COFO be more active in its communications (e.g., add a LinkedIn or other social media presence)?

- a. COFO has been historically active in communication among members through both the website and listserv. Is it possible to extend this reach?
- b. Advantages of noted by participants include additional visibility and opportunities for members to engage on issues in forums. Disadvantages noted by participants include additional time required to maintain outreach (technically and content-wise), potential liabilities of inappropriate information sharing (e.g., FOIA).
- c. Past reference was made to the IOA listserv as a useful tool for soliciting feedback on a variety of issues, though to some the email chains became burdensome.
- d. A moderated LinkedIn forum was suggested as a possible tool for avoiding an excessive number of emails. GovLoop was also mentioned as a potential host, as was the importance of ensuring that any platform chosen is accessible through agency firewalls.
- e. Other suggestions included a recurring podcast featuring topics relevant to ombuds.
- f. In summary, participants favored the capability to have a moderated forum for asking questions and sharing information. The ability to opt in or out of email traffic was seen

as desirable. Risks associated with such forums were generally seen as manageable through disclaimers and other types of content guidance. There is general interest in the Executive Committee and interested volunteers moving forward to investigate options.

6. Culture-Related Resources

- a. Customers and stakeholders often approach issues differently based on cultural differences. Helpful insights may be drawn from a December 2015 article published by the Washington State University Extension, entitled “Communicating with Latino Farmers: Cultural Aspects and Strategies” by José García-Pabón and Marcia Ostrom. (link: <http://extension.wsu.edu/publications/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/publications/fs191e.pdf>)
- b. The article cites a useful framework for understanding how breakdowns in communication may occur depending on the high and low contexts that define relationships.
- c. This material was found helpful in circumstances where an ombuds was placed in a diverse population of customers/stakeholders, and inspired the question of what other resources may be available to assist with cross cultural communication.
 - i. For example, the Culture Card: A Guide to Build Cultural Awareness, American Indian and Alaska Native was designed for federal disaster responders and federal coordinators (link: <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/American-Indian-and-Alaska-Native-Culture-Card/SMA08-4354>)
- d. Other resources?
 - i. Participants mentioned educational offerings in cultural communication offered by various vendors, including Department of Agriculture and the “Great Courses” program. The Peace Corps was also mentioned as a potential resource.
 - ii. A participant referenced a Generational Differences Chart as having been helpful in the past, noting further that it was a bit out of date and makes some controversial assertions/generalizations (link: <http://www.wmfc.org/uploads/GenerationalDifferencesChart.pdf>)
 - iii. Participants also noted the importance of self-awareness and being mindful of differences in style and their impact on relationships.

7. Position Openings and Ombuds News

- a. Department of the Interior plan to post an ombuds position (GS-14/15)
- b. National Reconnaissance Office plan to post an ombuds position (GS-13)

8. Additional topics raised by Members

- a. **Ombuds Representation in Agency FMFIA Reporting** – General inquiry regarding how ombuds programs participate in agency reporting required under the Federal Managers Financial Integrity Act (FMFIA) and corresponding OMB A-123 Guidance. Further inquiry will be followed up via the COFO Listserv.

Attendees:

In-Person

Bloch, Brian – Department of the Interior
Dea, Joanne – United States Department of Agriculture
Maurer, Bill – Department of Energy
Pritzker, David – Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
Reed, Janay – Defense Intelligence Agency
Sotoudeh, Paul – United States Patent and Trademark Office
Thomas, Michelle – Defense Intelligence Agency

Call-In

Achuko, Devara – Department of Homeland Security
Berg, Mollie – Department of Defense
Brown, Andrea – United States Patent and Trademark Office
Brown, Robert – Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation
Bunns, Felicia – Department of Energy
Carmush, Collete – Department of the Interior
Condillac, Charmaine – Food and Drug Administration
Duncan, Natalie – Small Business Administration
Epps, Ayanna – Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation
Fox, Angela – United States Department of Agriculture
Garmon, Felisa – Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
Gerber, Harriet – Department of Health and Human Services
Gordon, Laurel – Department of Justice
Hill, Gary – Department of Defense
Holman, Patrick -- Department of Energy
Kamenshine, Wendy – Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
Kelly, John – Small Business Administration
Kinnavy, Noreen – International Broadcasting Bureau, Voice of America and Office of Cuba Broadcasting
Larkins, Marcia – Department of Health and Human Services
Levine, Lisa – Department of Justice
Luckam, Stephanie – Department of Homeland Security
Majdiak, Sarah – Community Relations Service
Mazur, Cynthia (Cindy) – Director for Alternative Dispute Resolution, Office of Chief Counsel
McGuire, Carrie – Office of Government Information Services
Michael, David – Department of Health and Human Services
Milner, Heather – Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
Plonk, Maureen – Department of Homeland Security
Smith, Tyler – Department of Health and Human Services
Stukes, Jock – National Reconnaissance Organization
Valdez, Roberta – Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation
Walker, Don – Department of Defense
Wolfe, Lexi – Small Business Administration
Yoo, Sonya –
Yuille, Deanna – Department of Health and Human Services