



COALITION OF FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN

COFO MONTHLY MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date/Time: April 12, 2023, 1:30-2:55pm (EST)

Location: Video/telephone

Agenda:

1. COFO Annual Conference date
2. MS Teams Heads Up
3. ABA Dispute Resolution Section Annual Spring Conference – May 10-13 in Las Vegas
4. IOA Annual Conference Recap
5. IOA Compensation Survey
6. Ombuds Day 2023 – October 12
7. Voluntary Leave Transfer Initiative reminder
8. Next Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) meeting 2/22
9. Announcements – Training opportunities, job openings, or really any office and ombudsman happenings you'd like to tell the world about
10. 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
11. Discussion Topic
 - o Outsourced Ombuds – as a community we're starting to see increased demand for outsourced ombuds services. These are ombuds services provided on contract either for an interim period or longer, often with the ombuds' administrative and data services centralized in one place with the contractor. Let's discuss the pros and cons of outsourced ombuds and what it might mean for the ombuds profession more broadly.

Highlights:

- 1. COFO Annual Conference**
 - o In person this year at USPTO, but also hybrid.
 - o First call for conference committee volunteers. There will be an email to follow.
 - o Quality and reputation of conference has become known, so excited to hold it again but in person. The conference is free. Requires volunteer power to make it happen at all levels and especially because it will be hybrid.
- 2. MS Teams Heads Up**
 - o Chat function is considered a permanent record, so be careful internally and check with your agency to see what the policy is.
 - o Also, there is a phone log that shows who called you and who you called, so worth looking into whether agency has the ability to delete that record for you.
- 3. ABA Dispute Resolution Section Annual Spring Conference – May 10-13 in Las Vegas**
 - o Being held at Caesars Palace in Vegas.

- If interested in broader conflict resolution work, check out current deals/discounts for attending the conference.
- 4. IOA Annual Conference recap**
 - Was great to see people in person.
 - Quick recap of the government sector meeting on Monday afternoon of the conference.
 - Used the human spectrogram concept where one side of the room would represent strongly agree and the other would represent strongly disagree, with people choosing a side. A variety of ombuds and non-ombuds related questions were posed.
 - Many confirmed it was one of the conference highlights!
 - 5. IOA Compensation Survey**
 - IOA currently running a survey of all ombuds to discover the range of salaries within the field, data that will be used to help the profession. Ombuds across the country will be able to rely on this data when negotiating salaries upon hire.
 - The average time it takes to complete is 10 minutes.
 - 6. Ombuds Day 2023 – October 12th**
 - Reminder to put on your calendars.
 - It is the day before the COFO Annual Conference.
 - Theme was decided on, *Ombuds: Diverse in Role, United in Service*, and the rest of the activities and details will be announced in the coming months.
 - 7. 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.
 - Contact COFO if you've qualified for leave transfer and would like to get leave from other ombuds.
 - 8. Next Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) Meeting – 4/26**
 - Scheduled for 2-3pm.
 - Safe space to discuss personal and professional topics that impact us.
 - 9. Announcements – Training opportunities, job openings, or really any office and ombudsman happenings you'd like to tell the world about**
 - The USOA Annual Conference will be held Sept. 13-15 in Atlanta, GA at the Westin Perimeter hotel.
 - For more information go to: <https://www.usombudsman.org/usoa-events/annual-conference/>
 - This year conference registration is a required first step to reserve a hotel room.
 - CFPB posted an Associate Ombuds position yesterday. Two postings, one open to federal employees and the other for anyone. It is a remote position equivalent to GS-13 and the post closes on April 17. Externally facing office.
 - Social Media Committee Meeting next Thursday, April 20 from 2:30-3:30pm ET.
 - 10. 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.**
 - None
 - 11. Discussion Topic: Outsourced Ombuds – as a community we're starting to see increased demand for outsourced ombuds services. These are ombuds services provided on contract either for an interim period or longer, often with the ombuds' administrative and data services centralized in one place with the contractor. Let's discuss the pros and cons of outsourced ombuds and what it might mean for the ombuds profession more broadly.**

- Could be helpful in that the ombuds is truly independent, but on the other hand who is paying for the outsourced ombuds, and does that present independence challenges?
- Another challenge is that some agencies prefer to hire from within so that new ombuds have familiarity with the culture and operations of the agency, which an outsourced ombuds wouldn't have.
 - Someone mentioned that when they did outsourced ombuds work, they made sure to conduct research about the organizations in advance.
 - Someone else mentioned this could be an advantage, with the ombuds not having bias given their lack of institutional knowledge.
- A potential concern for some employees is trusting the outsourced ombuds who formed a relationship with the person who gave them a contract.
- NIH has contract ombuds on the team with permanent internal ombuds and there doesn't seem to be a difference for employees working with the full-time employee and the contract ombuds.
- Outsourcing could make a lot of sense if the contract is managed by the ombuds office, but meanwhile a potential issue is independence and the commitment from leadership to allow for informal conflict resolution.
- Perhaps a consultant coming into an agency and helping establish a new ombuds office, and helping the agency to hire someone, could be a good model.
- Could also be helpful from a DEIA perspective.
- Someone recalls talk about a model within FMCS where there could be federal ombuds available to provide services through an MOU, and the agency wouldn't need to find a contractor and go through procurement. The post office provided something similar in the past.

Attendees:

Last	First	Agency	Call-In
Anderson	Jeff	DOE	1
Baker	Jason	NIH	1
Berg	Mollie	NGA	1
Braden	Lara	DeCA	1
Brown	Andrea	USPTO	1
Cawthon	Shalonda	Office of Workers Compensation Programs/DOL	1
Cecil	Tina	FBI	1
Coffman	Cherina	NGA	1
Doyle	William	EES	1
Footman	Aaron	USPTO	1
Ginn	Brad	Argonne National Laboratory	1
Gnatt	Sheldon	NSA	1
Gordon	Laurel	DOJ/US Marshals Service	1
Healey	Angela	NSA	1

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Hendrickson	Caitlan	FEMA	1
Hudson	Antoinette	DC DGS	1
Jarrett	Syreeta	DIA	1
Johnson	Stella	N/A	1
Kamenshine	Wendy	CFPB	1
Katherine	Erica	FDA	1
Kinnavy	Noreen	USAGM	1
Kiraithe-Muchene	Irene	Henry M. Jackson Foundation	1
Lawrence	Steven	DHS I&A	1
Levine	Lisa	DOJ / Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR)	1
Manderson	Katie	VA	1
White	Karen	Department of State	1
N/A	Monica	NSA	1
Marcotte	Dan	FDIC	1
Maurer	Bill	Census	1
Miller	Ellen	IOA	1
Miller Sander	Dawn	Red Cross	1
Morey	Chauntanette	FBI	1
Patel	Bina	USPTO	1
Porch	Susanne	Commerce/National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)	1
Robinson	Belinda	FBI	1
Rojas	Nick	DIA	1
Rowe	Mary	MIT	1
Sanglier	Elizabeth	TSA	1
Schauer	Greta	DHS	1
Smith	Tyler	NIH	1
Sotoudeh	Paul	USPTO	1
Stergio	Marcus	Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs/DOL	1
Vermillion	Chris	DOE	1
Villafane	Jacqueline	American Red Cross	1
Weber	Guy	NGA	1
Wolfe	Lexi	DOE	1
Yuille Banford	Deanna	DOD/Defense Human Resources Activity	1
Yurgelun	Christine	MA Probate and Family Court Department	1

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