



COALITION OF FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN

COFO MONTHLY MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date/Time: May 11, 2022, 1:35-3:00 pm (EST)

Location: Video/telephone

Agenda:

1. COFO 2022 Annual Conference – Friday October 14th – committee volunteers needed!
2. COFO Website status
3. USOA Federal Government Chapter update
4. Ombuds Day 2022 is October 13th
5. Peer Practitioner Network update
6. Voluntary Leave Transfer Initiative reminder
7. Next Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) meeting 5/25/22
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
 - Question and poll concerning remote work vs. telework at your agencies. How widespread has remote work become at your agencies in light of return to work?
 - Your question here!
10. Discussion Topic
 - IOA recently changed its name from “International Ombudsman Association” to “International Ombuds Association”. Is it time for COFO to do the same? There is longstanding debate in our community over whether our profession should move to a name like “ombuds” or “ombudsperson” that reads more inclusively, even as there is debate within the debate over whether or not the word “ombudsman” and its root might themselves be gender-neutral. Furthermore, as federal ombuds, we face the additional concern that many of our enabling statutes, charters, and policies reference “ombudsman” and name changes could create confusion for leaders, stakeholders, and a wider world that is already generally unaware of what we are. So what should be next? Let’s respectfully discuss it.
 - Your topic here!

Highlights:

1. **2022 Annual Conference Reminder/Call for Volunteers**
 - Reminder that conference is to be held on Friday October 14th potentially both virtual and in-person.
 - Set up a conference committee every year, and this is the first call for volunteers to serve on that conference committee. Commitment is about 1-2 hours per month, slightly more once closer to conference. Let us know if interested in joining committee.

2. **COFO Website Update**
 - Have a new home, website will be on adr.gov sometime in the near future.
 - Should have ability to edit and manage the site's pages ourselves, allowing us to bring more information to members.
3. **USOA Government Chapter Update**
 - Chairs of that committee announced next meeting will be Wednesday, May 18 from 1pm to 2:30pm ET. Topics of discussion will be upcoming USOA conference, DEI initiatives going on within USOA, upcoming chapter elections, followed by interactive seminar on having difficult conversations.
 - Meeting is open to all USOA members and non-members.
4. **Ombuds Day Reminder**
 - Scheduled for October 13. Graphics and slogan are done.
 - Ombudsday.com, more information available including an Ombuds Day email signature available for download and use.
5. **Peer Practitioner Network (PPN) Update**
 - PPN approved by Executive Committee as a permanent COFO program.
 - Fills a space alongside Mentoring Program to further support ombuds. Any questions about the program, reach out to Susanne Porch or Jason Baker.
6. **Voluntary Leave Transfer Initiative Reminder**
 - For those approved by agency to enter voluntary leave transfer program but do not want to ask those within agency for leave donations, this program connects ombuds who are in need of and others who are able to donate leave. Contact Paul Sotoudeh, Heather Milner, Wendy Kamenshine or Susanne Porch with questions.
7. **Ombuds Supporting Ombuds Meeting**
 - Next meeting is Wednesday, May 25. Intended to be a space for ombuds to discuss stresses in their lives and challenges they are facing outside of ombuds practices.
 - If there are topics people know they would like to discuss in advance, send those to Heather Milner so that she can prep in advance.
8. **Announcements**
 - CFPB will be posting for an Associate Ombuds in the near future.
 - Extending timeframe to express interest in an Acting Associate Ombuds position.
 - Reach out to Heather Milner or Wendy Kamenshine if questions about either position.
 - IOA 2023 conference will be held in Seattle. The planning will begin soon, so if people want to join the Conference Committee reach out to Katie Manderson.
9. **General Question** submitted in advance: How widespread has remote work (when official duty station is outside 50-mile radius of office) become at your agencies in light of return to work?
 - Poll question results:
 - Question 1, "Does your agency offer remote working (as opposed to only teleworking)?"
 - Yes – 34/55 (62%)
 - No – 5/55 (9%)
 - No Answer – 16/55 (29%)
 - Question 2, "If yes, can you estimate the percentage of the workforce qualifying to participate in remote work?"
 - 25% or less – 22/55 (40%)
 - 25-50% - 6/55 (11%)
 - 50-75% - 1/55 (2%)
 - More than 75% - 4/55 (7%)

- People shared what their ombuds offices have recently seen re: remote vs. telework:
 - People have tried to pull off “remote telework” whereby they keep their same official duty station for the purposes of maintaining higher locality pay, but full time telework from random locations.
 - What some agencies are doing is requiring two in-person days per pay period. Some employees are therefore traveling to duty station for the second Thursday-Friday of a pay period, and the first Monday-Tuesday of the next pay period, then working remotely for the remainder of the two pay periods.
 - Telework decisions are handled at the immediate supervisor level. Remote status determinations are made at the SES level.
 - People have been working remotely (far outside their duty station) for years, just wasn’t an opportunity available to everyone. Another issue heard of are middle managers never reporting to office, but their direct reports are.

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 - Many felt that in keeping up with the times, the name change should happen.
 - Most in the chat liked suggestion to be more gender neutral.
 - Someone shared she cringes when people call her ombudswoman, others agree.
 - Another person shared that people are awkward when calling her ombudsman.
 - A lot of people in chat seem to believe Ombuds solves the issue.
 - Gender neutral in Swedish or not, the word Ombudsman creates a stereotype, so from a perception standpoint it should just be Ombuds.
 - Singular or plural? Most seem to agree Ombuds can be singular or plural, whereas Ombudsman is often times perceived to be singular and Ombudsmen plural even though ombuds themselves rarely use the word Ombudsmen.
 - Seemingly a lot of support for changing COFO to be Coalition of Federal Ombuds.
 - Some historical context -- the word 'ombudsman' is derived from the Old Norse word 'umboðsmaður', meaning representative. The umboðsmaður first appeared during the Viking Age, 793-1066. Vikings lived in longhouses of 30-50 residents; approximately 90% of Vikings were farmers. The umboðsmaður's role was to help settle disputes among the inhabitants and their trading partners to help preserve good relationships.
 - Scandinavians would use ombud, not ombuds. Others suggest that the root of Ombudsman (meaning representative) would have an “s” on it.
 - Someone else shared that suffix maður is male stereotyped.
 - Something to consider, IOA change was difficult given international membership, many international ombuds refer to themselves as Ombudsman.

- Someone suggested IOA has had many unhappy members for the past few years, so are we considering a change to COFO because we feel strongly about it or because IOA did it. Also asked, “what does this mean for our relationship with USOA?” Then shared that ombuds feels too informal. Others struggled with that idea and actually think informal is a good thing.
- The same way the word “their” can be awkward but more importantly diminishes gendering, ombud or ombuds is supported.
- Another issue is how much time we spend explaining the meaning of the word when we could be using that time for something else. Proposal to go with something that is well received and most comprehensible for others.
- Suggestion for a vote among COFO membership, change name or no.

Attendees:

Last	First	Agency	Call-In
Baker	Jason	NIH	1
Behr	Virginia	FDA	1
Berg	Mollie	NGA	1
Bloch	Brian	DOI	1
Bookstein	Monique	Prince William County Public Schools	1
Coffman	Cherina	NGA	1
Coleman	Jean	SBA	1
Danabar	Sheila	TSA	1
Donnelly	Wanda	State	1
Enriquez	Elisa	Los Alamos Laboratory (DOE)	1
Garmon	Felisa	CFPB	1
Ginn	Bradley	Argonne National Laboratory	1
Gnatt	Sheldon	NSA	1
Gordon	Laurel	DOJ / U. S. Marshals Service (USMS)	1
Green	Veronica	State OIG	1
Hartman	Jessie	NARA/ Office of Government Information Services (OGIS)	1
Heffernan	Claire	TSA	1
Hobson	Shirley	VA	1
Hopkins	Emilee	NGA	1
Hurley	Nathan	FDA / Center for Tobacco Products	1
Jarrett	Syreeta	DIA	1
Jioia-Jones	Tyswana	USDA	1

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Kamenshine	Wendy	CFPB	1
Katherine	Erica	FDA	1
Kinnavy	Noreen	USAGM	1
Lawrence	Steve	DHS Office of Intelligence & Analysis	1
Lenkel	Laurie	FDA	1
Levenson	Dan	NARA	1
Levine	Lisa	DOJ / Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR)	1
Lewis	Mark	FDA	1
Manderson	Katie	VA	1
Manzines	Rosamaria	Prince William County Public Schools	1
Maurer	Bill	Census	1
McCoy	Barbara	HHS / CMS	1
Megee	Christine	DOD Education Activity	1
Messick	Daniel	FDIC	1
Miller	Carla	DOJ / ATF	1
Miller Sander	Dawn	Red Cross	1
Milner	Heather	CFPB	1
Monyei Whaley	Allison	DOD OIG	1
Morey	Chauncenette	FBI	1
Patno	Arielle	FDA / Center for Tobacco Products	1
Peterson	Dr. Dana	NSA	1
Piziali	Jamie	EPA	1
Porch	Susanne	Commerce / National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)	1
Reed	Janay	DOD / DIA	1
Robinson	Belinda	FBI	1
Rojas	Nick	DOD / DIA	1
Rowe	Mary	Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)	1
Sanglier	Elizabeth	TSA	1
Schauer	Greta	TSA	1
Schwartz	Dave	UNLV	1
Semo	Alina	NARA	1
Skodacek	Ken	FDA	1
Smith	Julie	Census	1

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Smith	Tony	Census	1
Smith	Tyler	NIH	1
Sotoudeh	Paul	USPTO	1
Stergio	Marcus	Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs/DOL	1
Swann	Benita	FDIC	1
Taylor	Lelar	VA	1
Thomson	Ronnie	Sandia National Laboratories	1
Vermillion	Chris	DOE	1
Villafane	Jacqueline	American Red Cross	1
Voloshin	Victor	NIH	1
Walker	Olivia	DOD / Army Medical Readiness Assistance Program	1
Weber	Guy	DOD / NGA	1
Whittington	Fred (Whitt)	DOL OIG	1
Wolfe	Lexi	DOE	1
Yuille Banford	Deanna	DOD / Defense Human Resources Activity	1
		Total	70