



COALITION OF FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN

MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date and Time: June 9, 2021, 1:30-2:58 pm (EDT)

Location: WebEx

Agenda:

1. 2021 Annual Conference Update – the COFO Annual Conference is tentatively scheduled for October 15th
2. Social Media Committee Update
3. Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) Meeting – June 23rd
4. Ombuds Day – October 14th
5. Announcements – Training opportunities, job openings, or really any office and ombudsman happenings you'd like to tell the world about
6. General Questions – Space for newer ombuds and programs (and people looking to set up or change programs) to ask questions and get feedback. No issue is too big or small so ask away!
7. Discussion Topics
 - a. Dealing with Persistent Inquirers – How do you deal with individuals who continue to raise issues where the ombudsman's office can no longer assist and where the inquirer is also adversely affecting the operations of the ombuds resource?
 - b. Security of Electronic Records – How are ombuds around the federal government protecting their electronic records? What methods are you using?

Highlights:

- 1. 2021 Annual Conference Update**
 - a. Planning to be held on October 15, 2021
 - b. In addition to in-person, preparing for virtual component
 - c. Looking for volunteers for the Conference Committee and for Conference Committee Chair(s)

- 2. Social Media Committee Update**
 - a. Social Media Committee Chair Erica Katherine thanked those who commented on the survey
 - b. By end of the month, the committee plans to send recommendations to the COFO Executive Committee to assess what platforms may work

3. Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) Meeting

- a. OSO meetings are led by Heather Milner
- b. They are offered as a way to connect and/or let off steam
- c. Next meeting is June 23, 2021, 2-3 pm EDT

4. Ombuds Day

- a. Ken Skodacek reminded COFO that Ombuds Day is October 14, 2021
- b. Theme is Exploring Opportunities to Resolve Conflict Together
- c. Need help finding speakers from organizations with externally facing programs

5. Announcements

- a. None

6. General Questions

- a. Questions posed via polling about whether Ombuds offices handle EEO ADR and whether they are required to report issues or case-related information to EEO offices
- b. Discussion of how ADRA impacts such requests for information

7. Dealing with Persistent Inquirers – How do you deal with individuals who continue to raise issues where the ombudsman’s office can no longer assist and where the inquirer is also adversely affecting the operations of the ombuds resource?

- a. Guy Weber led discussion
- b. Important to be clear up front to set expectations about what we can and can’t do
- c. Stress informality and that internal Ombuds are not part of any formal process
- d. Acknowledge the difference between external and internal Ombuds
- e. An external ombuds has tried scheduling follow-ups with an inquirer who was advice-shopping around multiple components of the organization, which seemed a helpful way to acknowledge that the person was heard and built trust
- f. Think about what Ombuds can control, such as following up with visitor to check on how situation is going
- g. Note the amount of time visit scheduled for; some schedule for 45 minutes so it’s all right if it goes over to an hour
- h. Control boundaries of conversation
- i. Think of Ombuds’ resources as finite
- j. Some people who return are not ready to take the next step; ask them how they’ll know when they’re ready for the next step
- k. Ask them questions about what moving forward would look like
- l. People need time to tell their story; honor the story
- m. Powerful questions help visitors think about next steps
- n. Individuals need to feel like they’re received a fair process
- o. Ask ourselves: Where is the disconnect, with the Ombuds or the visitor?

- p. Raise issue with visitor: *You seem to be asking me for help. Here are the processes available. I'm not sure I have more to offer.*
- q. Some issue a signed letter indicating they don't have more to offer
- r. Some try to keep persistent inquirers connected, as they are overwhelming other processes
- s. Suggestion to utilize OPM Federal Coaching Network
- t. They may be repeat visitors to fulfill their need to tell their story
- u. There are limits to Ombuds role and self-care issues: How much energy are we putting in? What is the goal in assisting people?
- v. A challenge is that some visitors think there is only one way to get what they need vs. multiple options
- w. Ask visitor: *What are your expectations? How do you want to move forward?*
- x. Can tell people we can help them when a new issue arises
- y. Question posted about a visitor asking to be friends
 - i. This could raise concerns, including perception of impartiality
 - ii. Could ask visitor what they mean by friends
 - iii. Could say: *I can't meet those expectations vs. I can't be your friend*
 - iv. Suggestion to have an office policy or standard approach so you can just say this is what we always do
- z. Can use the Ladder of Accountability
- aa. Idea to send the Office charter and discuss what is within the scope of how Ombuds might be able to help them
- bb. For data capturing, some use "ombuds ended the process" or "venting/no further assistance"
- cc. Suggestion to follow BIFF approach: brief, information, friendly, and firm, which some have used with a small number of customers who refuse to accept the final responses provided

8. Security of Electronic Records Discussion

- a. Tabled

Attendance 6/9/2021

Last	First	Agency	Call-In
Anderson	Jeff	DOE	1
Balick	Howard	FDA	1
Brown	Amy	FDIC	1
Brown	Andrea	United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO)	1
Brown	Dallas	DHS / National Protection and Programs Directorate	1
Carmouche	Colette	TSA	1
Coffman	Cherina	NGA	1
Coleman	Jean	SBA	1
Dean	Karen	FMCS	1
DeBerry	Marcella	NSA	1
Derrick	Danielle	FINRA	1
Doyle	Bill	US Secret Service	1
Enriquez	Elisa	Los Alamos Laboratory (DOE)	1
Epps	Ayanna	FDIC	1
Footman	Aaron	USPTO	1
Frazier	Veronica	DOD / DIA	1
Garmon	Felisa	CFPB	1
Gordon	Laurel	DOJ / U. S. Marshals Service (USMS)	1
Haley	Charmion	FDIC	1
Harley	Jasmine	National Credit Union Administration	1
Hartman	Jessie	NARA/ Office of Government Information Services (OGIS)	1
Heffernan	Claire	TSA	1
Hobson	Shirley	VA	1
Hurley	Nathan	FDA / Center for Tobacco Products	1
Jarrett	Syreeta	DIA	1
Kamenshine	Wendy	CFPB	1
Katherine	Erica	FDA	1
Kinnavy	Noreen	Broadcasting Board of Governors	1
Lawrence	Steve	DHS Office of Intelligence & Analysis	1
Lenkel	Laurie	FDA	1

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Last	First	Agency	Call-In
Levine	Lisa	DOJ / Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR)	1
Marcotte	Dan	FDIC	1
Maurer	Bill	Census	1
McCoy	Barbara	HHS / CMS	1
McGuire	Carrie	NARA / OGIS	1
McNeil	Tracey	SEC	1
Michael	David	NIH	1
Miller	Carla	DOJ / ATF	1
Milner	Heather	CFPB	1
Moore	Sandi	NRO	1
Patel	Bina	USPTO	1
Piziali	Jamie	EPA	1
Porch	Susanne	Commerce / National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)	1
Rippy	Catherine	HHS / CMS	1
Robinson	Belinda	FBI	1
Roman	Rafael	National Ocean and Atmospheric Agency (NOAA)	1
Semo	Alina	NARA	1
Skodacek	Ken	FDA	1
Smith	Julie	Census	1
Sotoudeh	Paul	USPTO	1
Trujillo	Sarah	USDA	1
Valdez	Roberta		1
Varner	Tahirih	NPS	1
Vermillion	Chris	TSA	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
White	Karen	DOD / National Guard Bureau	1
Whittington	Fred (Whitt)	DOL OIG	1
Wolfe	Lexi	DOE	1
Zrubek	Tom	DOD OIG	1
		Total	62

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