



COALITION OF FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN

COFO MONTHLY MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date/Time: July 13, 2022, 1:30-3:00 pm (EST)

Location: Video/telephone

Agenda:

1. COFO 2022 Annual Conference – Friday October 14th – committee volunteers needed!
2. COFO Website status
3. IOA Internship Task Force
4. Ombuds Day 2022 is October 13th
5. Voluntary Leave Transfer Initiative reminder
6. Next Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) meeting 7/27/22
7. Announcements – Training opportunities, job openings, or really any office and ombudsman happenings you would like to tell the world about
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
 - Has your office participated in any kind of shared marketing/advertising with EAP or other “wellness” resource(s)? We are hoping to learn what others might have done in this space.
 - Your question here!
9. Discussion Topic
 - IOA Data collection is an important issue for ombuds, and thus a common discussion topic for our profession. But let’s look at data a different way – WHY do you collect the data points you do? And why do you choose NOT to collect other data points? Are there any particular unique data points you collect that you’ve found useful and would like to share with the community? And how do you use your data to inform your work?
 - Your topic here!

Highlights:

1. **COFO 2022 Annual Conference – Friday October 14th – committee volunteers needed!**
 - Call for proposals went out this morning, will be going out to groups and individuals outside of COFO soon. Feel free to submit a proposal if you would like to. 60-, 45-, or 30-minute sessions as well as blips will be on agenda, and encourage as many COFO people in those presentations as possible.
 - Set up a conference committee every year, those interested in joining the committee for this year’s conference are still welcome to join and help administer it. Still not sure if conference will be in-person or virtual, but volunteers are needed either way.
2. **IOA Internship Task Force**
 - Reaching out to all sectors of ombuds field to collect documents, resources, testimonials, experiences of any kind that those ombuds groups have related to

internships to determine where needs and interests lie and then how IOA can encourage ombuds internship opportunities.

- Reach out to chair of the IOA Internship Task Force if interested in joining or if you have any resources to share.
- Question raised about what authorities are used to bring on interns in the federal government.
 - Someone weighed in that if people are volunteers they don't need to go through more formal pathways.
 - Perhaps some thought and discussion would be helpful to see if there are ways that the more formal hiring processes can be simplified for the purposes of bringing on federal ombuds interns.
 - One challenge for a particular agency is the concern about having an intern in ombuds office who might then seek employment in different offices within that same agency.
 - Someone else shared the Presidential Management Fellows program, sponsored by OPM, free advertising for agency and getting interns into your program without any expenses for the agency.
 - Operation Warfighter (official name of program?), program focused on helping injured military get back into the workforce.
 - Open opps is also a community where agencies can post opportunities for interns, and the interns have to give at least 10 hours per week, more can be arranged depending on availability of intern and needs of office.

3. Ombuds Day 2022 is October 13th

- Scheduled for October 13.
- Toolkit on ABA's website that people can use: <https://www.OmbudsDay.com>.
- Looking for mix of externals and internals to help put on this year's Ombuds Day.

4. COFO Website Update

- Old site no longer active, but new site is physically up. The general content of new host site is all there with a few new pages and updates to existing pages coming soon.
- Might change link just for ease of use but for now the link is <https://adr.gov/coalition-of-federal-ombudsman/>.
- Question about how to fix the old web address showing up as first on list when searching google for COFO.
 - Someone suggested that all in attendance at COFO meeting should do a google search for COFO after the meeting, and don't click on old DOE link, click on new link instead. That should shift what appears first.

5. 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 need leave with other ombuds who are able to donate leave. Contact Paul Sotoudeh, Heather Milner, Wendy Kamenshine with questions.

6. Next Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) meeting 7/27/22

- Next meeting is Wednesday, July 27. Intended to be a space for ombuds to discuss personal thoughts, feelings, challenges, and discuss approaches people take to dealing with those challenges. Can be but does not need to be practice related.

7. Announcements

- Los Alamos National Laboratory posted position for ombuds, that was already shared by email yesterday.

8. **General Question** submitted in advance: Has your office participated in any kind of shared marketing/advertising with EAP or other “wellness” resource(s)? We are hoping to learn what others might have done in this space.
- Someone shared that their agency, particularly in virtual work environment, has different offices give presentations to the entire department/agency on what their services entail, so this ombuds office has been included in this wider presentation about EAP and other support services.
 - This office found it to be helpful because it delineates uniqueness of ombuds office from those other services.
 - Someone else mentioned their office just did the same last week, explained how ombuds can refer people to some of those other resources, but how it is also different.
 - Someone else shared that they did do a joint outreach with Federal Occupational Health, which runs EAP at this department. Wanted to be sure that people out in the field (not in DC) knew they too were eligible for ombuds services.
 - Was good in the sense that it seemed to be a natural fit due to impartiality and confidentiality.
 - Separate website was also created to provide resources for employees (at home, when in office, etc.) that explained different scenarios when they could contact the ombuds office versus other EAP related resources.
 - Chat comment was that something similar was done on panels with other service providers, also found it helpful because “it highlights options for the workforce and the differences in services, and many of us mention other service providers in our own presentations... and, I've hosted employee discussion sessions on specific topics with other service providers, again we were able to highlight differences in support resources for the workforces... not marketing per se but definitely getting the word out.”
 - Someone else mentioned they participate in new employee orientations so that they can explain what they do to new employees. Prior to COVID, would also go out on road shows, give briefing to field offices, then for the rest of the day take as discreet of an office space as possible and provide ombuds services to whoever wanted to use them.
 - Someone else in their previous position did a lot of work with EAP because they were good at explaining what ombuds did, and has always thought they should connect with any other offices that might potentially have overlap to clarify what each resource is for.
9. **Discussion Topic:** Data collection is an important issue for ombuds, and thus a common discussion topic for our profession. But let’s look at data a different way – WHY do you collect the data points you do? And why do you choose NOT to collect other data points? Are there any particular unique data points you collect that you’ve found useful and would like to share with the community? And how do you use your data to inform your work?
- Suggestion that we need to think about who the target audience is. This person is external, so who is going to be reading the data presented in an annual report, since that is why the office collects data to begin with.
 - This office captures demographic data (what industry are they from, etc.)
 - Drop down menus that can be informative but not too granular.
 - They collect a primary issue and secondary issue, and if someone mentions multiple issues those are counted as multiple referrals/inquiries/cases.
 - IOA categories is what someone else uses, but one of those categories is scheduling, which ended up being a majority of the issues this office worked on one year, so that wouldn’t have been the best way to collect data. They then had a scheduling main category and then other subcategories of scheduling, refer to as “impacts we hear.”

- One office also tracks how many inquiries they refer to other agency offices, just to capture where they are referring people.
- Answer to why are we collecting data, “we want to show our value and also track how much we are working on.” Data this office collects also helps to tell a story, distinguish what is novel and what isn’t, reflect back on a quarterly and/or monthly basis to review what’s been heard, seen, learned.
- How much work we do is reflected in the number of inquiries we take in and handle, justifies our value, the authority the agency has given us to do our work, and especially in modern federal government where everything is oriented around metrics/statistics.
- Question about services provided and “impacts we hear” categories mentioned earlier.
 - Person who raised that earlier explained that impacts is its own section of data presented (about 50 fields for each inquiry). Helps to slice and dice.
 - This office has their own custom glossary of categories and subcategories, don’t use the exact IOA categories.
- Comment about who is the audience as it relates to presenting data, of course employer but not just employer. Audience is all who use the ombuds office.
 - This person finds important to consider return on investment, so how are we understanding, evaluating, and then demonstrating our value to each of our “employers” or in other words stakeholders.
 - Someone responded that they try to be careful about thinking of ROI only in terms of “how much money did the office save the agency?” since that might overlook or undervalue “how much we helped this one specific individual.”
- Question in chat, “How do ombuds feel about capturing demographic visitor data - i.e race, gender, etc?”
 - One response was that they’ve been in an ombuds office that does collect demographic data, and another that does not. The reason some offices do not is because it could be used as identifying information.
 - Someone else shared that their office did collect it to try and evaluate any applicable trends, but stopped collecting it because of some concerns about identifying information.
 - Chat response, “There may be many reasons to do or not but one question I always ask myself when considering a new data point is why do I need it.”
 - Chat response, “I think it is important unless it will pinpoint a specific person.”
 - Chat response, “I think you can track demographic data separate of specific information. It seems critical to be able to demonstrate ratios of use of the service among different populations.”
- Another question in chat, “Is anyone aware of any formal computer systems or programs that can be used for data capture?”
 - Chat response that a popular database for ombuds is <https://www.caseloadmanager.com/pg52.cfm>.
 - Someone else shared that due to expenses, a common practice by ombuds is just simply using Excel.
- Comment in chat, “I struggle with demonstrating the value of prevention in real terms... one colleague talked about the ombuds role as being similar to cybersecurity in that a significant part of the value is in preventing terrible outcomes and that it's hard to quantify that prevention.”
- Another comment in chat, “Also you may wish to consider when you start collecting new data - start of a calendar year, fiscal year, etc. in terms of reviewing info over time.”

Attendees:

Last	First	Agency	Call-In
Anderson	Jeff	DOE	1
Baker	Jason	NIH	1
Bale	Ambuja	DEA	1
Behr	Virginia	FDA	1
Bookstein	Monique	Prince William County Public Schools	1
Broadway	Carlisa	EEOC	1
Coffman	Cherina	NGA	1
Davidson	Kimberly	George Mason University	1
Doyle	William	EES	1
Gnatt	Sheldon	NSA	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
Hebron	Eric	ATF	1
Heffernan	Claire	TSA	1
Hendrickson	Caitlan	FEMA	1
Hobson	Shirley	VA	1
Hopkins	Emilee	NGA	1
Hurley	Nathan	FDA / Center for Tobacco Products	1
Jarrett	Syreeta	DIA	1
Jioia-Jones	Tyswana	APHIS	1
Kamenshine	Wendy	CFPB	1
Katherine	Erica	FDA	1
Kinnavy	Noreen	USAGM	1
Lalena	C. Marie	Pepperdine University (Student)	1
Lawrence	Steve	DHS Office of Intelligence & Analysis	1
Lenkel	Laurie	FDA	1
Leonardi	Madison	DOE Intern	1
Levenson	Dan	NARA	1
Levine	Lisa	DOJ / Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR)	1
Mahony	Jennifer	Boston Children's Hospital	1

UNCLASSIFIED

Manderson	Katie	VA	1
Maurer	Bill	Census	1
McGee	Christine	DOD Education Activity	1
Miller	Carla	DOJ/ATF	1
Miller Sander	Dawn	Red Cross	1
Monyei Whaley	Allison	DOD OIG	1
Morey	Chauncenette	FBI	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
Rojas	Nick	DOD / DIA	1
Rowe	Mary	Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)	1
Sanglier	Elizabeth	TSA	1
Schauer	Greta	TSA	1
Skodacek	Ken	FDA	1
Smith	Julie	Census	1
Smith	Tony	Census	1
Smith	Tyler	NIH	1
Sotoudeh	Paul	USPTO	1
Stergio	Marcus	Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs/DOL	1
Thomson	Ronnie	Sandia National Laboratories	1
Taylor	Lelar	OCHCO	1
Tisdale	Laurice	HHS, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services	1
Trujillo	Sarah	APHIS	1
Vermillion	Chris	DOE	1
Voloshin	Victor	NIH	1
Weber	Guy	DOD / NGA	1
Wolfe	Lexi	DOE	1
		Total	61