



COALITION OF FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN

MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date and Time: August 11, 2021, 1:36-2:57 pm (EDT)

Location: WebEx

Agenda:

1. 2021 Annual Conference update
2. IOA member dialogues
3. Social Media Committee update
4. COFO Peer Practitioner Network
5. Next Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO)
6. Ombuds Day
7. Announcements
8. General Questions
9. Discussion Topics
 - a. Have you noticed any changes in your ability to maintain ombuds principles, particularly those of independence and impartiality/neutrality, in your agency since the pandemic began?

Highlights:

- 1. 2021 Annual Conference Update**
 - a. Scheduled to be held on October 15, 2021
 - b. It is the day after Ombuds Day
 - c. All virtual conference
 - d. See email calling for presentations
- 2. IOA member dialogues**
 - a. Will be held on August 12, 2021, from 11 am-12:30 pm EDT and 7-8:30 pm EDT
 - b. Dialogues concern proposed amendments to IOA bylaws and articles of incorporation
 - c. This is different from the Standards of Practice proposed changes
- 3. Social Media Committee (SMC)**
 - a. Chair Erica Katherine acknowledged the work of members Deanna Yuille Banford, Syreeta Jarrett, Sandra Moore, Belinda Robinson, Ken Skodacek, and Sarah Trujillo

- b. SMC submitted its proposal to Executive Committee
- c. SMC has received good feedback so far

4. COFO Peer Practitioner Network

- a. New pilot program
- b. Susanne Porch is driving this effort
- c. This concept began as solo practitioners but expanded to all, with similarly situated practitioners grouped together
- d. Scheduled small group substantive, confidential discussions of issues
- e. Submit interest form by August 20, 2021
- f. Kick-off meeting—aimed to be August 23, 2021
- g. Comment included that this can be of real value for solo practitioners, and a great complement to the mentoring program
- h. All are empowered to champion ideas for new networks or projects
- i. Concern raised about protocols and parameters to ensure no misinformation will be shared around the Standards of Practice
- j. COFO will group people together to include people with experience paired with others; all have obligation to share accurate information
- k. Assessment about the network will be made at the six month mark
- l. Ideas are welcome to ensure information shared is accurate

5. 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. Meetings are held on the fourth Wednesday of the month
- d. Next meeting is August 25, 2021, 2-3 pm EDT

6. Ombuds Day

- a. October 14, 2021

7. Announcements

- a. None

8. General Questions

- a. Question raised about conducting inreach
 - i. Replies included to treat it like an exchange
 - ii. Use hypotheticals, such as walking through an example of a supervisor and employee issue
 - iii. Focus on basics, including what you do and core Standards of Practice
 - iv. Discuss confidentiality, including multiple layers of leadership
 - v. Consider shorter 15-20 minute presentation or incorporate interactive process if longer

- vi. Strong recommendation to include the What's in it for Me? (WIFM) concept into presentations and to speak according to the specific audience
- b. Question posed about handling virtual visits and shifting from phone and in-person
 - i. Some conducted 1/2 to 2/3 work virtually pre-pandemic and 100% now
 - ii. Some agencies have screen shots and recordings turned off
 - iii. Confidentiality extends to virtual meetings
 - iv. Some add language in their confidentiality statement about no recording
 - v. Question asked about whether ABA finalized online dispute resolution guidelines
 - vi. Virtual terms and agreements—Karen Dean of FMCS previously circulated this, including maintaining confidentiality; posted on website and reiterated in opening statement
 - vii. Some recommend not using Teams, as there is no way to delete chat
 - viii. Some prefer Zoom
 - ix. Suggestion to share screen to avoid receiving information
 - x. Positives about the virtual world include the idea that people can talk more freely and for longer times to have deep, open conversations
 - xi. One ombuds asks visitors what they prefer; around 60% choose phone only (no teleconference); during facilitated discussions, ombuds mentions not recording when using WebEx. They also use a simple Webex meeting room link to tell the visitor by phone instead of sending an email or invite
 - xii. Given that 80% of communication is nonverbal, phone can be challenging
 - xiii. A significant percentage of people choose not to share virtually or do not have equipment to do so
 - xiv. In the intelligence community, some do not have cameras
 - xv. Discuss beforehand whether people will turn on cameras or not
- c. Question concerning information on the new Internal Justice, The Respectful Workplace Advisors (RWA) Program at the World Bank
 - i. Good information on RWA on the World Bank website
 - ii. RWA is a longstanding program in the international community. While they are not a federal program, they've connected to COFO at times
- d. Can ombuds be more of a “therapeutic” role?
 - i. Ombuds are neutral, here for everyone, and not advocates for individuals or outcomes
 - ii. Restorative justice practices can be added
 - iii. One ombuds uses restorative practices vs. restorative justice phrase
 - iv. Restorative justice practices can be used to help people heal while ombuds remain neutral and independent
 - v. Sometimes, ombuds can assist people getting to a more meaningful place; sometimes not as it depends on the situation
 - vi. Ombuds offer tools and skills but can't do the work for individuals
 - vii. Is leadership open to hearing about issues and doing the work?

- e. How do ombuds offices handle confidentiality with administrative personnel?
 - i. It can be difficult if administrative/support staff handle multiple areas, such as ombuds, grievance, and anti-harassment and are not dedicated to the ombuds role
 - ii. It would be hard for someone to keep information separate and not blur the lines between offices
 - iii. Administrative staff may be used for small offices, even solo practitioners, maybe as collateral duty vs. full-time workers
- f. Are ombuds being brought into the discussions concerning EO 14035 DEIA (diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility)? **[NOTE: this question and discussion are solely from the chat.]**
 - i. One ombuds' opinion was that OPM, EEOC, and OMB are missing an opportunity to encourage agencies to tap into the ombuds as a data point and a resource
 - ii. One ombuds noted that they have been brought in on the diversity side, but indicated that ombuds have not not been brought up as a resource
 - iii. Link to Executive Order: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/06/25/executive-order-on-diversity-equity-inclusion-and-accessibility-in-the-federal-workforce/>

9. Discussion Topic

- a. Have you noticed any changes in your ability to maintain ombuds principles, particularly those of independence and impartiality/neutrality, in your agency since the pandemic began?
- b. Though we did not formally get to the topic, discussion leaders Guy Weber and Mollie Berg noted that we did discuss principles brought up by the pandemic and, in particular, navigating confidentiality in the virtual world

Attendance 8/11/2021

Last	First	Agency	Call-In
Arbid	Michelle	FEMA	1
Baker	Jason	NIH	1
Balick	Howard	FDA	1
Barrar	Riley	CFPB	1
Behr	Virginia	FDA	1
Berg	Mollie	DOD / National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA)	1
Bloch	Brian	DOI	1
Davenport Dayes	Nicky	FEMA	1
Dean	Karen	FMCS	1
DeBerry	Marcella	NSA	1
Foisy	Paul-Dominick	State	1
Footman	Aaron	USPTO	1
Fox	Angela	FDA	1
Gnatt	Sheldon	NSA	1
Gordon	Laurel	DOJ / U. S. Marshals Service (USMS)	1
Green	Veronica	State OIG	1
Harley	Jasmine	National Credit Union Administration	1
Hopkins	Emilee	NGA	1
Kashdan	Mark D.	CDC	1
Katherine	Erica	FDA	1
Kinnavy	Noreen	Broadcasting Board of Governors	1
Leep	Kathryn	FDIC	1
Lenkel	Laurie	FDA	1
Levine	Lisa	DOJ / Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR)	1
Lewis	Mark D.	FDA	1
Lloyd	Brenda	FLETC	1
Marcotte	Dan	FDIC	1
Maurer	Bill	Census	1
McNeil	Tracey	SEC	1
Megee	Christine	DOD Education Activity	1

UNCLASSIFIED

Last	First	Agency	Call-In
Michael	David	NIH	1
Miller	Carla	DOJ / ATF	1
Panza	Jessica	Pepperdine	1
Patno	Arielle	FDA / Center for Tobacco Products	1
Piziali	Jamie	EPA	1
Porch	Susanne	Commerce / National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)	1
Reilly	Kevin	NASA	1
Robinson	Belinda	FBI	1
Rojas	Nick	DOD / DIA	1
Rowe	Mary	Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)	1
Smith	Julie	Census	1
Sotoudeh	Paul	USPTO	1
Stergio	Marcus	Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs / DOL	1
Sutton	Shameka	NCUA Acting Ombudsman	1
Thomson	Ronnie	Sandia National Laboratories	1
Trujillo	Sarah	USDA	1
Varner	Tahirih	NPS	1
Vermillion	Chris	TSA	1
Villafane	Jacqueline	American Red Cross	1
Voloshin	Victor	NIH	1
Weber	Guy	DOD / NGA	1
Wolfe	Lexi	DOE	1
Yuille Banford	Deanna	DOD / Defense Human Resources Activity	1
		Total	53