



COALITION OF FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN

MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date and Time: September 15, 2021, 1:30-3:00 pm (EDT)

Location: WebEx

Agenda:

1. 2021 COFO Annual Conference
2. COFO Peer Practitioner Network
3. COFO Mentoring Committee
4. Leave Transfer Initiative
5. COFO Website Move to New Host
6. Next Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) Meeting on September 29th
7. Federal Ombuds Survey Results
8. USOA Federal Government Chapter
9. Ombuds Day, October 14th
10. Announcements
11. General Questions
12. Discussion Topic

Highlights:

- 1. 2021 COFO Annual Conference**
 - a. Date for conference: October 15, 2021
 - b. Conference will be virtual and replaces the monthly meeting for October
 - c. Conference agenda will be finalized this week and registration will open next week
 - d. Full-day conference 9am – 5pm EDT held on WebEx platform
- 2. COFO Peer Practitioner Network**
 - a. Kickoff meeting was two weeks ago and groups assigned
 - b. Five groups with 22 participants were assigned
 - c. Groups will self-directed, and first meetings will be held soon
 - d. Participation and progress of groups will be assessed in February 2022
 - e. Discussions in the group maintain principle of confidentiality
- 3. COFO Mentoring Committee**
 - a. Applications for new cohorts of mentor/mentee will be announced in October

- b. More information will be given at a special session at COFO Conference
- c. If you are interested in the joining the mentoring committee or have questions please contact Virginia Behr virginia.behr@FDA.HHS.GOV, Bill Maher William.maurer@census.gov, Brenda Doty bdoty@FMC.GOV, Lisa Levine lisa.levine@usdoj.gov or Fatimah Mateen fatimah.mateen@hq.dhs.gov

4. Leave Transfer Initiative

- a. Plan to connect COFO ombuds who are approved for the Voluntary Leave Transfer Program at their agency with ombuds from other agencies who have leave to donate
- b. Important to help ombuds in small offices considering our professional ombudsman standards of practice
- c. If you'd like to assist with this new initiative or need leave, please contact Wendy Kamenshine, wendy.kamenshine@cfpb.gov

5. COFO Website Move to New Host

- a. COFO will move from the hosted site by the Department of Education to a new host
- b. If your agency is available to host the COFO website on their server, please contact Paul Sotoudeh Paul.Sotoudeh@USPTO.GOV

6. Next Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) Meeting, 09/29/2021

- a. OSO meetings were started at the being of the pandemic to help ombuds support each other and discuss current topics of concern
- b. Success of the meetings has led to their continuation and are generally held two weeks after the membership meeting
- c. Next meeting of Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) will be 9/29/2021, 2-3 pm EDT
- d. Topic will be a continuation of the previous month topic, reminder will be sent soon

7. Federal Ombuds Survey Results

- a. Tahirih Varner and team at NPS sent a survey in February of 2021 to the COFO membership to determine the workload of Federal Ombuds
- b. Survey was completed with 27 responses 21 from internal and 6 from external ombuds
- c. Several observations were made from the data, and a few will be shared today
- d. Each ombuds office that responded generally had multiple ombuds
- e. External teams generally had fewer ombuds with the title of ombuds, however seem to have others who performed duties of ombuds
- f. Nationwide ombuds generally serve 2% of their population
- g. External ombuds may not be able to measure percentage of population/visitors served
- h. Most ombuds offices have designated subunits that serve a specific population of an organization by bureau or geographic designation

- i. Impact of pandemic seems to show trend of work slowdown during first half of pandemic then increasing numbers as the start of this year
- j. Slides will be shared via email to COFO membership

8. USOA Federal Government Chapter

- a. Federal Government Chapter of USOA will be restarting
- b. Syretta Jarrett is Chapter Chair and Erica Katherine is Co-Chair
- c. USOA will hold the Annual Membership Meeting on Wednesday, 09/22/2021 at 3 – 4:30 pm EDT via Zoom
- d. With the restart of the USOA Federal Chapter look forward to building community with your fellow ombuds on a quarterly basis
- e. Quarterly meetings will include guest speakers, networking opportunities, discussion of best practices, and efforts to expand on diversity, equity, and inclusion within the ombuds community
- f. Other officers to be elected during the first meeting are secretary, communications officer, and training officer
- g. Contact Syretta Jarret, Syreeta.Jarrett@dodiis.mil or Erica Katherine Erica.Katherine@fda.hhs.gov for questions or additional information
- h. It was commented that Zoom is difficult for many Federal ombuds to use due to restrictions and WebEx is a more Federal friendly format

9. Ombuds Day, 10/14/2021

- a. Ombuds Day is October 14th, and many events are held by the ABA to commemorate the day along with many state proclamations
- b. See ABA website for more details: <https://abaombudsday.wordpress.com/about-ombuds-day/>

10. Announcements

- a. none

11. General Questions

- a. Does anyone have a privacy statement either on your internal or external webpage or on your outgoing emails? If you do have one, what does it say?
 - i. One ombuds asked if anyone was told they do not need a privacy act statement?
 - ii. This is not the statement that is Agency-wide but a statement specific to ombuds work
 - iii. Wendy Kamenshine stated please contact her if you want to discuss offline
 - iv. Wendy's office was told they were required to have one by law
 - v. Follow-up question was asked if the requirement was stated as specific to ombuds work or to certain functions
 - vi. The requirement was stated that if anyone collected information within a government agency a privacy act statement was needed

- vii. It was noted that sensitive information like names, phone numbers, and location groupings that may identify a specific person may not be maintained; however if data collection is maintained relating to it then it could be considered data under the privacy act regulation
- viii. More information would be needed to make further determinations and Wendy would bring more information to the group as determined

12. Discussion Topic: Have you noticed a change in your visitors since the pandemic began? Some of our offices have reported (among other things) increased anger, a greater sense of entitlement, or a lot more anxiety. Let’s discuss, compare notes, and talk about strategies for serving these visitors

- a. Reports of increased anger, anxieties, and a greater sense of entitlement coming forth specifically during the pandemic
- b. One ombuds noted the types of requests have changed and the approach of management towards employee needs have changed, meaning management seemed more sensitive to needs of visitor
- c. Telework needs specifically were more thoughtfully considered by many management groups
- d. One external ombuds stated their office noticed angrier visitors that have more politically driven topics that not do not pertain to their process concerns
- e. Internal visitors seem to need more coaching for an issue to help with increased anxieties
- f. External ombuds are often the office of last resort and thus sometimes have more build up to their concerns
- g. The idea of entitlement may seem different from the traditional meaning of the word as many have been doing their work remotely, and now they expect some flexibility
- h. The level of distress for visitors is different and they are sometimes relaying information in a way that is not coherent and with a different level of urgency
- i. Due to time constraints this topic was shorten and will be discussed more next month

Attendance 09/15/2021

Last	First	Call-In
Bedlivy	Dawn	1
Berg	Mollie	1
Bookstein	Monique	1
Brown	Amy	1
Brown	Andrea	1

UNCLASSIFIED

Last	First	Call-In
Cameron	Bob	1
Carmouche	Colette	1
Davenport Dayes	Nicky	1
Dean	Karen	1
DeBerry	Marcella	1
Fleming	Tasha	1
Foisy	Paul-Dominick	1
Footman	Aaron	1
Garmon	Felisa	1
Gordon	Laurel	1
Harley	Jasmine	1
Hartman	Jessie	1
Hurley	Nathan	1
Jarrett	Syreeta	1
Johnson	Dawn	1
Kamenshine	Wendy	1
Katherine	Erica	1
Kinnavy	Noreen	1
Kith	Sarah	1
Lawrence	Steve	1
Lenkel	Laurie	1
Levine	Lisa	1
Lewis	Mark D.	1
Lloyd	Brenda	1
Malone	Marcus	1
Maurer	Bill	1
Mazur	Cynthia (Cindy)	1
McGuire	Carrie	1
McNeil	Tracey	1
Michael	David	1
Milner	Heather	1
Morey	Chauncenette	1
Patel	Bina	1
Patno	Arielle	1

UNCLASSIFIED

Last	First	Call-In
Piziali	Jamie	1
Porch	Susanne	1
Rojas	Nick	1
Roth	Lewis	1
Rowe	Mary	1
Semo	Alina	1
Smith	Julie	1
Sotoudeh	Paul	1
Stergio	Marcus	1
Thomson	Ronnie	1
Varner	Tahirih	1
Vermillion	Chris	1
Villafane	Jacqueline	1
Wolfe	Lexi	1
Zrubek	Tom	1
Total		54