



COALITION OF FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN

MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date/Time: November 14, 2018, 1:30pm – 3:00pm

Location: USDA, 1400 Independence Ave, SW, 1st Floor, Room 1052(c) and Dial-in

Agenda:

1. Conference Recap
2. Mentoring Program Update
3. Discussion Topics
4. Membership Requests and Comments

Highlights:

1. Conference Recap

- a. Thank-You to all who worked on putting on the conference and all who attended either in-person or virtually on Web-Ex.
- b. A special shout-out to the Conference Committee (and Conference co-chair).
- c. A good mix of presenters both from the ombuds community and individuals with other non-ombuds roles.
- d. Thank-You to all survey participants and the survey link is still open if you would like to provide feedback.
<https://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/4645774/COFO-Post-Conference-Survey>
- e. Conference committee will discuss feedback and report back to the group.

2. Mentoring Program Update

- a. There are 11 mentees who will be matched with mentors.
- b. Mentees have expressed areas they would like mentorship in and are being matched with mentors who are skilled in the requested areas.
- c. Both mentees and mentors will participate in separate one-hour video orientation.
- d. Two or three individuals are not eligible to be mentees according to the guidelines, and the committee will look to see if they can be matched with mentors nonetheless.
- e. Thank-You to all of the Mentoring Committee members for the hard work in getting this program started.
- f. If you have any questions and/or interested in becoming a mentor/mentee, please contact Wendy Kamenshine (Wendy.Kamenshine@cfpb.gov) and David Michael (David.Michael@nih.gov).

3. Discussion Topic: Receipt of Petitions

- a. Does your office receive petitions from the public or on behalf of organizational members, and what is the process when a petition is received?

1. One office receives hundreds and even thousands of emails or letters all with the same subject and text. At first ombuds tried to respond to all senders but found they did not receive a response and discontinued responding. The subject matter and the number of writers is provided to the organizations Executive Secretariat for awareness.
2. Similar experience at another office, often the topics relate to a topical event in the news, many individual emails with the same or similar subjects and texts, leadership informed of topics and numbers but agency does not respond to mass correspondence. When constituents express concern about rule making or changed policy, office does inform sender that the ombuds office is not an agent of notice and provides the correct venue to the sender.
3. Ombuds office email has been provided at outreach events and is now in circulation such that office receives numerous emails about specific concerns. Ombuds collects like issues and alerts leadership to the concerns being shared.
4. Office receives hundreds but not thousands of letters or emails looking to bring specific concerns to the attention of agency leadership. Limitations prevent the office from advocating for expanded privileges for the writers and the office informs the writers of the ombuds role.

4. Discussion Topic: Civility

a. How does your office fit into the organizational discussion of civility?

1. Served as an ad hoc member of agency task force on civility. Concern that task force recommendations could result in adverse actions being taken and needed to remain separate from group. Much of what is discussed as civility relates to situations where individuals should know right from wrong and some individuals walk right to the line of what is unacceptable, supervisors for example can be the worst offenders. Implementation of civility policy is the real challenge.
2. Civility is not a topic incorporated into ombuds program or agency ADR but is part of agency's anti-harassment program. Reluctance to get too involved, including a possible free speech concern. Agency is looking at civility policy but has not addressed bullying through policy and bullying is a bigger concern.
3. Civil treatment is a compliance issue for leaders, message is underscored for managers that they have an affirmative obligation to act. Might be able to learn from others, for instance it was once taboo to speak of safety issues but this taboo was removed, perhaps a similar process could affirm employees right to speak up about harassment.
4. Without management responsiveness, any program is useless, and ultimately the question can be; why hasn't incivility been addressed with existing rules and policy?
5. Civility is being surveyed by a non-ombuds group at one agency.
6. The use of civility and associated training brings us to the lowest possible common denominator and into compliance mindset, ombuds

work is inherently more complex and ombuds work results in the building and use of higher skills within an agency.

7. It is really about respectful interaction and there are themes that are shared with senior leadership to help them understand the problem.
 8. Reminds me of an initiative towards mindfulness training in the past, need to be proactive to prevent things from happening and need to make people aware of the negative impact that unprofessional behavior and talk can have on the work environment.
 9. Concerned that we might fall into the trap of following the bright and shiny object, civility is currently a hot topic, and agency has taken on the lack of respectful treatment as a cultural issue. Christine Porath has a quick read; *Mastering Civility: A Manifesto for the Workplace*, and several TEDx talks available online that discuss civility.
 10. Porath spoke at one agency and the agency Chaplin is leading a lot of civility sessions. The ombuds office works with leaders to build both their confidence and confidence in working with conflict; teaching a “listening cycle”. The next topic for leaders is empathy training, there are senior leaders at the kindergarten level.
 11. Our work is really more about organizational development than compliance with EEOC rules and reducing harassment complaints.
 12. Simon Sinek has spoken about the need for mid-level leaders to practice and model positive behaviors.
 13. The *Harvard Business Review* noted that conflicts in the corporate setting cost an average of \$7800 a day.
 14. Many EEOC judges are unaware about the work that goes on outside the formal channels, they would benefit from learning more about the work of ombuds. There is an opportunity at the next Excel Conference for ombuds to present information on ombuds work to the EEOC community. Information on conference and proposals is at: <https://eeotraining.eeoc.gov/profile/web/index.cfm?PKwebID=0x2547d970&varPage=location>
5. Member Requests and Comments
1. If your agency has a good anti-harassment policy please contact Bill Maurer (William.Maurer@hq.doe.gov) or Scott Deyo (Scott.Deyo@hq.doe.gov) or call them at 202-586-0500.
 2. COFO should consider using coordinated events to leverage our impact. The work of the Inter-Agency ADR Working Group was noted for its effort to share resources within the community. www.adr.gov for more information.
 3. A member wished us all a happy, healthy and safe Thanksgiving.

Attendees:

In-Person

Berg, Mollie -National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency
Dea, Joanne -United States Department of Agriculture
Deyo, Scott –Department of Energy
Hill, Gary- National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency
Kinnavy, Noreen – United States Agency for Global Media
Maurer, Bill – Department of Energy
Perez, Neida –Organization of American States
Chad, (*need last name*) –Department of Energy

Call-In

Balick, Howard, FDA
Bedlivy, Dawn –National Security Agency
Bell, Alana –Transportation Security Administration
Behr, Virginia – Department of Health and Human Services
Berg, Mollie -National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency
Bookstein, Monique –Federal Bureau of Investigation
Byron, Jason –National Institutes of Health
Coleman, Jean – US Small Business Administration
Day-Lewis, Kimberley – Department of Homeland Security
Doyle, Bill- U.S. Secret Service
Fox, Angela -United States Department of Agriculture
Gordon, Laurel –United States Marshals Service
Hurley, Nathan – Department of Health and Human Services
Larkins, Marcia – Department of Health and Human Services
Lenkel, Laurie – Department of Health and Human Services
Levine, Lisa –Department of Justice
McGuire, Carrie – Office of Government Information Services
McNeil, Tracey –United States Securities and Exchange Commission
Merrix, Celeste – Department of Homeland Security
Michael, David – Department of Health and Human Services
Milner, Heather – Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
Murphy, Martha – National Archives and Records Administration
Rippy, Katherine – Department of Health and Human Services
Roman, Rafael –National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Semo, Alina – National Archives and Records Administration
Skodacek, Ken –Food and Drug Administration
Smith, Tyler – Department of Health and Human Services
Stukes, Jock - National Reconnaissance Organization
Todd, Julie –Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
Weber, Guy - National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency
Wolfe, Lexi – Small Business Administration