



COALITION OF FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN

MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date/Time: December 12, 2018, 1:30pm – 3:00pm

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

Agenda:

1. Update on COFO website
2. Mentoring Program Update
3. Discussion Topic
4. Looking Back: Recapping “The Year in COFO”
5. Looking Forward: What do you want to see from COFO in 2019?
6. Announcements

Highlights:

1. Website Technical Issues

- a. Currently the COFO website is functioning at a normal status.
- b. Functional issues with the website may be due to browser/server issues. Try accessing the website via different browsers such as work/home computers or cells.

2. Mentoring Program Update

- i. The Mentoring committee continues to meet bimonthly. Currently, the group is focusing in the following areas:
 1. Mentor/Mentee Selections: Mentors selection and mentee matches have been made and matched successfully. 11 mentees have been matched with their mentors. Guy Weber has been selected as a mentor reservist.
 2. Orientation: The mentor committee will be providing a 30 minute orientation for mentors and mentees, independently via a webinar, followed by Q&A.
- b. If you have any questions, please contact David Michael (David.Michael@nih.gov).

3. Discussion Topic: Ombudsing & Partnerships

- a. How do you navigate ombudsing a particular office in your agencies when you also need to work with that office programmatically? An example presented was partnering with Human Resources (HR).
 - i. Participants shared best practices of how they would handle ombudsing with a particular office in their agencies. Examples include,

1. The importance of building rapport in a professional working relationship, one that encourages an understanding of independent boundaries.
2. Holding difficult conversations as a function of the ombuds office to address checks and balances in every department including, Human Resources.
3. An emphasis on the importance and necessity of an ombuds to consistently act upon foundational practices when addressing wrongdoing. It allows for the ombuds to remain true to the values of the role, cautiously avoiding “bleeding” out of lines.
 - ii. Suggestion: continue to develop professional partnerships that offer trust and rapport, encouraging difficult conversations to take place, when needed.
 - iii. Takeaway: When addressing inappropriate practices with an internal partner, it is important to act upon the ombuds principles of practice to ensure neutrality and independence are not compromised to attain a successful working relationship.

4. Looking Back: Recapping “The Year in COFO”

- a. IOA Annual Conference 2018: Small group of COFO members, Patrick Holman, Lisa Levine, Joanne Dea and Laurel Gordon designed and led the framework for the government sector discussion around the theme “Tools in Times of Change”. The theme spun off into numerous discussions that took place during the monthly COFO membership conference call.
- b. Records Committee: A new committee was formed to discuss the strategy of records keeping and way forward.
- c. COFO Mentorship Committee: COFO has launched its first ever mentorship committee, executed on the working document developed by Wendy Kamenshine and David Michael. The mentoring committee is gaining ground to other ADR practitioners in the Federal Government seeking to branch independent mentoring groups.
- d. COFO Annual Conference: Successfully attended by 200 participants online and in person. The conference was well received in engagement and content.
- e. Ombuds Day 2018: The first ever launch of the ombuds day was successfully attended by individuals from various sectors including COFO, academia and private sectors. The event was well received by the conflict resolution practitioners. COFO members who volunteered their efforts in the success of the event include, Wendy Kamenshine (CFPB), Lauren Marx (Chi Resolution), and Tangita Daramola (CMS/HHS).
- f. Ombuds Consultancy and Design: A few members of the COFO Executive Committee members had the opportunity to consult in advancing the profession of opening new ombuds programs in the federal sector based on expertise, knowledge and know-how.

5. Looking Forward: What do you want to see from COFO in 2019?

- a. The Executive Committee would like to hear from you, what do you want to see from COFO in 2019? Please send your ideas and thoughts to a COFO Executive Committee member or email COFO Chair, Paul Sotoudeh (Paul.Sotoudeh@USPTO.GOV).
- b. The Executive Committee is interested is calling for suggestions on potential themes and date for the annual conference.

6. Announcements

- a. CFPB has released their annual report to the Director, thereafter it will be released for the public.
- b. COFO Mentorship Program: COFO's mentorship program has brought forward high energy. As a result, Inter-Agency Alternative Dispute Resolution Working Group (IADRWG) is interested in launching a similar mentoring program.
- c. Ombuds Day 2019: The success of Ombuds Day 2018 has gained momentum and high energy. It's almost 2019, which means it's time to start planning for next year's ombuds events. Ombuds Day 2019 will be October 10th, and the ABA Dispute Resolution Section is seeking out volunteers from the federal ombuds community for the 2019 Ombuds Day Task Force. Volunteers do not need to be ABA members, but do need to be committed to making Ombuds Day a success by developing a vision and plan (which may include 1-4 events nationwide and an online campaign) alongside the other Task Force members. Task Force planning meetings will begin in January, and the ABA DRS will support the Task Force with money, materials, resources, and staff. If you're interested, please reach out to Liz Hill (Elizabeth.Hill@colorado.edu) or Paul Sotoudeh (Paul.Sotoudeh@USPTO.GOV).
- d. USOA Conference: The United States Ombudsman Association has announced that it will hold its 40th Annual Conference September 18-20, 2019 at the Hilton Waikiki Beach Hotel in Honolulu, HI. Pre-conference workshops will be offered September 16-17, 2019. Details of the 2019 Annual Conference will be posted as they become available. The conference host will be Hawaii Ombudsman, Robin Matsunaga, whose office is marking its 50th anniversary, the first classical ombudsman office established in the United States.
- e. The International Ombudsman Association annual conference in New Orleans April 1-3, 2019 in New Orleans, LA. The Foundations Course be offered prior to the conference from March 29-31. For more information, please visit: [IOA Conference 2019](#).
- f. COFO's winter gathering/party this Friday at 4 PM at St. Arnold's Mussel Bar, 3433 Connecticut Avenue NW, in the Cleveland Park neighborhood of DC. Please join your COFO colleagues for a relaxed early evening of outstanding conversation.

Attendees:

In-Person

Maurer, Bill – Department of Energy
Sotoudeh, Paul – United States Patent and Trademark Office
Webb, Robert – Armed Forces Retirement Home
Weber, Guy --National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency

Call-In

Barrar, Riley – Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
Balick, Howard – Department of Health and Human Services
Bedlivy, Dawn - National Security Agency
Bloch, Brian – Department of Interior
Berg, Mollie – National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency
Bookstein, Monique – Federal Bureau of Investigation
Brown, Andrea – United States Patent and Trademark Office
Doyle, Bill – U.S. Secret Service
Epps, Ayanna – Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation
Fox, Angela – U.S. Department of Agriculture
Garmon, Felisa – Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
Gnatt, Sheldon – National Security Agency
Gordon, Laurel – United States Department of Justice
Heffernan, Claire- Transportation Security Administration
Landau, Natalie – State Dept.
Levine, Lisa - Department of Justice
McGuire, Carrie – Office of Government Information Services
Merrix, Celeste – Department of Homeland Security
Michael, David – National Institutes of Health
Miller, Robin - Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
Miller-Sander, Dawn - Conflict Transformation Associates
Patel, Bina – National Ground Intelligence Center
Smith, Tyler – National Institutes of Health
Stukes, Jock – National Reconnaissance Organization
Wolfe, Lexi – Transportation Security Administration
Whittington, Frederick – United States Department of Labor, OIG