



COALITION OF FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN

MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date/Time: March 13, 2019 1:30pm – 3:00pm

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

Agenda:

1. COFO Membership Location
2. COFO Annual Conference
3. ABA Dispute Resolution Section Ombuds Committee Update
4. Ombuds Research Survey
5. IOA Annual Conference Updates and Requests
6. Discussion Topic
7. Announcements

Highlights:

- 1. COFO Membership Location**
 - a. USDA has been gracious to host our monthly meetings over the past year. We will have to find a new venue. New venue considerations: centrally located that is metro accessible.
 - b. For possible venue suggestions, please email Paul Sotoudeh (Paul.Sotoudeh@USPTO.GOV).
- 2. COFO Annual Conference**
 - a. Seeking volunteers for the annual conference, which is expected to be held later this year.
 - b. Please contact Paul Sotoudeh (Paul.Sotoudeh@USPTO.GOV) or a member of the COFO Executive Committee for questions or suggestions.
- 3. ABA Dispute Resolution Section Ombuds Committee Update**
 - a. The Committee has been working towards developing the Model Organizational Ombudsman Act. The purpose of the Act is to create a model statute which defines what an organizational ombuds is and codifies protections for the role, which may impact Federal ombuds programs. The hope is that state legislatures will pass this Act into law in their jurisdictions. The Committee is finalizing the document and will it send out to the federal ombuds community for comments.
 - b. Proposed ombuds act will be circulated through the COFO Executive Committee. For questions or concerns, please contact Wendy Kamenshine (Wendy.Kamenshine@cfpb.gov) and/or Paul Sotoudeh (Paul.Sotoudeh@USPTO.GOV).
- 4. Ombuds Research Survey**

- a. Tyler Smith from NIH has been working for years with his colleagues in higher education (Shereen Bingham, University of Nebraska at Omaha; Bryan Hanson, Virginia Tech; Andrea Griffin, Indiana University Northwest) to develop a tool that measures perception. The primary goal of this tool is to understand perceptions across the organization that enables ombuds to consider the impact of their practices and how they frame communication about their office.
- b. Currently, the tool has been piloted in academic internal ombuds organizations. The group would like to extend the pilot study to the federal sector. Tyler and his colleagues are seeking volunteers to answer a 2 minute preliminary anonymous survey on this topic. Tyler will send out an email containing a link to take the survey. The final survey tool will be made available to all ombuds at no cost. For more information, please contact Tyler Smith (Tyler.Smith@nih.gov).

5. IOA Conference Updates & Requests

- a. The government sector discussion will be facilitated by Deanna Yuille (FDA), Elisa Enriquez (Los Alamos Laboratory) and Bina Patel (NGIC). The discussion topic: addressing harassment in the workplace. It is a 360 degree discussion that is designed to address harassment in the workplace for both external and internal ombudsman. For questions or thoughts, please contact Elisa Enriquez (elisae@lanl.gov), Deanna Yuille (Deanna.Yuillebanford@fda.hhs.gov) or Bina Patel (Bina.M.Patel.civ@mail.mil).

6. Discussion Topic: Early Warning Signs

- a. How do you get early warnings out in the agency? Who do you go to report early warnings?
 - i. Participants shared best practices of how they would handle early warnings in their agencies. Examples include,
 1. The importance of building rapport in a professional working relationship, one that encourages an understanding of independent boundaries, with individuals of influence such as Human Resources, Senior Leaders, and/or Legal Counsel).
 2. Early warnings may include sensitive topics and depending on the issue, as ombuds, we have to remain flexible to developing professional relationships with leadership in the organization to comfortably report it.
 3. Due to confidentiality, it can be challenging to report early warning signs. A few ways to report early warning signs without releasing confidentiality: collect trends associated with a specific issue and early warning; research on the issue to gather information and report it as a general trend or major outlier. Some agencies are required to report early warning signs such as potential whistleblowers or IG complaints and obligated to report it.
 4. For both external and internal ombuds, calculus to report early warning signs is not necessarily different. Whether the issue reported is external or internal, the ombudsman must seek to build professional working relationships within the organization to report early warning signs.

5. Early warning is a function of what the ombuds does and not necessarily a process. Currently, a defined process of reporting early warning does not exist.
- ii. Suggestion: continue to develop professional partnerships that offer trust and rapport, encouraging difficult conversations to take place, when needed, specifically to report early warning signs.
- iii. Takeaway: When addressing early warning signals, it is important to act upon the ombuds principles of practice to ensure neutrality, confidentiality and independence are not compromised to attain a successful working relationship. It is a mutual layer that is dependent upon building partnerships with other internal functions.

7. Announcements

a. Trainings & Conferences

- i. COFO Executive Office Elections (next year): We are currently half way through our tenure with the present Executive Committee - if you are thinking of running for any of the positions next year, it is a good time to start thinking about it.
- ii. IOA Annual Conference will be held in New Orleans, LA from 1-4 April, 2019.
- iii. Cinergy Conflict Coaching Training will be held in Richmond, VA on 9 April, 2019.
- iv. ABA Dispute Resolution Conference will be held in Minneapolis, MN from 10-13 April, 2019.
- v. Kennesaw State University will hold a Summer Training Institute in Savannah, GA from 19-22 June, 2019.
- vi. USOA Annual Conference will be held in Honolulu, HI from 18-22 September.

b. Job Announcements

- i. CFPB is seeking applicants for Private Education Loan Ombuds. Posting is on USAJobs.gov and will close 19 March, 2019.
- ii. US District Courts is seeking a Circuit Mediator. The Circuit Mediator position is from the Office of the Circuit Executive, United States Courts of the DC Circuit. POC for questions about the opening is Robert Fisher, the Circuit Mediator, who can be reached at 202-216-7343.
- iii. FEMA is seeking applicants for an Externship to work in the ADR/Ombuds position. POC is Vik Kapoor (vikram.kapoor@fema.dhs.gov)

Attendees:

Last	First	Department	Agency	In-Person
Berg	Mollie	Department of Defense	National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency	1
Dea	Joanne	United States Department of Agriculture		1
Deyo	Scott	Department of Energy	Deyo Ombuds Solutions, LLC	1
Kinnavy	Noreen	International Broadcasting Bureau Voice of America and Office of Cuba Broadcasting		1
Maurer	Bill	Department of Energy		1
Sotoudeh	Paul	United States Patent and Trademark Office		1
			Total	6
Last	First	Department	Agency	Call-In
Asar	Sharon	Consumer Financial Protection Bureau		1
Balick	Howard	Department of Health and Human Services	Food and Drug Administration	1
Barrar	Riley	Consumer Financial Protection Bureau		1
Bloch	Brian	Department of the Interior		1
Brown	Andrea	United States Patent and Trademark Office		1
Byron	Jason	Department of Health and Human Services	National Institutes of Health	1
Day-Lewis	Kimberley	Department of Homeland Security	Federal Law Enforcement Training Center	1
Donnelly	Wanda	Department of State		1
Doyle	Bill	Department of Homeland Security	United States Secret Service	1
Epps	Ayanna	Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation	Office of the Internal Ombudsman	1
Forfa	Tracey	FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine		1
Garmon	Felisa	Consumer Financial Protection Bureau		1
Gnatt	Sheldon	National Security Agency		1
Gordon	Laurel	Department of Justice	US Marshals Service	1
Herling	Jasmine	National Credit Union Administration		1

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Hill	Gary	Department of Defense	National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency	1
Katherine	Erica		Food and Drug Administration	1
Kamenshine	Wendy	Consumer Financial Protection Bureau		1
Kelly	John	Small Business Administration		1
Lenkel	Laurie	Department of Health and Human Services	Food and Drug Administration	1
Leone	Joe	NSA		1
Levine	Lisa	Department of Justice		1
McGuire	Carrie	Office of Government Information Services	NARA	1
McNeil	Tracey	U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission		1
Miller	Rozmyn	Consumer Financial Protection Bureau		1
Mills	Laurel	Department of Justice	US Marshals Service	1
Milner	Heather	Consumer Financial Protection Bureau		1
Morey	Chauncenette	Department of Justice	Federal Bureau of Investigation	1
Murphy	Martha	Office of Government Information Services	National Archives and Records Administration	1
Ogunyale	Patricia	USDA		1
Patel	Bina	NGIC		1
Rippy	Catherine	Medicare Beneficiary Ombudsman		1
Patno	Arielle	USDA	Center for Tobacco Products, Office of the Center Director	1
Semo	Alina	National Archives and Records Administration		1
Smith	Tyler	Department of Health and Human Services	National Institutes of Health	1
Thompson	Darlene	United States Department of Agriculture	Farm Service Agency	1
Valdez	Roberta	Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation		1
Vermillion	Chris		Transportation Security Administration	1
Walker	Don	Department of Defense	US Army Medical Command	1
Weber	Guy	Department of Defense	National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency	1
Whittington	Fred (Whitt)	Department of Labor	Office of Inspector General	1
Williams	Talisha	Department of Health and Human Services	Food and Drug Administration	1
Wolfe	Alexandria	Department of Homeland Security	Transportation Security Administration	1
Zeller	Jessica	Health and Human Services	Food and Drug Administration	1

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Zrubek	Tom	Department of Defense	Inspector General	1
			Total	45