



## COALITION OF FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN

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### MEETING MINUTES

**Meeting Date/Time:** April 10, 2019 1:30pm – 3:00pm

**Location:** Dial-In

**Agenda:**

1. COFO Membership Location
2. COFO Mentoring Committee Update
3. IOA Annual Conference Reflections
4. Discussion Topic
5. Announcements

**Highlights:**

**1. COFO Membership Location**

- a. Location: We hope to have a final location confirmed before our meeting next month. We appreciate everyone's flexibility in joining us via telecom today.

**2. COFO Mentoring Committee Update**

- a. COFO Mentoring Program launched its first class of mentors/mentees in January. The Committee is excited to launch a second class as of June 2019. We are in the process of soliciting mentors and mentees. If you are interested in participating as a mentor/mentee, including doubling up as either, please contact [COFOMentoring@nih.gov](mailto:COFOMentoring@nih.gov)
  - i. Another round of email reminders will be sent to COFO members with the information.
- b. Reflections from 1<sup>st</sup> Round: Mentors reflected on personal growth experiences from being a mentor. For example, working with new ombuds has allowed mentors to appreciate the diversity of thought and talents brought forward from their mentees. It has served to be a rewarding experience.

**3. IOA Annual Conference Reflections**

- a. Conference served as a reminder of the IOA Standards of Practice.
- b. IOA had a variety of topics ranging from sexual harassment, cultural intelligence, emotional intelligence and race. Sessions were extremely challenging and thought provoking; challenging the audience to think outside of the box. Dr. DiAngelo's engagement on 'White Fragility' touched upon racial insularity, speaking to the audience on advantages of passively benefitting from racism, while challenging perceptions of structural racism. It allows participants to reflect on how we can bring facilitate equity in our practices.

- c. Conflict Coaching Session: Cinnie Noble, Founder of CENERGY led a plenary on conflict coaching and questions to pose in a session. The questions were unique and ombuds can apply them to help navigate issues that may arise.
- d. Creating Conditions for Critical Discussion: Honest Reflections on Our Practice: Led by Tyler Smith, Guy Weber, and Mollie Berg – a robust discussion that allowed participants to reflect on the essential role of the ombuds in helping visitors make sense of what is happening to them.
- e. Diversity of topics – the conference allowed participants to attend multiple sessions due to IOA’s ability to hold diversity of topics. Please contact Katie Manderson if you wish to submit a topic for next year’s conference.
- f. Government Sector Discussion: discussion on methods of practice as an organizational ombuds and differences within them was inquired further. Terms used to reference visitors and methods of practice vary in each organization.
- g. 50 Shades of Conflict: participants had an opportunity to discuss ‘gray areas’ in their independent ombuds function on a general scale. The activities conducted in this session will be built upon for the COFO Annual Conference for both external and internal practicing ombuds.
- h. Cultural Session by Wayne Blair: The discussion topic was interesting and eye opening in terms of understanding national vs. organizational culture. Mr. Blair discussed the nuances of cultural dimensions, reflecting upon how they influence workplace culture in terms of leadership, colleague relations and expectations. Mr. Blair mentioned the ombuds function as the ‘organizational whisperer’ who serves as a middle person to mitigate conflict between leaders and the workforce.
- i. “Ombuds Work” - Mars Inc. is working with Bravely, a tech company that has created an app to accommodate a quickly growing workforce, while catering to the new generation that relies on social media. This is a powerful tool that we should think about in the government sector in terms of how to serve a growing workforce. Bravely provides Human Resources services that has an ombuds function embedded into this area. The company serves as a contractor.
- j. Office Closure Plenary: the plenary was led by Reese Ramos (Sandia Labs) and (Baker Hughes) that was forced to close their offices quickly. A major takeaway from this session was the importance of senior stakeholder buy in. Developing a senior stakeholder relationship is vital for the growth and sustainment of the ombuds office in any organization.

**4. Discussion Topic: How do ombuds handle conflicts or difficult discussions in the workplace? Does an ombuds need an ombuds?** *The topic discussion is a continuing discussion that came from the session, “Undebate” from the IOA conference.*

- a. Participants discussed the importance of not shying away from disagreements and holding these conversations with their visitors/inquirers. The important element is to understand how people operate and process information differently. Specifically, as an ombuds who provides feedback to their visitor/inquirer should keep an open mind and listen to listen. To provide ombuds services, conflict resolution specialists should be cognizant of the proper use of the office. Participants stated the importance of tapping

into our trained professional hats of understanding when visitors/inquirers are checking a box or coming to resolve conflict.

- b. Participants discussed the importance of obtaining feedback in our practices and when done respectfully, asking questions and allowing visitors/inquirers to vent. For example, the COFO monthly calls are safe spaces to have discussions and provide feedback to one another, and the COFO Executive Committee. The COFO Executive Committee wants to serve each of our members better and in this space, welcome appropriate criticism and feedback.

## **5. Announcements**

### **k. Trainings**

- i. Training: Interagency ADR DOD Group will be holding a large group discussion on May 15, 2019 from 9:00am to 3:30pm at EPA (1200 Pennsylvania Ave). The discussions will be centered on the future of ADR.

### **l. Job Announcements**

- i. Department of Homeland Security: Joint Duty Assignment, GS 14, TS/SCI for one year at the Office of I&A.
- ii. National Reconnaissance Office: Internal Organizational Ombudsman position will be posting soon. It is a 3 year rotational assignment.

**Attendees:**

<b>Last</b>	<b>First</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Agency</b>	<b>Call In</b>
Asar	Sharen	Consumer Financial Protection Bureau		1
Balick	Howard	Department of Health and Human Services	Food and Drug Administration	1
Berg	Mollie	Department of Defense	National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency	1
Brown	Andrea	United States Patent and Trademark Office		1
Bryon	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
Doyle	Bill	Department of Homeland Security	United States Secret Service	1
Epps	Ayanna	Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation	Office of the Internal Ombudsman	1
Gnatt	Sheldon	National Security Agency		1
Gordon	Laurel	Department of Justice	US Marshals Service	1
Hill	Gary	Department of Defense	National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency	1
Kamenshine	Wendy	Consumer Financial Protection Bureau		1
Katherine	Erica	Department of Health and Human Services	Food and Drug Administration	1
Leone	Joe	National Security Agency		1
Levine	Lisa	Department of Justice		1
Manderson	Katie		State of Texas	1
McGuire	Carrie	Office of Government Information Services	NARA	1
McNeil	Tracey	U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission		1
Merrix	Celeste	Department of Homeland Security		1
Michael	David	Department of Health and Human Services	National Institutes of Health	1
Miller	Rozmyn	Consumer Financial Protection Bureau		1
Mills	Laurel	Department of Justice	US Marshals Service	1
Moore	Sandi	US Army		1
Morey	Chauncenette	Department of Justice	Federal Bureau of Investigation	1
Murphy	Martha	Office of Government Information Services	National Archives and Records Administration	1
Patel	Bina	NGIC		1

## UNCLASSIFIED

Patno	Arielle	USDA	Center for Tobacco Products, Office of the Center Director	1
Reed	Janary		Defense Intelligence Agency	1
Reilly	Kevin		NASA	1
Rowe	Mary	MIT		1
Smith	Tyler	Department of Health and Human Services	National Institutes of Health	1
Stukes	Jock	National Reconnaissance Office		1
Sotoudeh	Paul	United States Patent and Trademark Office		1
Valdez	Roberta	Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation		1
Vermillion	Chris	Department of Homeland Security	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	Frederick	Department of Labor		1
Wolfe	Alexandria	Department of Homeland Security	Transportation Security Administration	1
Zeller	Jessica	Health and Human Services	Food and Drug Administration	1
Zrubek	Tom	Department of Defense	Inspector General	1
			<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>