



COALITION OF FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN

MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date/Time: August 08, 2018, 1:30pm – 3:00pm

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

Agenda:

1. Listserv Issues
2. Annual COFO Conference Update
3. Mentoring Program Update
4. Discussion Topics
5. Announcements

Highlights:

1. Listserv Technical Issues

- a. Functional issues with the COFO Listserv continue. The Executive Committee is working with the Department of Education to determine the root cause of the issue.
- b. The Executive Committee suggested a workaround that involves a simple distribution list for COFO members via a non-governmental platform, such as Gmail that permits larger bandwidth and onus.
 - i. A concern may be that emails from a non-governmental platform are automatically sent to junk/spam folders. Users can mark the non-governmental COFO email address as a “safe user” to prevent emails from disappearing into the folders.
- c. If you are not getting COFO emails, or if you need any assistance sending something to the COFO membership, please reach out to Paul Sotoudeh, Heather Milner, or Tyler Smith.

2. COFO Annual Conference Update

- a. The conference planning committee has received topic/speaker suggestions from the recent survey. A registration email, including the agenda and topics of the conference is expected to be sent by September 07, 2018.
- b. The COFO Annual Conference is planned to be held at the US Patent and Trademark Office (Alexandria, VA) on October 12 and will be available via the web. However, not all activities will be available for the online platform. The conference may begin at 0830am as suggested in the surveys. To ensure that we meet the required hours, COFO may offer a “networking working lunch.” Suggestions/recommendations for a “networking working lunch” include:

- i. Factor “lunch” logistics, i.e. catering food
- ii. Suggestion: a senior should be seated at each table for networking purposes, which may be classified as a working lunch.
- c. COFO members interested in participating or may have questions/concerns, please contact Bina Patel (Bina.M.Patel.Civ@mail.mil) and Tyler Smith (Tyler.Smith@nih.gov).

3. Mentoring Program Update

- a. Mentoring committee has been selected:
 - i. Chair: David Michael
 - ii. Committee members: Laurel Gordon, Wendy Kamenshine, Felicia Bunns, Virginia Behr; and Bina Patel (Ex-Officio member)
 - iii. Committee members will hold their first meeting on August 31, 2018 via conference call to discuss the way forward.
- b. Some key parameters –
 - i. A launch email will be sent on Monday, October 1, 2018 notifying mentor/mentee matches.
 - ii. End of December 2018/early January 2019: mentors to attend mentorship training.
 - iii. Mentor considerations/expectations:
 - 1. Identify your goals as a mentor.
 - 2. Actively participate in the COFO monthly meetings/ombudsman trainings.
 - 3. Demonstrate a commitment to mentoring as a profession over the next 3 years.
 - 4. Both mentors and mentees are expected to commit 2 hours/month for 6-12 months.
- c. 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).

4. Discussion Topic: Serving as a Courageous Ombudsman

- a. Serving as a Courageous Ombudsman (follow-up discussion from the IOA Annual Conference) – What does it mean to be a courageous ombuds?
 - i. In a robust conversation, participants discussed the definition of a courageous ombudsman. Participants agreed that the definition varies across organizations. For example, a courageous ombudsman may be defined as maintaining independence, objectivity, autonomy from the workforce, while upholding a collegial workplace relationship with senior management and SES cadres.
 - ii. Courageous ombudsman may also be defined as an individual who addresses controversial topics, delivers debatable messages and issues with SES cadres, perhaps in an in-person meeting, while simultaneously serving as a buffer with top management and the workforce.
 - iii. Courageous ombudsman entails an individual who challenges the enforcement/application of policies and procedures to ensure fairness.

- iv. Courageous ombudsman (internal/external) is an individual who is able to build trust, rapport, and perhaps a relationship with the workforce/clients.
- v. Courageous ombudsmen are mission enablers, change agents, and provide services with personal resiliency.
- b. How do you address controversial and difficult topics? What are some of the elements or ingredients for success in such a conversation?
 - i. Participants commented on communication style, one that is direct with a soft approach to address difficult topics.
 - ii. Face to face open conversations between the ombudsman and an individual.
 - iii. Addressing issues while providing suggestions in the form of questions.
 - iv. The communication style of an external ombudsman may differ as they may not have the opportunities to build rapport and trust. It becomes necessary to explain the role of the ombudsman prior to communicating a difficult message.
 - v. Internally, ombudsmen deliver news with facts to top management to address difficult conversations successfully.
 - vi. Internally, deliver news with Wayne Blair at the table; flexing/stretching at the table to address difficult conversations.
 - vii. Externally, define the role as an external ombudsman with the intention that we “don’t carry a magic wand,” so that clients understand
- c. Who do you speak with to prepare for a conversation?
 - i. Speaking to the workforce and top management through consistent messaging.
- d. How do you encourage proactive behavior from employees and managers?
 - i. Utilize vulnerability as an opportunity to build trust.
 - ii. Externally, build relations through interactions with the community.
- e. What has to be in place for this to occur?
 - i. Participants agreed that trust, rapport, and good relationship should be in place for the success of proactive behavior between employees and managers.
 - ii. Participants agreed that a courageous ombudsman should be an artful communicator, with strong listening skills to address the needs and issues, by doing what’s right.
- f. What keeps you from being a courageous ombuds?
 - i. Participants agreed that leadership may not understand the ombudsman function and complete tasks outside of the function. Participants suggested that at times, leadership may want ombudsman to serve as an enforcer to accomplish mission/tasks.
 - ii. Generational differences in the workforce may keep an ombudsman from being courageous. An example that was shared, working with veterans who are from a different generation may be accustomed to their traditional habits and thought processes, which vary today.

5. Announcements:

- a. National Institute of Health published their annual report. The report includes five years of data from 2013-2017. The report is available at the following link:
ombudsman.nih.gov

Attendees:

In-Person

Dea, Joanne - United States Department of Agriculture
Desta, Abiy - Center for Devices and Radiological Health
Kinnavy, Noreen- The International Broadcasting Bureau of the Broadcasting Board of Governors
Maurer, Bill – Department of Energy
Sander, Dawn Miller– Conflict Transformation Associates, LLC
Sotoudeh, Paul – United States Patent and Trademark Office
Webb, Robert - Armed Forces Retirement Home
Wolfe, Lexi – Small Business Administration

Call-In

Balick, Howard – Department of Health and Human Services
Behr, Virginia – Department of Health and Human Services
Berg, Mollie -National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency
Bloch, Brian – Department of the Interior
Brown, Amy – Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation
Coleman, Jean – US Small Business Administration
Donnelly, Wanda – US State Department
Epps, Ayanna – Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation
Fox, Angela – United States Department of Agriculture
Garmon, Felisa – Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
Gartlan, Jennifer – Federal Maritime Commission
Gordon, Laurel – U.S. Marshall Service
Heffernan, Claire- Transportation Security Administration
Hill, Gary – National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency
Katherine, Erica - Department of Health and Human Services
Landau, Natalie- US State Department
Larkins, Marcia – Department of Health and Human Services
Leibman, Melissa – Department of Justice
Levine, Lisa - Department of Justice
Lewis, Kimberley Day – Department of Homeland Security
McGuire, Carrie – Office of Government Information Services
McNeil, Tracey – U.S. 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
Patel, Bina – National Ground Intelligence Center

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Platt, Meadow – Food and Drug Administration
Rippy, Katherine – Department of Health and Human Services
Semo, Alina – National Archives and Records Administration
Smith, Tyler – Department of Health and Human Services
Stukes, Jock - National Reconnaissance Organization
Thompson, Patricia - Ombudsman Program Officer for Children and Youth Dept. of Behavioral Health
Tranconie, Fred
Walker, Don – Department of Defense
Wright, Donald – US Department of Agriculture
Yuille, Deanna – Department of Health and Human Services
Zeller, Jessica – Department of Health and Human Services
Zrubek, Tom – Department of Defense