



COALITION OF FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN

MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date/Time: August 14, 2019 1:30pm – 3:00pm (EST)

Location: Phone Only

Agenda:

1. COFO Annual Conference Update
2. COFO Monthly Meeting
3. COFO Mentoring Committee
4. COFO Election Committee
5. COFO Mailing List & Google Group
6. Ombuds Day Reminder
7. Discussion Topics:
 - a. Responding to all submissions – do your offices respond to every submission you received or only the ones concerning your area of focus? How do you triage or handle submissions outside the scope of your mission?
 - b. Mentoring and independence – Do you (or would you) mentor people, whether formally or informally, in your agencies who aren't ombuds?
 - c. General Questions – Space for newer ombuds and programs (and people looking to set up programs) to ask questions and get feedback. No issue is too big or small so ask away!
8. Announcements

Highlights:

- 1. COFO Annual Conference Update**
 - a. Conference date: 18 October 2019 @ USPTO. The conference committee continues to meet every other Wednesday @ 3PM EST. Currently the team is discussing potential topics and speakers. If you are interested in participating as a volunteer, please email Paul Sotoudeh: Paul.Sotoudeh@USPTO.gov
 - b. The conference is a unique opportunity to network, share best practices and gain new insights into our field. We have insightful speakers lined up this year. More to come.
- 2. COFO Monthly Meeting**
 - a. No monthly meeting in October. We will meet in person at the conference, which will serve as our monthly meeting. We are seeking a physical location for November and beyond. If you have a suggestion, please email Paul Sotoudeh: Paul.Sotoudeh@USPTO.gov
- 3. COFO Mentoring Committee**

- a. The mentoring program began in 2019 with 24 ombuds actively participating. We are currently working on putting together the 2020 cohort. An email announcement is expected to be published in October. If you are interested in being a mentor or mentee, please contact COFOMentoring@nih.gov

4. COFO Election Committee

- a. Elections for the Executive Committee are coming up in February 2020. It is a great to start thinking about running or helping by serving on the election committee. The latter entails logistical help with gathering the nominations. If you are interested in participating as a volunteer, please email Paul Sotoudeh: Paul.Sotoudeh@USPTO.gov

5. Ombuds Day Reminder

- a. Ombuds day is coming up in October. Registration information with access to links is available on the ABA website. For more information, please contact Ken Skodacek: Ken.Skodacek@fda.hhs.gov
- b. Ombuds Day is a great opportunity to connect with ombudsman in the federal government and network with colleagues to share best practices. This year, the committee will host three events, including the first one with Chuck Howard, Executive Director, IOA, as the key note speaker. Additional events will be held in Chicago, IL and Boulder, CO.

6. Discussion Topics

- a. Responding to all submissions – do your offices respond to every submission you received or only the ones concerning your area of focus? How do you triage or handle submissions outside the scope of your mission?
 - i. Participants’ eagerly provided their responses with the expertise of their current role. External facing ombudsman for instance, shed light on their role as triaging questions and inquiries of external applicants to the appropriate channels, while not serving as a resource. Their relationship with internal groups is vital to the success of assisting public inquiries. For example, should an inquiry arise regarding a whistleblower call, the call is triaged to the compliance team. A high quality of customer service is necessary to assist external inquiries.
- b. Mentoring and independence – Do you (or would you) mentor people, whether formally or informally, in your agencies who aren’t ombuds?
 - i. Participants actively provided their thoughts on mentorship and coaching opportunities for individuals who want to progress their skills in conflict resolution as an opportunity. There was a mutual understanding to not allow non-ombudsman individuals to directly train or obtain new skills through a hands on approach as this may violate the ombudsman rules on independence and confidentiality. Some participants mentioned when providing coaching or mentorship opportunities to non-ombuds professionals, non-disclosure agreements were signed. Other participants mentioned that taking on detailees brings forward concerns of perception with breaching ombuds regulations, possibly accessing confidential records, and detailees reporting to management outside the ombuds unit. On a final note, an individual who has no experience in the ombuds function can successfully complete a detail in the ombuds office with a shared understanding of boundaries and the role.

- c. General Questions – Space for newer ombuds and programs (and people looking to set up programs) to ask questions and get feedback. No issue is too big or small so ask away!
 - i. An inquiry was made on how to handle a request of visitors can see the ombudsman anonymously so the boss does not verify the visit. We have tabled this inquiry to next month's meeting due to lack of time.

7. Announcements

- a. None

Attendees

Balick	Howard	FDA CBER
Behr	Virginia	FDA CDER
Berg	Mollie	NGA
Deyo	Scott	Dept of Energy
Doyle	Bill	US Secret Service
Epps	Ayanna	FDIC Internal
Fox	Angela	USDA ADR
Gnatt	Sheldon	NSA
Harris	Robert	FDIC Internal
Heffernan	Claire	TSA
Hill	Gary	NGA
Katherine	Erica	FDA ORA
Kinnavy	Noreen	US Agency for Global Media
Lemelin	Christa	NARA OGIS
Lenkel	Laurie	FDA Commissioner's Office
McNeil	Tracey	SEC
Merrix	Celeste	FLETC
Michael	David	NIH
Mitchell	Kirsten	NARA OGIS
Morey	Chauncenette	FBI
Patel	Bina	NGIC
Roman	Rafael	NOAA Acquisitions and Grants
Shinn	Bob	USDA Forest Service
Skodacek	Ken	FDA CDRH
Sotoudeh	Paul	USPTO
Vermillion	Chris	TSA
Weber	Guy	NGA
Wolfe	Lexi	TSA
Yuille	Deanna	FDA
Zeller	Jessica	FDA ORA