

Coalition of Federal Ombuds (COFO) Charter

Enacted February 19, 2024

Article I. Name

Section 1.01 "Coalition of Federal Ombuds," also referred to as "The Coalition" or "COFO." The terms "ombuds", "ombudsman", "ombudsperson" and "ombud" are interchangeable.

Article II. Purpose

Section 2.01 The Coalition of Federal Ombuds is the principal interagency forum that provides collaboration, advice, and guidance on professional ombuds standards, skills development, program development, and effectiveness.

Section 2.02 Coalition members and committees work as an integrated and networked enterprise to increase the professionalism and effectiveness of federal ombuds by sharing experiences, ideas, policies, standards, best practices, and innovative approaches.

Article III. Values

Section 3.01 Properly structured federal ombuds share three core standards of practice: independence, confidentiality and impartiality. These are considered essential to the ombuds profession. Many if not most also share common definitional characteristics—informality (does not make decisions binding on the agency or provide formal rights-based processes for redress), a commitment to credible practices and procedures, and a commitment to fairness. These attributes, taken together, define a unique profession.

Section 3.02 COFO strives toward a leadership style based on cross-agency collaboration and interdisciplinary experience. COFO recognizes and honors its widely divergent constituents and their individual practices. This breadth of activity and experience provide for valuable exchanges.

Article IV. Coalition Membership

Section 4.01 COFO is an inclusive body with representation from alternative dispute resolution (ADR) professionals from across the federal government.

Section 4.02 General membership includes any person working as an ombuds, alternative dispute resolution specialist, or other persons interested in federal ombuds practice.

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Section 4.03 Voting Members are the primary governing body of the Coalition. Voting membership shall be composed of ombuds (full and part-time) working as current Federal employees. Members must practice according to the values cited above when performing ombuds duties, and nominees for the Executive Committee must be from the Voting Membership. If an agency has more than one ombuds (i.e. a sub-agency or division by subject matter or agency program), each ombuds (such as an associate and an assistant ombuds) may be members of the voting membership.

Section 4.04 Regular meetings of the voting membership will be held monthly, and a conference will be held annually. Location, time, and cancellations are at the discretion of the Executive Committee.

- (a) Final meeting agendas for meetings of the voting membership shall be set by the chair after considering recommendations from the Executive Committee.
- (b) Regular meetings of the voting membership will generally be held monthly, and the conference shall take the place of one regular meeting.
- (c) The annual conference of the Coalition shall be held at a time and place decided upon by the Chair, with the concurrence of the Executive Committee.
- (d) Special meetings of the voting membership may be called by the Chair, with concurrence of the officers, or must be called when a majority of the executive committee or a majority of the voting membership requests same.
- (e) An announcement of the time and place of meetings shall be in writing, via email, and posted on the Coalition website. Announcements of special meetings shall be given to members with notice of at least 10 business days.
- (f) A quorum of the Coalition shall be constituted when those holding one-fourth (25 percent) of the voting membership with entitlement to cast votes, are present in person, on the phone, or by proxy at the meeting. No business may be transacted until a quorum is present and the announced time of the meeting has passed.
- (g) Decisions of the voting membership will be made by consensus to the maximum extent possible. When consensus is not possible, any two voting members (a proposer and a second) may call for a vote on an issue. For an election or motion to be considered decided, it must have the agreement of a majority of the voting membership constituting a quorum and participating in person, by phone, or by other electronic means. At the option of the Chair, elections and votes may be held by a show of hands, recorded vote, electronic vote, or by secret ballot. Electronic voting may be held between COFO meetings.

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- (h) Proxies: At all meetings of the Coalition each member of the voting membership, entitled to cast his/her vote, may be present in person, via phone, or in proxy. For a proxy to be effective, said proxy must be an ombuds in the member's agency. At the beginning of the meeting, the proxy shall announce to the chair that they are serving as a proxy and provide the name of the voting member. These proxy procedures are not applicable if a vote is held electronically.
- (i) Critical Objections: Voting members may submit a critical objection to any election, motion, or proposal to any member of the Executive Committee before a final decision is made. A critical objection indicates grave concern that an election or motion, if passed with a majority vote, would likely have significant adverse consequences. Voting members shall use considerable judgment and discretion when using critical objections, which shall hold the decision in abeyance for no longer than 10 business days. Critical objections submitted anonymously may be considered by the Executive Committee on a case by case basis. Such an objection shall be made in writing with thorough rationale for the objection.
- (j) Upon receipt of a critical objection from the voting membership, the Executive Committee shall respond in writing with a final decision and appropriate justification in a timely manner (days, not weeks). In cases where the Executive Committee is split on a decision, the Chair will provide the final decision.

Article V. Executive Committee Membership and Governance

Section 5.01 The Executive Committee membership shall consist of the positions of Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, and Coordinator. Each membership term shall be for a minimum of two calendar years after election. Deviations of terms are addressed in 5.02. Members shall be eligible to succeed themselves and there shall be no financial compensation from COFO for serving as an Executive Committee member.

Section 5.02 Any deviations of term will be reviewed and decided by the Executive Committee. See Executive Committee Charter for clarification and guidance.

Section 5.03 The members of the Executive Committee shall be elected through a defined election process as outlined in the Executive Committee charter.

Section 5.04 All members of the Executive Committee shall collaboratively govern and conduct necessary business for and on behalf of the Coalition. All positions, except for that of the Chair, may be composed of two ombuds, each with equal responsibility and authority.

Section 5.05 Any Executive Committee or voting member may be removed or expelled by unanimous decision by all other members of the entire Executive Committee, at any meeting called for that purpose.

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Article VI. Committees

Section 6.01 Standing committees and temporary working groups may be named and appointed by the Executive Committee, as needed. Such committees and temporary working groups promote the objectives and purposes of the Coalition. They shall serve only for the purpose or time appointed.

- (a) The Executive Committee shall vote to establish or dissolve any of the committees and working groups, as needed.
- (b) Chairs will be appointed for standing committees and working groups. All voting members are eligible to chair a committee or working group. Non-voting general members may serve on committees. The Executive Committee may consider non-voting members to chair or co-chair a committee or working group when doing so would be in the best interest of the Coalition, but should only do so under exceptional circumstances. The terms of committee chairpersons shall be decided by the Executive Committee and the Executive Committee maintains sole discretion to determine what constitutes an exceptional circumstance.
- (c) Dates and responsibilities assigned to these committees shall be subject to the authority of the Executive Committee.
- (d) Standing committees and working groups shall work closely with their Executive Committee liaison, also referred to as an ex-officio committee member, to coordinate their projects and/or activities.

Section 6.02 Standing committees and working group duties may include:

- (a) Executive Committee – shall have the responsibility of collaboratively governing and conducting necessary business for and on behalf of The Coalition which includes assigning Committee Chairs and overseeing Committees and Workgroups
- (b) Conference Committee - shall have the responsibility of providing any necessary planning of the year's annual conference and all committee updates at the regular meetings. The Conference Committee Chair is responsible for providing updates to the Executive Committee and General Membership.
- (c) Mentoring Committee – shall have the responsibility of managing the COFO mentoring program, including the application process, assigning mentoring pairs, and providing guidance and information on mentoring and associated processes.
- (d) Social Media Committee – shall have the responsibility of updating, maintaining, and monitoring the content and information shared on the COFO LinkedIn page, as well as any other social media platforms on which the Coalition might have an active presence.
- (e) Peer Practitioner Network Committee – shall have the responsibility of managing the COFO peer practitioner network program, including the application process, assignment of individuals into peer groups, and guidance for groups as needed.

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- (f) Past Chair Advisory Committee – shall consist of prior COFO Chairs and be available to support, upon the current Chair’s request, the current COFO leadership with advice and counsel
- (g) Voluntary Leave Transfer Initiative Committee – shall have the responsibility of administering the COFO initiative connecting federal ombuds approved to receive donated leave through their agency’s leave donation program with federal ombuds at other agencies who are candidates to donate leave

Section 6.03 Elections Committee (Biennially) - Within 90 calendar days prior to the completion of the two-year term the Executive Committee shall appoint an elections committee of no less than three and no more than five persons to begin election procedures.

- (a) The committee shall secure the consent of each nominee before placing his or her name on the proposed ballot. The Elections Committee will follow the same procedures as outlined by their most recent Election Committee predecessors. Any alterations must receive advance approval from a majority of the Executive Committee.

Article VII. Charter Amendments

Section 7.01 After 30 days’ notice, the voting membership may amend the Charter, in whole or in part, with a quorum present, by a majority vote.

Section 7.02 A proposed Charter amendment, change, alteration, or repeal shall be in writing, signed by at least two thirds of the Executive Committee members. No vote shall be taken upon any proposal unless and until all members of the voting membership have received 30 days’ notice of consideration of any proposed change, alteration, repeal or amendment. To be official, any such notice shall include a copy of the proposed change, alteration, repeal, or amendment. Placement of the notice and copy of the proposal on the Coalition's email list by a Coordinator within the 30-day time limit shall constitute notice. In the absence of a Coordinator, the Chair may place the notice on the list serve to constitute notice.

Section 7.03 The Coalition will not restrict membership on the basis of membership in any protected classes as identified by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

This document constitutes the Coalition’s operating by-laws and shall be referred to as “the Charter.”