



# COALITION OF FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN

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## COFO MONTHLY MEETING MINUTES

**Meeting Date/Time:** January 10, 2024, 1:30-3:00pm (EST)

**Location:** Video/telephone

**Agenda:**

1. Charter vote – open through January 17th
2. Executive Committee nominations for 2024-26
3. IOA Annual Conference – being held March 18-20 in Indianapolis
4. ABA Dispute Resolution Section Spring Conference – being held April 10-13 in San Diego
5. Committee Updates: Mentoring, Peer Practitioner, Social Media
6. Voluntary Leave Transfer Initiative reminder
7. Next Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) meeting 1/24
8. Announcements – Training opportunities, job openings, or really any office and ombuds happenings you'd like to tell the world about.
9. General Questions - Space for new and emerging practitioners and programs to ask questions and get feedback from the COFO community in a short discussion format.
10. Discussion Topic
  - Let's talk about systemic reviews/climate assessments/group work/whatever name you'd like to call them. We discuss issues related to this kind of work often – there are challenges in doing these reviews effectively and making them worth the effort involved. Let's share and discuss some best practices and lessons learned from doing this work.

**Highlights:**

- 1. Charter vote – open through January 17th**
  - Thank you to the Charter and Governance Workgroup and the previous and current ECs, and to everyone who provided comments on the two charter drafts.
  - If you are a voting member, you should have received an email with an invitation to submit your vote yes or no. There is one more week to vote, we'd like as many members as possible to vote.
  - If you didn't receive an email and you think you qualify as a voting member, please email the EC as soon as possible.
- 2. Executive Committee nominations for 2024-26**
  - The elections committee has decided to extend the nomination window through next Tuesday. If you would like to nominate someone for the next EC cycle, please do so before next Tuesday.

- There are two slots open for each position other than Chair, so if you nominate yourself for a role other than Chair you will not be expected to complete all of that position's work by yourself.
  - We are particularly interested in Coordinator nominations, based on the nominations we've received to this point.
- 3. IOA Annual Conference**
- This year's IOA Annual Conference will be held in Indianapolis March 18-20, and registration is open. Also, two days of pre-conference sessions before the 18<sup>th</sup>.
  - The main hotel might be a higher rate than government employees are afforded by their agencies, but the conference is in an area with many other hotels that should work.
- 4. ABA Dispute Resolution Section Spring Conference**
- This year the ABA conference will be in San Diego.
  - It's a great conference to attend if interested in broader ADR work.
- 5. Committee Updates**
- Mentoring Committee
    - With the new year we have a new cohort scheduled to begin next week.
  - Social Media Committee
    - Next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, January 18 at 2:30pm EST.
- 6. Voluntary Leave Transfer Initiative reminder**
- Connects ombuds who need leave with ombuds from around the federal government who have leave to donate. Helps to avoid awkward scenario where ombuds ask for or donate leave to others in their agency.
  - Contact COFO if you've qualified for leave transfer and would like to get leave from other ombuds.
  - At least for some agencies, this Friday is the end of the 2023 leave calendar, so if you still have leave you are scheduled to lose you might consider donating.
- 7. Next Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) Meeting – 1/24**
- Scheduled for 2-3pm.
  - This is a safe space to discuss personal and professional topics that impact us.
- 8. Announcements - Training opportunities, job openings, or really any office and ombuds happenings you'd like to tell the world about**
- FEMA is accepting applications for an Associate Ombuds position. It is an internal ombuds function that will be eligible for telework. Headquarters is in DC. To apply, send a resume and cover letter directly to the current ombuds.
  - CFPB has a new Associate Ombuds, John Fields, who is on today's call.
- 9. General Questions - Space for new and emerging practitioners and programs to ask questions and get feedback from the COFO community in a short discussion format.**
- How do people encourage evaluations of their programs? Have something available for people to complete? Send something out proactively?
    - Someone says that everyone who uses ombuds services receives a survey at least 2-3 months after case is closed. Used to be by mail (and it was a 35% completion rate) but now by text message (65% completion rate). Using AirTable as the platform for survey.
    - Someone else asked if anyone knew if the National Archives current retention policy would still require people's names to be kept.
      - Others suggested that if the survey allows for anonymous responses, that sort of takes care of it.



- Someone else shared that at the beginning they now think about, given the circumstances, who has the authority to remedy. It helps the ombuds to inform how they are going to engage.
  - For instance, if it's necessary for leadership to take action, the ombuds might be limited in what they can do to be helpful to the visitors.
  - Also ask visitors how they came to ask a third party to do this, because of the concern about leadership punting issues they don't want to deal with.
- Question in the chat, "Is there a relation of this questions with the famous work by the NIH OOs about team science?"
  - The link shared in chat was: [Collaboration and Team Science Field Guide \(cancer.gov\)](https://www.cancer.gov/colaboration-and-team-science-field-guide)
- Someone else in chat wrote, "I have asked myself the same question every time we approach this topic. Is the issue that group work provides greater challenges or the culture of the organization makes solutions to systemic issues less probably?"
  - Initial evaluation of culture could be done on the front end to gauge whether there is the possibility of identified needs for change being accepted or avoided.
  - Those with decision making authority need to have authentic engagement.
- Someone else in chat wrote, "When it comes to group/systemic work (general gov't. not Ombuds specific), I feel it depends on the engagement and intention of the consensus of the group. Although I don't know if it's related or not, more folks seem to have and stick with more polarized opinions/viewpoints. In the past, it seemed to me that most folks could be "swayed" in the past. This is both good and sometimes not great. I also agree supervisor/management engagement is also a vital component."
- Someone else shared that their ombuds office evaluated the effectiveness of their group work to ensure that future group work would be more valuable, and they decided they needed to get buy-in from leadership in advance, they wanted to spend time on the front end to understand the group's culture, and do more prep work to get to know the group before they began the group work.
  - Also shared that in their experience the rewards of group work outweigh the amount of work put in.
  - Their biggest challenge has been getting everyone on the team to engage when some people appear unwilling or disinterested.
- Someone wrote in chat, "I suggest it also depends on what you mean by systemic work. My office is external and this year we discussed how there are different types of systemic work we already do that results in broader change. A good amount of it is not time consuming."
  - Someone responded, "+1 these points about different kinds of systems work. I love the discussions about "culture change." In addition, there are generic options for a cluster of concerns that come in where the work is actually less to handle them together...and safer for the visitors."
- Someone shared that their biggest current question about group work is what they should be keeping in terms of data, and what they should or shouldn't be relaying to leadership.
  - Some leaders are data driven and want the data.
  - Someone shared that the biggest issue with data might be putting them in reports, and that concern exists in relation to both systemic review reports and also annual reports. Reason is that ADRA likely does not support written reports and especially for something like systemic reviews.

- They proactively explain to leadership in advance that they won't get a written report, and when leaders specifically ask for them the ombuds says take notes, we'll explain as many times as you'd like us to, but we can't provide reports.
  - Link entered in chat for psychological safety discussion from recent ACR meeting: <https://www.acrgny.org/RTB-Videos>
- Someone suggested surveying the COFO community about how they handle systemic reviews, the data they collect, and how they present it to leadership, then thereafter sharing the results with all of the COFO community.
- Someone else put in the chat, "One question to pose is are we discussing systemic work or systemic/broader impact? I suggest there is a difference."

**Attendees:**

Last	First	Agency	Call-In
Anderson	Jeff	DOE	1
Bedrossian	Leona	ATF	1
N/A	Deirdre	N/A	1
Belanus	Nicole	DC Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman	1
Berg	Mollie	DOD/NGA	1
Bookstein	Monique	Prince William County Public Schools	1
Braden	Lara	Defense Commissary Agency	1
Brown	Andrea	USPTO	1
Bruner	Dedan	DC Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency	1
Cawthon	Shalonda	Office of Workers Compensation Programs/DOL	1
Cecil	Tina	FBI	1
Coffman	Cherina	DOD/NGA	1
Davis	Shadella	Smithsonian	1
DeBerry	Marcella	NSA	1
Doty	Brenda	Federal Maritime Commission	1
Enriquez	Elisa	NIH	1
Fields	John	CFPB	1
Foreman	Shakeya	City of Philadelphia	1
Harley	Jasmine	National Credit Union Administration	1
Harshbarger	Blayne	USDA	1
Hartman	Jessie	OGIS	1
Hawkins	Toni	NIH	1
Hendrickson	Caitlan	FEMA	1

## UNCLASSIFIED

Hopkins	Emilee	NGA	1
Horvath	Julia	NASA	1
Hurley	Nathan	FDA/Center for Tobacco Products	1
Jackson	Anthony	Forest Service	1
Johnson	Stella	N/A	1
Kamenshine	Wendy	CFPB	1
Katherine	Erica	FDA	1
Lawrence	Steven	DHS I&A	1
Levine	Lisa	DOJ/EOIR	1
Lopez Johnson	Jennifer	US Forest Service	1
Lunder	Erika	GAO	1
McGuire	Carrie	OGIS	1
Morey	Chauntanette	FBI	1
Piziali	Jamie	EPA	1
Porch	Susanne	Commerce/National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)	1
Rowe	Mary	MIT	1
Semo	Alina	OGIS	1
Skodacek	Ken	FDA	1
Smith	Julie	Census Bureau	1
Smith	Tyler	NIH	1
Sotoudeh	Paul	USPTO	1
Stergio	Marcus	Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs/DOL	1
Trujillo	Sarah	USDA/APHIS	1
Vermillion	Chris	Census	1
Voloshin	Victor	NIH	1
Weber	Guy	DOD/NGA	1
Wolfe	Lexi	DOE	1
Yuille Banford	Deanna	DOD/Defense Human Resources Activity	1
Ziolkowski	Olivia	FDA/Center for Biologics and Research	1
		<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>