



COALITION OF FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN

COFO MONTHLY MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date/Time: February 14, 2024, 1:30-2:55pm (EST)

Location: Video/telephone

Agenda:

1. New COFO Charter and Executive Committee Charter – both go into effect 2/19
2. COFO Executive Committee election – please vote!
3. Status of Coordinator position
4. ABA Resolution 500
5. IOA Annual Conference – being held March 18-20 in Indianapolis
6. ABA Dispute Resolution Section Spring Conference – being held April 10-13 in San Diego
7. Committee Updates: Mentoring, Peer Practitioner, Social Media
8. Voluntary Leave Transfer Initiative reminder
9. Next Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) meeting 2/28
10. Announcements – Training opportunities, job openings, or really any office and ombuds happenings you'd like to tell the world about.
11. 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.
12. Discussion Topic
 - Let's continue the conversation about systemic work and systemic reviews that we began last month. One element of this discussion last time had to do with data from reviews, particularly since many federal leaders are very data-driven. When you conduct a review, what sort of data do you keep? Do you produce a data report or other kind of written report from the review?

Highlights:

1. **New COFO Charter and Executive Committee Charter**
 - Both go into effect on 2/19.
 - On that date, the coalition will officially be the Coalition of Federal Ombuds.
 - Thanks to everyone who was involved with bringing these documents to fruition.
2. **COFO Executive Committee Election**
 - We have achieved quorum so we are good to go, but people are still welcome to vote through end of business tomorrow, 2/15.
 - If you believe you are a voting member but did not receive an email with a link that allows you to vote, please reach out to the EC.
3. **Status of Coordinator Position**

- As of now, the next EC will only have one Coordinator because only one person is running in the current election.
 - It is important for each of the Vice Chair, Secretary, and Coordinator roles to include two individuals, so for anyone who is interested in partnering with the other Coordinator please reach out to the EC or the current Coordinator with questions or an expression of interest.
- 4. IOA Annual Conference**
- This year's IOA Annual Conference will be held in Indianapolis March 18-20.
 - IOA Executive Director addressed the current challenges of the government's continuing resolution, and announced that IOA will refund federal ombuds if they register and end up being unable to attend because of agency budgetary restrictions.
 - Others have expressed concerns about the cost of a hotel room at the JW Marriott where the conference will be held, so IOA has reached out to the hotel to inquire about what they might be able to do. There is also a Fairfield Inn across the street where people can book a room instead.
- 5. ABA Resolution 500**
- Urges lawyers and all other parties to increase the use of early dispute resolution (EDR), and it includes ombuds on that list alongside negotiation and mediation.
 - Take a look at the resolution when you get a chance.
- 6. 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.
- 7. Committee Updates**
- Peer Practitioner Network
 - If there are externally facing ombuds who are interested in a peer group, please reach out to express interest. There are already a few people interested but not yet enough to form a peer group.
 - Mentoring Committee
 - Matches have been made for the upcoming term and mentors/mentees are beginning to work together.
 - Social Media Committee
 - Thank you to everyone who joined last month's meeting.
- 8. 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.
- 9. Next Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) Meeting – 2/28**
- Scheduled for 2-3pm.
 - This is a safe space to discuss personal and professional topics that impact us.
 - Topic for this month will be, "How did you get here?" referring to how people ended up joining the ombuds profession.
- 10. Announcements - Training opportunities, job openings, or really any office and ombuds happenings you'd like to tell the world about**
- VA has a number of job announcements coming soon. A GS-13 was recently hired and a GS-14 and 12 will be posted soon.

11. 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.

- None.

12. Discussion Topic: Let's continue the conversation about systemic work and systemic reviews that we began last month. One element of this discussion last time had to do with data from reviews, particularly since many federal leaders are very data-driven. When you conduct a review, what sort of data do you keep? Do you produce a data report or other kind of written report from the review?

- Someone shared that when they were first hired, the President of the university they reported to was more interested in anomalies than trends, because they felt like they should/would already have a pulse for the trends.
 - Also shared the distinction that a pattern is different than a trend, which ombuds should consider when presenting data to leadership.
 - Raised that there are multiple ways to present data to leadership; can use it to raise concerns that are trends, patterns, or anomalies.
- Someone asked in the chat, "Is a climate assessment an example of a systemic review?" and someone else responded that yes, "Another word for it for most of us."
- Someone else asked in the chat, "Is there a national repository for data from different ombuds orgs? I'm a researcher and see small data reports from different places but haven't yet found a data set that provides 'the big picture'. Could you advise what they are?"
 - Then further explained verbally they are interested in doing ombuds work and want to better understand the issues that organizational ombuds most often experience.
- Someone else shared that if an individual brings forth an issue that seems to place them in the minority, and you look at that issue and study it and have questions about it yourself, then maybe it is something that people don't realize is impacting them. Sometimes our positions can be about showing people where the blind spots are.
- Someone else shared that we are influencers, so there are ways in which we can plant the seed for leadership to become aware of those anomalies.
 - As soon as you use the word trend with a leader who is particularly data driven, they ask, "how many?" so this person has begun using the term pattern instead of trend.
 - Also makes the point that the number of instances doesn't necessarily matter because if that was one person's experience it is still important to better understand it, especially depending on what type of experience it was.
 - Someone else added that knowing your audience is incredibly important. Some leaders understand the ombuds position and simply say thank you after hearing about an issue, while others immediately ask for the data.
- Someone shared in the chat that the point raised about hearing from the minority had them thinking, "In the past, ombuds offices generally heard from 2-3% of their populations - do we know if that statistic is still relevant? Do we ask that question in the IOA practice survey?"
 - Someone responded that their office hears from even less than 2-3% and therefore, when they present data to leadership, they clarify that they have "small data," not large data.
 - Someone else shared that their hope is that we can move away from the need to present our value through large volumes of data, given what someone said

earlier about how important just one person's experience can be. Just that one instance can implode an organization, so we probably have to reframe how we demonstrate our value as ombuds and the value of data we present to leadership.

- Someone from IOA responded, "We ask for numbers in the survey. That 2-3% number is an old number and can be IMHO detrimental to showing impacts."
- Someone else agreed that it shouldn't always be about data, because if one instance is important enough to consider, it should be considered. Also added that for the leader who says they don't want the data, the ombuds can present it again as largely held beliefs and experiences of the populations they work with.
 - They usually focus work on, "what's working or isn't working, why, and how can it be addressed."
- Someone added that, "leaders are human too," and probably need support for making something new and unique happen, so they spend big money to gather reports and data that support them making changes, so in that sense some leaders want and need data.
- Someone shared that, specific to groupwork, they do collect data but mostly related to the number of people who they work with in that groupwork so that at the end of the year they can show how many people they worked with through groupwork versus those who brought forward individual inquiries.
 - Biggest challenge is how laborious the data can be and the process of distilling it into something meaningful, yet leadership does find it valuable when they can look at how many people's concerns relate to leadership itself.
 - How do others deal with that, the challenge of how burdensome the process can be of collecting and presenting data from systemic reviews.
 - Someone else responded that they don't fold the systemic review data into broader inquiry data because they feel it skews the value of the remainder of the data because the systemic review was proactive groupwork where you work more intensely in one particular area. There is value in the data of individual inquiries that paints a different picture which would be skewed if they included data from a systemic review on, for instance, one particular office.
- Someone in the chat wrote, "It would be wonderful to hear more about the collection of some narrative information. There is a group in IOA thinking about the use of AI to analyze such data sets with less effort by the OO."
 - Someone responded that they love the question and are interested in the use of AI to analyze data, but their agency isn't even allowed to use ChatGPT or other forms of AI on their government issued devices.
 - Someone else speculated that most ombuds are probably not statisticians or data experts, so they assume the use of AI could be helpful to most ombuds interested in analyzing data. Going through the numbers is time consuming and difficult, so anything to help with that process would be great.
- Question was asked about whether people produce reports from systemic reviews.
 - Someone responded that their office needs to track data for the purpose of producing an annual report at the end of the year. The systemic reviews they conduct are reported out differently with separate data, similar to the person who commented on separating individual inquiry and groupwork data.
 - Someone else shared that their agency used to hire consultants to conduct climate assessments, but the ombuds office is now going to begin doing it and will produce reports based on the data they collect from groupwork.

- Someone in the chat commented, “So many annual reports are internal only or only on the intranet. But then we don't see anything showing the impact on the public-facing/external site. It would be so helpful to have a summary of info (that the agency will allow) on the external site so others can see your impact (especially helpful for other agencies and groups wanting to set up a program).
 - Someone responded that they agree with how helpful their report being posted externally might be, but they don't even have an externally facing website because of the spam emails and calls they would get from people needing help from their agency that this ombuds office is not able to provide (because they are internally facing).

Attendees:

Last	First	Agency	Call-In
Asar	Sharon	CFPB	1
Banos	Janet	CIS	1
Baum	Marsha	Sandia National Laboratories	1
Behr	Virginia	FDA	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
Cecil	Tina	FBI	1
Chaplin	Christina	Texas Committee for the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve	1
Coffman	Cherina	DOD/NGA	1
Davis	Ashley	University of Washington	1
Davis	Shadella	Smithsonian	1
DeBerry	Marcella	NSA	1
Delaney	James	FDA	1
Doyle	Bill	Secret Service	1
Edwards	Debra	N/A	1
Felton	Felicia	Census Bureau	1
Fields	John	CFPB	1
Foreman	Shakeya	City of Philadelphia	1
Garmon	Felisa	CFPB	1
Gill	Sarah	FINRA	1
Harley	Jasmine	National Credit Union Administration	1

UNCLASSIFIED

Hartman	Jessie	NARA/Office of Government Information Services (OGIS)	1
Hawkins	Toni	NIH	1
Hebron	Eric	DOJ/ATF	1
Hendrickson	Caitlan	FEMA	1
Hurley	Nathan	FDA/Center for Tobacco Products	1
Katherine	Erica	FDA	1
Kiraithe-Muchene	Irene	Henry Jackson Foundation Medical Research International (HJF/HJFMRI)	1
Konecke	Patty	N/A	1
Lenkel	Laurie	FDA	1
Levine	Lisa	DOJ/EOIR	1
Lopez Johnson	Jennifer	US Forest Service	1
Lunder	Erika	GAO	1
Manderson	Katie	VA	1
McGuire	Carrie	OGIS	1
Mendelson	Samuel	DHS Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman Office	1
Miller	Ellen	IOA	1
Miller Sander	Dawn	American Red Cross	1
Milner	Heather	CFPB	1
Mitchell	Kirsten	NARA/OGIS	1
Monaco	Amanda	University of Virginia	1
Moore	Sandi	NRO	1
Morey	Chauncenette	FBI	1
Patno	Arielle	FDA/Center for Tobacco Products	1
Phan	Emma	City of Seattle	1
Piziali	Jamie	EPA	1
Porch	Susanne	Commerce/National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)	1
Rojas	Nick	DOD/DIA	1
Rowe	Mary	MIT	1
Schauer	Greta	TSA	1
Smith	Julie	Census Bureau	1
Sotoudeh	Paul	USPTO	1
Stergio	Marcus	Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs/DOL	1
Thompson	Patricia	DC Department of Behavioral Health	1
Thomson	Ronnie	Sandia National Laboratories	1

UNCLASSIFIED

Trujillo	Sarah	USDA/APHIS	1
Umbertis Holloway	Natasha	Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren Division	1
Villafane	Jacqueline	Outsourced ombuds	1
Vissing	Yvonne	Salem State University	1
Weber	Guy	DOD/NGA	1
White	Karen	National Guard Bureau	1
Wint	Angela	Florida Atlantic University	1
Ziolkowski	Olivia	FDA/Center for Biologics and Research	1
		Total	66