



## **IOA Ombuds Program Charter**

**October 1, 2020**

### **Establishment of Pilot IOA Ombuds Program**

To support the commitment of the International Ombudsman Association ("IOA") to its mission and its Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, IOA has decided to provide organizational ombuds services ("IOA Ombuds Program" or "Program") on a pilot program basis from October 1, 2020 to October 1, 2021. Creation of this Program is in support of IOA's goal to be a professional association that is as supportive and inclusive and accessible as possible for members and registrants for its annual conference, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, religion, employment status or status in the field. In addition, IOA desires to model the concept of association ombuds to demonstrate the ability of an organizational ombuds to improve the conduct and climate of a professional association with aggregate data and anonymized feedback on trends and recommendations from the ombuds to association sponsors.

The IOA Ombuds Program is designed to be an independent, impartial, informal, and confidential channel for IOA members and conference registrants to discuss any concerns they may have concerning issues related to the annual conference, their ombuds practice, or the profession. The person selected to provide these services, ("IOA Ombuds" or "Ombuds") will be available virtually to provide information confidentially and will provide a safe place for people to discuss such issues as safety, actions from "overly-friendliness to harassment, micro-aggressions, free speech, integrity, privacy, and conflicts of interest. The Ombuds is a resource to informally discuss any of these or other ombuds practice-related concerns and help inquirers develop options, problem-solve, create paths for self-advocacy, and make informed choices about the best path forward.

This Charter sets forth the operating principles under which the IOA Ombuds Program will operate and reflect IOA's commitment to the IOA Ombuds and the role of this position.

### **Standards of Operation**

As provided in the Services Agreement between IOA and the IOA Ombuds (the "Agreement"), the Ombuds shall be a member of IOA and shall adhere to IOA's Code of

Ethics and Standards of Practice in performing ombuds services for visitors. These tenets require organizational ombuds programs to be independent, neutral, informal, and confidential:

### 1. Independence

The IOA Ombuds is an independent contractor and, while a member of IOA, will in no way be serving in any leadership role or other capacity for the IOA. The Ombuds functions outside existing administrative structures pursuant to the Agreement between the IOA Ombuds and IOA.

### 2. Impartiality

The IOA Ombuds provides impartial assistance and assessments of concerns. As a neutral third-party, the Ombuds is a resource for equitable and fair process, and the fair administration of process. The Ombuds does not, however, provide legal or other kinds of advocacy or enforce IOA's Code of Ethics or Standards of Practice. The Ombuds does not render services or become involved in any matter in which it would be a conflict of interest for the Ombuds to do so.

### 3. Informality

The IOA Ombuds provides a means for off-the-record discussions of concern. The Ombuds is empowered to provide only informal assistance, and does not have authority to conduct investigations, make or override decisions, determine policy, testify or participate in formal or administrative proceedings with respect to confidential communications, provide legal advice, or accept legal notice of claims or complaints against IOA or any other organization, entity, or person. For those wishing to assert claims or have on-the-record communications, the IOA Ombuds can make referrals to appropriate formal channels so that individuals may make informed choices about which process they decide is best for them to pursue.

### 4. Confidentiality

Communications with the IOA Ombuds are confidential to the maximum extent permitted by law. This principle of confidentiality helps the IOA Ombuds provide a safe place for visitors to voice concerns, evaluate issues, and identify options for possible further action. The IOA Ombuds is a purely voluntary resource. No one is required to use it, but those who do will be deemed to have agreed to respect and abide by the principles on which it was created and not call the Ombuds to testify or produce documents related to confidential communications in any administrative or legal proceeding. IOA has also agreed not to call upon or attempt to have the IOA Ombuds disclose confidential communications or to testify or produce documents relating to confidential communications in any administrative or legal proceeding.

Consistent with the IOA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, the only exceptions to this confidentiality principle are: (a) when, during the course of communications with the IOA Ombuds, an inquirer gives the Ombuds permission to make a disclosure and the Ombuds agrees it is appropriate to do so, or (b) when the IOA Ombuds determines that there is an imminent threat of serious harm.

## **Scope of Services**

The IOA Ombuds will be available to consult with visitors during the term authorized by the Agreement (concerning the annual conference or any ombuds practice-related issues identified above). The IOA Ombuds will be generally available by telephone and email. Visitors can find contact information for the IOA Ombuds on the IOA website at: [https://ioa.memberclicks.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=253:ioa-ombuds-program&catid=20:site-content&Itemid=230](https://ioa.memberclicks.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=253:ioa-ombuds-program&catid=20:site-content&Itemid=230)

As a neutral third-party, the Ombuds is an advocate for equity and fair process.

## **Accountability and Reporting**

The IOA Ombuds will report to IOA's President, and as she deems appropriate, to IOA's Executive Director, Executive Committee and/or Board of Directors, as provided in the Agreement. The Ombuds may also meet with and alert senior leadership of IOA of any systemic issues or trends the Ombuds believes may help the organization address identified or potential issues, improve the climate for membership or future conferences, or improve its policies and practices. Even when reporting issues to senior leadership, the IOA Ombuds protects the confidentiality of those using the Ombuds' services.

## **Record Keeping**

The Ombuds provides only informal assistance, and although informal notes may be temporarily created only as needed, the Ombuds will destroy all notes, documents, and materials containing personally identifiable information or confidential communications once the engagement has ended. Any reporting to senior leadership, as provided in the Agreement, will contain only aggregate data and the Ombuds insights and observations on the types of issues raised and any organizational recommendations.