



INTERNATIONAL  
**OMBUDSMAN**  
ASSOCIATION

# IOA OMBUDS REPORT

DECEMBER 2021



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Hello IOA Members,

Greetings from Elaine Shaw, your IOA Ombuds! It has been wonderful to have been part of your Ombuds lives since April 2020. You may remember my last report from the Pilot IOA Ombuds Program published in July 2020. In this new report, you will find information, statistics and my musings about my experience with IOA Visitors for the remainder of 2020 and through 2021.

There is much for which one can be grateful: the IOA has surpassed the 1000-member mark, is strong financially and committed to protecting and promoting the profession and providing valued service to members. It was also encouraging to see in Tom Kosakowski's Ombuds Blog "2021 Year in Review" that the number of ombuds offices opening and expanding is increasing and the number of offices closing appears to be slowing.

I am grateful to be connected to the good work that you all do. It never ceases to amaze me that IOA Visitors continue to honor me by reaching out to discuss issues that are important to them: How to advance their career? How to manage a sticky political situation at work? How to be of service to the IOA while balancing all the other demands of work and family?

I am pleased to share this report with highlights, concerns and ideas for future action. The blessing/curse comes to mind: "May you live in interesting times." My hope for all of us is that the times become a little more tranquil in 2022.

Elaine Shaw



Shown here with my hoop:  
a fun COVID-era undertaking: Waist-hooping!

## IOA Leader Feedback

“There are issues in IOA, just like there are in any organization. Although I have long been a believer in the value of an ombuds, I saw this firsthand from a management perspective when Elaine brought to our attention certain systemic issues that led to additional policy development. She also facilitated my having direct communications with some members about their concerns. I believe that in each of these situations, both IOA members and the organization itself benefited by having an ombuds who could discuss issues with people confidentially and provide options on how those issues could then be raised to appropriate senior leaders.”



Charles Howard, IOA Executive Director

“The IOA Ombuds is valuable to the IOA and its members for the same reason that all organizational ombuds are valuable to their organizations and people. The IOA Ombuds is a well-experienced ombuds professional who practices in full compliance with standards—meaning Independent, Informal, Impartial and Confidential. If unsure how to handle an IOA-related concern, reach out to the IOA Ombuds and gain a safe space to talk and receive guidance and support.”



Melanie Jagneaux, IOA President

## Executive Summary

**Value:** Return on Investment (ROI) – The IOA promoted and protected the profession and provided member services through the IOA Ombuds:

- The Pilot IOA Ombuds Program (established in late 2019) was assessed and received the “green light” to be established as an ongoing program in 2021
- Upward feedback from the Ombuds resulted in new policy development
- IOA Ombuds assisted organizations and individuals seeking Ombuds services and training

**Themes and Observations:** The IOA Ombuds explored with individuals and groups:

- Defining and holding colleagues accountable for ethical behavior
- Ensuring inclusion and transparency in decision-making
- Avoiding volunteer burn-out and frustration

**Considerations for the future:**

- Be intentional about the selection and assessment of IOA volunteer leaders
- Provide a feedback “loop” for Committee member volunteers to safely share their experience (what went well; what did not)
- Maximize the ROI in the IOA Ombuds program by clearly defining desired activities and outcomes
- Define and model innovative ways to utilize the IOA Ombuds to promote organizational health

## The Program

To support its commitment to its mission and its Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, the IOA decided to provide organizational ombuds services on a pilot program basis from April 1 to June 30 (extended through July 31) 2020 in connection with its response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the cancellation of the 15th Annual Conference in 2020. The program was extended for a full year through 2021. In the fall of 2021, the IOA Board conducted a membership survey and assessed the IOA Ombuds program effectiveness. Based on the assessment, the IOA Board decided to create a permanent IOA Ombuds role and to develop a Request for Proposal (RFP) process (to be announced). It is in keeping with IOA's goal to be a professional association that is as supportive, inclusive and accessible as possible for members and 'would-be' conference attendees, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, religion, employment status or status in the field. In addition, the IOA desires to model the concept of association ombuds and 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.

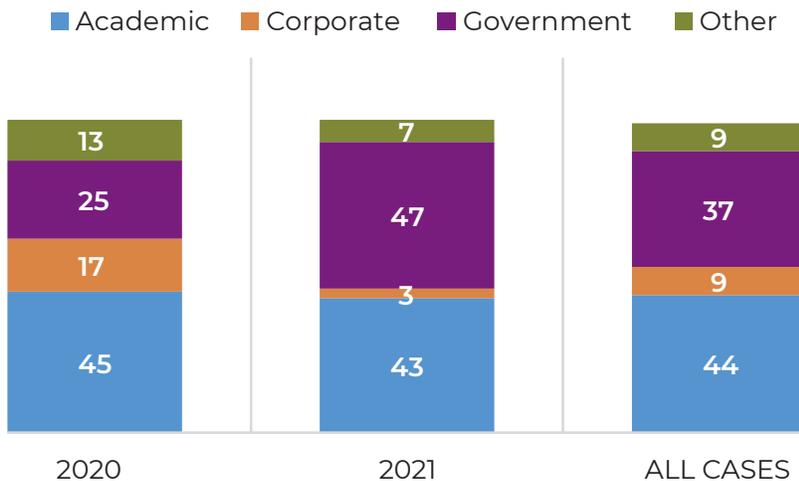
## The Value of an OMB's

Over the course of 2021, the IOA Board and the Executive Director developed a method by which the IOA Board could determine if the investment in an IOA Ombuds was worth it. Was there enough value coming back to IOA members individually and to the organization as a whole to justify the resources spent in support of the program? After surveying the membership and doing a full evaluation of the program in action, the IOA Board voted unanimously to establish a permanent IOA Ombuds role. By conducting an effectiveness evaluation of the IOA Ombuds, the IOA continues to model best practices for associations utilizing an Ombuds framework.

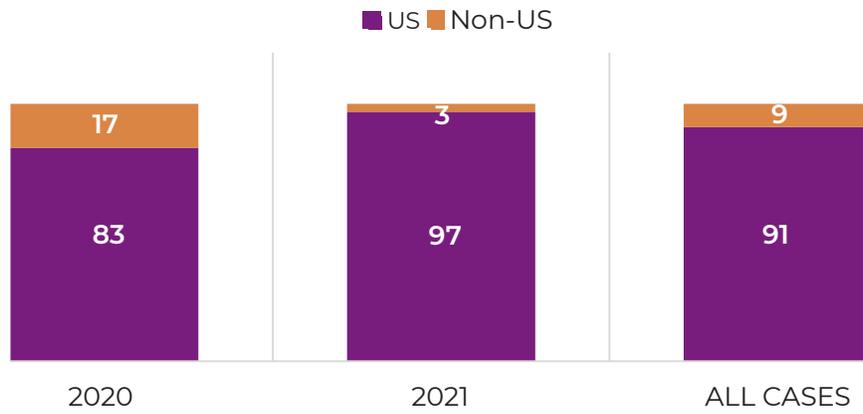
## The Data

In 2020, I talked with 24 Visitors (April-December) and in 2021, I connected with 30 Visitors (full year). This represents almost 5.5% of the IOA membership. The sector representation shows what might be described as underutilization by the Corporate Sector – just 9% of all cases for the period. In terms of US/Non-US utilization, the experience in 2021 showed international cases decreasing, ending with 91% of the cases coming from the US. And, finally, Ombuds tenure shifted in 2021 to a more tenured group of Ombuds contacting the IOA Ombuds – from a roughly 50/50 split between Ombuds with less than 10 years' experience and more than 10 years' experience in 2020 to a 30/70 split in 2021.

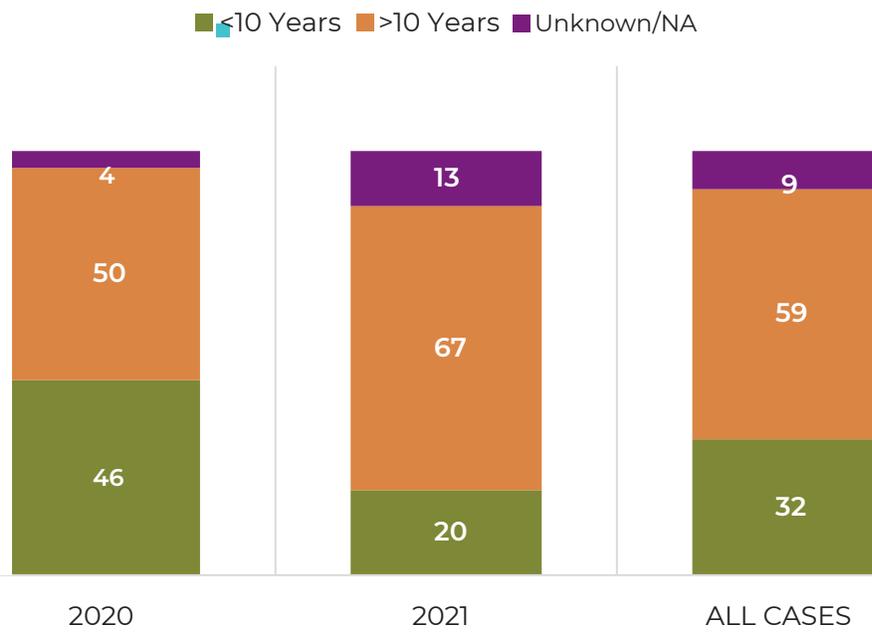
### Percentage of Cases by Sector



### Percentage of Visitors by Location



### Percentage of Cases by Ombuds' Experience



## What were the Issues?

Utilizing the Uniform Reporting Categories, issues arising in our conversations were tallied and are reported below. The information is shown in three bars: Issues by case in 2020 (partial year), 2021 (full year) and by Total Cases (April 2020-December 2021). In 2021, the issue that came up most frequently was “Peer and Colleague Relationships.” This category, as you may recall, includes questions, concerns and inquiries involving peers or colleagues who do not have a supervisor-employee relationship. The issues involved priorities, values, treatment, integrity, reputation, communication, bullying, diversity, and retaliation. Most often, as you will see with the “General Subject of Inquiry” chart below, the issues centered on experiences Visitors had within the IOA and not their employer, so ‘peers and colleagues’ were fellow IOA members and associates.

Issues related to Values, Ethics and Standards were the second highest reported category. Included in this area were issues concerning standards of conduct, culture and policies/procedures. Once again, Visitors were mainly concerned here with the IOA and not their own organization.

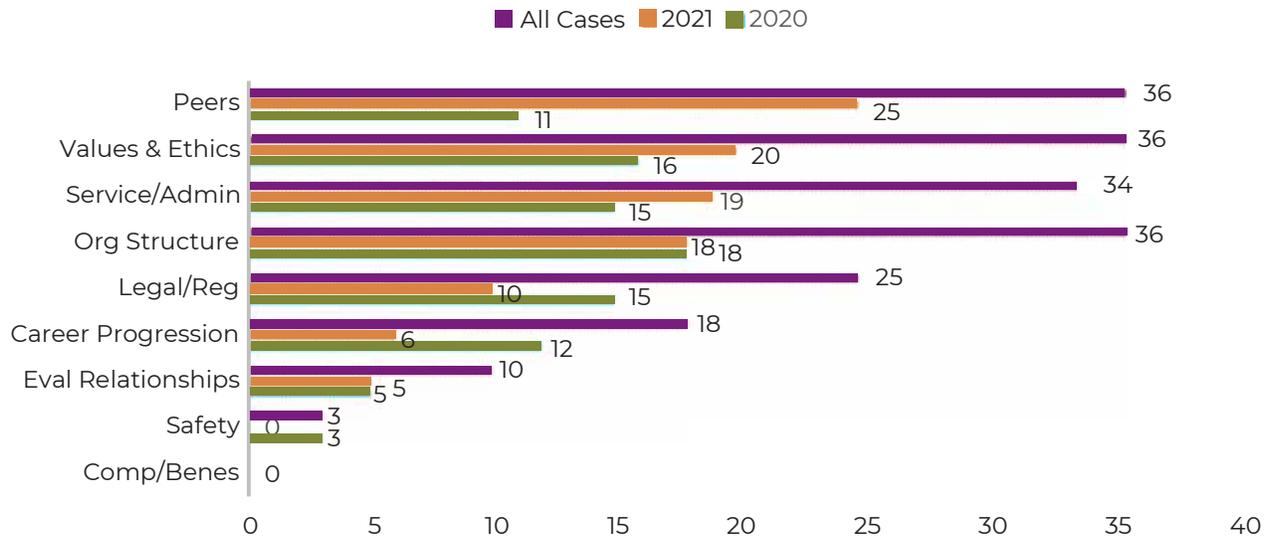
Services/Administrative issues and Organizational, Strategic, and Mission related issues were next highest and generally concerned IOA members’ questions, concerns or inquiries related to the management of the IOA, the leadership of the IOA, power and authority, priority-setting and organizational climate within the IOA.

Legal, Regulatory, Financial Compliance issues were raised in a total of 25 of 54 cases for the entire period of the IOA Ombuds program; 10 of 30 cases in 2021; and 15 of 24 cases in 2020. Included here are questions concerning the IOA Standards of Practice, the Code of Ethics and the CO-OP® credential.

There were a fair number of conversations from new and experienced Ombuds about their own career progression and the value of volunteer experiences within the IOA.

Evaluative Relationships (questions and concerns arising between people out of the supervisory relationship) came up relatively rarely in our conversations – just 10 times in 54 cases during the entire period.

### Issues by Category



### Cases by General Subject of Inquiry



## Observations

### Ombuds Effectiveness

It was notable that the IOA Board oversaw the development of a process by which the effectiveness of the IOA Ombuds could be assessed and utilized this process to inform its decision about supporting the IOA Ombuds program in the future. This is a process whose basic structure and framework could be made available to other Ombuds programs and is an example of the IOA Board endeavoring to lead the way in supporting the profession.

### Systemic Issues

Systemic issues were identified and reported to IOA leadership concerning the flow of communication from the Board about ongoing projects as well as the process by which conference speakers are selected and how concerns might be raised about IOA member conduct. Policy development is underway in these areas based on feedback from the IOA Ombuds.

### Directory of Ombuds Services

The IOA Ombuds had the opportunity to talk with a number of individuals and organizations interested in Ombuds training (individuals) and services (organizations). The IOA has recently provided information about the growth of its virtual training offerings and launched an Ombuds services directory to help connect organizations with the right kind of Ombuds assistance.

### Themes

**Leadership Development:** In a volunteer-dependent organization like the IOA, the ‘care and feeding’ of Board Members, Committee Chairs, and Committee Members is vital. An ongoing theme of many of my conversations over these last 20 months has been the disconnect between the “doers” and the “deciders;” between the folks who have access to the IOA Board and clarity about the work or project to be completed and the folks who are trying to do their part, squeezing volunteer hours for the IOA into their already busy schedule.

**Accountability for Ethical Behavior:** It is clear that the Standards of Practice and the Code of Ethics hold Ombuds accountable to ethical practice within their organizations and in their Visitor relationships, but it has become apparent that there is less clarity about general standards of professional conduct and mechanisms for holding IOA members accountable for compliance with these standards. Having provided upward feedback in this area, I am confident that new policies and procedures will be finalized and implemented in the near future.

## Considerations for the Future

As the IOA Board continues to work with its strategic plan, it would be great to see some of the themes and issues outlined here addressed. Most specifically:

- With the recent announcement about clarifying IOA committee structure and roles as well as implementing a Leadership Onboarding Program, the time may be right to add a feedback “loop” for Committee Members to provide information about their experience volunteering on IOA Committees. Might it be possible for the IOA Ombuds to assist in facilitating confidential volunteer dialogues to ensure the IOA Board is selecting and supporting effective leaders?
- The time may also be right to be more intentional about selecting and assessing IOA volunteer leaders. Do they have the tools, resources, support and clarity they need to build effective, high-functioning work teams?
- As the IOA goes forward with its IOA Ombuds program, there is an opportunity to clearly define desired activities and outcomes for the next Ombuds.
- Clearly defined activities and outcomes for the IOA Ombuds may include innovative practices to contribute to the enhancement of the IOA culture. Can the IOA continue to model how to leverage the value of an organizational ombuds? .

## Contact Information

If this report piques your interest in a comment or observation I have made...  
**REACH OUT...**

If you have been dealing with something you would like to talk over...  
**REACH OUT...**

If you want to learn more...  
**REACH OUT...**

If you have an idea about an innovative Ombuds service we might offer...  
**REACH OUT...**

**Call me: 734-277-3791**

**Or Email me: [IOA2020ombuds@gmail.com](mailto:IOA2020ombuds@gmail.com)**

