



Welcome to the **OMBUDS TOOLKIT**

On the following pages you will find a variety of resources designed to explain who ombuds are, what they do, how they add value to organizations and empower the people they serve.

Even if you've never heard of us before, this toolkit will help you understand why a growing number and variety of organizations count on ombuds to not only resolve conflict, but help create positive workplace cultures, enable systemic change, and mitigate long-term risk.

We hope you find this toolkit useful for whatever stage of ombuds engagement you are considering.

For more information, contact:

Ellen M. Miller
Executive Director
206-209-5275
emiller@ombudsassociation.org

Before you dive in, here's a brief overview:

First, ombuds everywhere are engaged as **trusted advisors**. In an era of accelerated change, ombuds are engaged by people and organizations to inform critical decisions for a lasting and positive impact. For organizations and leaders of all types, ombuds help survey the terrain, assess risk, monitor trends, address challenges, and advocate for fair processes.

Second, ombuds are a **source of empowerment**. They empower people and organizations to reach their full potential. While at one time we focused almost exclusively on conflict and conflict resolution, today we understand that conflict is merely the crucible through which some must pass before they can reach their full potential. Along the way, ombuds engage in constructive problem-solving toward the goal of instilling respect, civility and justice in communities, organizations and professional relationships.

And third, ombuds are **leading the way toward more just, engaged and inclusive organizations**. Ombuds are united in their mission to achieve fairness and equity among the communities and organizations they serve and are part of an international professional community committed to preserving its standards.



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How an Ombuds Can Help Your Organization

From Fortune 500 companies to professional associations, organizations worldwide are experiencing the disruption of national crises, and the power of rapid social, political and technological change. Today, a growing number of institutions and individuals are turning to ombuds as a source of insight and guidance.

At a time of dynamic change, organizational ombuds help manage risk and assist people at all levels of an organization with navigating complex relationships, policies and work environments – while working to instill respect and civility and a concern for equity for the communities they serve.

WHAT IS AN OMBUDS?

An organizational ombuds acts as a no-barrier, first-stop for employees, executives, managers and others seeking guidance, information and insight from a trusted advisor who is:

INDEPENDENT.

An ombuds is not part of the management of an organization and does not represent the individuals they work with.

IMPARTIAL.

An ombuds does not take sides and instead works to develop options to address or surface issues that support empowerment and fair process -- for those seeking assistance and for the organization.

CONFIDENTIAL.

An ombuds will protect your identity and the confidential information you share, unless the ombuds determines there is an imminent threat of serious harm.

INFORMAL.

Visiting an ombuds doesn't trigger a formal investigation often typical of HR or legal processes. Speaking with an ombuds is always off-the-record. Ombuds do not retain permanent records of confidential communications.



Ombuds help individuals who:

Experience a conflict with a co-worker, peer or supervisor.

Have compliance, ethical, legal or policy concerns about the workplace.

Experience sexual harassment or workplace misconduct.

Need a safe place to go for information and confidential guidance.

Ombuds serve many industries and sectors, including:

- Finance
- Insurance
- Energy production
- Government
- Higher education
- Non-profit
- Biotech
- Pharmaceuticals
- Research and development
- Manufacturing
- Health care
- Legal
- K-12 education
- Associations



What do Ombuds do?

Ombuds empower individuals and organizations to overcome disputes, conflicts and barriers that stand in the way of reaching their full potential.



FOR ORGANIZATIONS:

- Ombuds help public and private sector organizations anticipate and avoid risk, litigation and costly damage to brands and reputations.
- Conduct training, education, coaching, and facilitation.
- Supplement traditional HR, legal and compliance channels and departments.
- Build employee loyalty and a culture of engagement that can save costs and improve workplaces.
- Identify systemic trends and risks that help leaders make informed business, policy and management decisions.
- Build and strengthen productive and effective relationships between organizational departments, partners and professionals.
- Perform outreach to diverse constituencies and stakeholders about alternatives to traditional conflict resolution.
- A listening post and sounding board for new ideas, initiatives and proposed actions of large, complex and high-stakes organizations.

FOR INDIVIDUALS:

- Ombuds offer a safe place that permits confidential communications.
- Are a place for individuals to discuss options and process before they take action.
- Listen and help frame issues to navigate a broad spectrum of situations and issues.
- Offer a confidential resource to discuss options for reporting misconduct or managing and resolving conflicts.
- Conduct coaching, mediation and dispute resolution.

What ombuds don't do:

- ✗ Receive notice of claims against an organization.
- ✗ Conduct investigations.
- ✗ Make management decisions or policy.
- ✗ Advocate or take sides.
- ✗ Substitute for formal channels.
- ✗ Testify or produce documents in legal or other proceedings.

Ombuds ROI

With the cost of workplace conflict estimated at **\$359 billion per year**¹, ombuds can yield a high return on investment:



\$1 invested returns **\$22** in savings/cost avoidance.²



Companies with highly engaged employees have **10%-15%** higher profits.³



More than **\$144,000** per day is lost due to conflict, miscommunication and poor decision-making.⁴



34% of employee salary is lost for each disengaged employee⁵

1. CPP Global Human Capital Report, July 2008, pg. 3. Based on average hourly earnings of \$17.95, seasonally adjusted, non-farm workers. Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2008.
2. John Zinsser, Pacifica Human Communications, LLC; Jonathan E. McBride & James S. Hostetler, Board Champions for the Ombudsman, NACD-Directors Monthly, May 2008.
3. MIT Sloan Management Review: Measuring the Benefits of Employee Engagement, Summer 2015, page 5.
4. Harvard Business Review, "Putting a Price on People Problems at Work," by Tanya Menon and Leigh Thompson, August 23, 2016.
5. McLean & Company/Gallup: <https://www.linkedin.com/business/learning/blog/learner-engagement/how-to-calculate-the-cost-of-employee-disengagement>, cited by LinkedIn Learning, March 24, 2017.

WHO ARE OMBUDS

At a time of accelerated change, ombuds are serving as trusted navigators, engaged by people and organizations to inform critical decisions for a lasting and positive impact.

For organizations and leaders of all types, ombuds help survey the terrain, assess risk, monitor trends, address challenges, and advocate for fair processes.

Today, a growing number of corporations, non-profits, government agencies and world-class university systems are experiencing the disruptive power of rapid social, political, economic and technological change.

A younger generation is joining the workforce, challenging long-held management and organizational norms.

Technology continues to change professional interactions, personal relationships and our perceptions of others.

An unprecedented volume and variety of information is shared, consumed and internalized in entirely new ways.

More than ever, the expectations and priorities of customers, constituencies and community members are evolving to reflect a wider diversity of backgrounds, experiences, beliefs, values and viewpoints.

Often with rapid and disruptive change comes the potential for conflict and polarization – along with the opportunity for positive transformation.

In this complex environment, executives and other senior leaders remain under increasing pressure to manage costs, pursue growth, achieve mission objectives and avoid risk – while demonstrating immediate and measurable progress.

From Fortune 500 companies to renowned academic institutions, an ever-growing number of organizations are turning to the ombuds as a source of insight and guidance.

Today, you will find ombuds serving the following industries and sectors including:

- Finance
- Insurance
- Energy production
- Government
- Higher education
- Non-profit
- Biotech
- Pharmaceuticals
- Research and development
- Manufacturing
- Health care
- Legal
- K-12 education
- Associations



The cost of workplace conflict is estimated at \$359 billion per year, organizations in these and other sectors know that an effective ombuds can yield a high return on investment.

Executives estimate they lose more than **\$144,000 per day** in their own organizations due to interpersonal conflict, miscommunication, poor decision-making, and more.

Companies with highly engaged employees are found to have **10%-15% higher profits**.



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OMBUDS: A SOURCE OF EMPOWERMENT

Ombuds around the world engage in constructive problem-solving toward the goal of emphasizing respect, civility and justice in communities, organizations and professional relationships. Today, the modern ombuds:

- Empowers individuals and organizations to overcome disputes, conflicts and barriers that stand in the way of reaching their full potential.
- Helps public and private sector organizations anticipate and avoid conflict, litigation and costly damage to brands and reputations.
- Conducts training and education, and coaching and facilitation for organizations and individuals facing challenges large and small.
- Often works cooperatively with HR, legal and compliance channels and departments.
- Builds employee loyalty and a culture of engagement that can save costs and improve workplaces.

For individuals, an ombuds may offer coaching, mediation and dispute resolution, but doesn't wait for problems to occur. They also:

- Identify systemic trends and risks that help leaders make informed business, policy and management decisions.
- Build and strengthen productive and effective relationships between organizational departments, partners and professionals.
- Perform outreach to diverse constituencies and stakeholders about alternatives to traditional conflict resolution.
- Ombuds are continuously looking for ways to help people and add value to organizations.

**Ombuds help
people surface
issues, including:**

- Workplace and employee conflicts.
- Whistleblowing and compliance issues.
- Ethical, legal or policy violations.
- Risk mitigation.



Today's ombuds acts as a no-barrier, first-stop for employees, including executives, managers and other leaders seeking information, insight and guidance from a trusted advisor who is:

INDEPENDENT.

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IMPARTIAL.

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OMBUDS FAQs

Below are some frequently asked questions about the roles, responsibilities and missions of ombuds.

WHAT IS AN ORGANIZATIONAL OMBUDS?

An ombuds supports an organization as a no-barrier, first-stop for employees, executives, managers and others seeking guidance, information and insight from a trusted advisor. As independent, impartial, confidential and informal resources, Ombuds empower individuals and organizations to overcome disputes, conflicts and barriers that stand in the way of reaching their full potential.

WHAT WILL AN OMBUDS DO FOR MY ORGANIZATION

We work with individuals and groups to assist them in determining options to help resolve conflicts, issues and concerns. For organizations and leaders of all types, ombuds help survey the terrain, assess risk, monitor trends, address challenges, and advocate for fair processes.

DO OMBUDS IMPACT WORKPLACE CULTURE?

With the cost of workplace conflict estimated at \$359 billion per year, ombuds can help lower the risks and costs too often associated with conflict - creating stronger, more effective and more equitable organizations. We help build employee loyalty and a culture of engagement that can improve workplaces. Ombuds are critical in helping workplaces deal with DEIB, gender equity, #MeToo issues, and challenges related to returning to work/COVID.

WHAT LONG-TERM BENEFIT WILL AN OMBUDS HAVE?

Ombuds can build and strengthen productive and effective relationships between organizational departments, partners and professionals. They may also perform outreach to diverse constituencies and stakeholders about alternatives to traditional conflict resolution. They also can pressure-test new ideas, initiatives and proposed actions inside large, complex and high-stakes organizations.

HOW DOES AN OMBUDS DIFFER FROM AN EMPLOYEE RELATIONS OR HUMAN RESOURCES PROFESSIONAL?

An ombuds' function is to provide informal assistance in surfacing and resolving issues. While they can recommend that an organization consider establishing or revising policy, the ombuds plays no formal role in enforcing or deciding to implement policy. The ombuds does not conduct formal investigations but may assist in identifying or creating options for resolution, including referrals to formal channels (i.e. HR, Compliance or Ethics with investigatory powers.)

HOW DOES AN OMBUDS DIFFER FROM A LAWYER?

While some Ombuds may be JDs, they do not provide legal advice and visiting an ombuds does not trigger legal action.

IS AN OMBUDS THE SAME AS A MEDIATOR?

No. An ombuds works to manage conflict within an organization, whereas mediation is a specific process used for conflict resolution. Many ombuds are trained as mediators and often use mediation skills and techniques as one of many approaches to problem-solving and conflict management.

HOW DO OMBUDS WORK TO CHANGE THINGS FOR THE BETTER?

Ombuds are uniquely qualified to serve as a conduit for change through their ability to bring significant and/or repetitive issues to management's attention in a safe and confidential way— particularly with controversial issues that might not otherwise come forward—and raising issues to leadership others cannot or will not discuss. This includes identifying unintended consequences of programs and policies that negatively affect constituents. The systemic feedback the ombuds provides serves as useful information to improve organizations by helping enhance image, legitimacy, and commitment to accountability for its operations.

