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What is an Ombuds?

An independent, impartial, informal, and confidential resource to explore resolution of individual and systemic issues affecting NPS.

Why the word “Ombuds”?

According to the International Ombudsman Association (IOA), the word “Ombudsman” is Scandinavian and gender-neutral in origin. Variations of the term exist (i.e. ombuds, ombudsperson) and are common among those practicing in the ombudsman field. NPS decided to use the word Ombuds.

What exactly does the Ombuds do?

The Ombuds is available to discuss concerns, tries to understand all sides of issues, and helps you explore ways of resolving issues.

Is the Ombuds part of CADR?

Yes. The Ombuds was created by a collaborative agreement between NPS and the Office of Collaborative Action and Dispute Resolution (CADR). The Ombuds is affiliated with both DOI and NPS.

Are there certain principles that Ombuds must follow?

Yes. All services are performed in full compliance with the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) standards of practice and code of ethics. Ombuds must be impartial, confidential, informal, and independent.

What do the four Ombuds standards mean?

Impartial: Approaches matters without bias and does not take sides or advocate for either side. If anything, the Ombuds advocates for fairness.

Confidential: The Ombuds is a safe place to talk because it is completely confidential (barring imminent harm) and off-the-record. Everyone is given the full freedom to voice their concerns and frustrations without filter or fear of retaliation.

Informal: The Ombuds is not an investigator and does not process formal complaints. Rather, the Ombuds is an off-the-record resource to try to help improve the work environment.

Independent: The ombuds works outside the management structure with unfettered access to all information and people needed to perform duties, including the Director, NPS and senior DOI leaders.

For more information, follow the hyperlinks to the IOA [Standards of Practice](#), [Code of Ethics](#), and [Best Practices](#), also available online at www.ombudsassociation.org.

Who can contact the Ombuds?

Employees (permanent, temporary, seasonal), managers, and leaders can all talk to the Ombuds about concerns they have and explore ways to make things better.

Who are the Ombuds?

Scott Deyo and Sigal Shoham will both be providing ombuds services to the NPS community.

How do I know that I can trust the Ombuds team?

NPS and DOI CADR did an extensive search and was highly selective and deliberative. We needed Ombuds with: the utmost integrity; a long-standing, proven record of dealing with people in a fair, respectful and empathic way; experience dealing with significant organizational issues; proven ability to deal with a diverse workforce, especially with highly sensitive issues; and who were widely respected and recommended by the greater ombuds community. We are confident that we found the right team, both of whom have years of experience following the IOA standards of practice.

What's the point of having an Ombuds?

There are a number of ways an Ombuds can help. They are there to help you figure out a way to deal with the situation yourself, to help you think about problems in different ways, to be an independent voice and raise ongoing or systemic issues with senior leadership, to help the agency, as a whole, develop strategies and actions to address problems, or even better, to prevent things from even becoming a problem in the first place. Ultimately Ombuds help reinforce a workplace culture that focuses on ethics, respect, teamwork, fairness, responsibility and accountability.

Why use an Ombuds?

Perhaps you are unsure about where to go to address a concern, or you want to address a concern early before it escalates or worsens. You might feel unclear about the organization's policies and procedures and need help getting clarification. Maybe you want a neutral third party to help facilitate thinking through an issue, or you want help figuring out how to address

an issue in a way that won't make it worse. You might also feel like you have been treated unfairly and need to talk about your concerns.

What types of issues could we talk with the Ombuds about?

Sometimes we need a little help from someone else. Maybe just to talk about what's going on, or you have no idea even where to begin. Or you've been dealing with something for a long time, and despite best efforts, it just doesn't seem to be working. Maybe you've seen something in the workplace that doesn't sit right, or you're concerned about what someone else is going through. Finally, you may be holding on to something that's eating away at you, but you don't feel there's anywhere to go or anyone you can trust to talk about it. These are just a few things you could talk about with the Ombuds.

How does an Ombuds maintain confidentiality?

The Ombuds does not share information without permission, maintains information in a secure way, and has a duty to resist all requests for confidential information by anyone, both inside and outside NPS and DOI. Working notes are not considered records and are destroyed once the matter is considered closed. The only exception to confidentiality is the rare instance where there appears to be imminent risk of serious harm.

Is the Ombuds just another arm of management?

No. The Ombuds is independent of NPS management.

I'd like the Ombuds to change a policy. Is that possible?

No. Ombuds do not have the power to change policies. However, we are able to independently offer feedback about possible additions or changes to policies that may be unclear, unfair, or seen to be having unintended consequences.

How will a real or perceived conflict of interest be handled?

Should the Ombuds determine that a conflict of interest exists (real or perceived), the NPS Ombuds will request the assistance from another DOI Ombuds.

Won't the Ombuds just tell management what I said?

Absolutely not. The Ombuds has a duty to protect your identity, and will not share information provided in confidence to the maximum extent permitted by law.

Are Ombuds confidential so the agency can hide wrongdoing?

Absolutely not. Confidentiality is not an agency requirement; it is a core ombuds standard. It is not based on a desire to mislead or hide matters. Rather, confidentiality ensures that people feel safe to discuss any matter with the Ombuds. The default approach is complete confidentiality unless permission is explicitly given to share information. We provide this commitment except in the very rare case where there appears to be an imminent risk of serious harm.

What if a supervisor asks the Ombuds who shared a concern?

The response is, “I do not share the names of those who see me. This applies to everyone, including supervisors and leaders, who also may want to share concerns with us.” If a supervisor states, “I know who brought this forward,” the Ombuds reaffirms “I do not confirm or deny who talks to us.”

What if I'd like an issue raised, but I don't want my name shared?

Many times people will let the Ombuds raise broad concerns without identifying the person who had the concern. Instead of complete confidentiality where the issue and identity isn't shared, the option of the Ombuds raising issues without attribution is worth exploring.

Does the Ombuds advocate for employees?

No. The NPS Ombuds isn't a part of management or an employee advocate (such as the union, which represents employees). The Ombuds strives to be impartial, which means not taking sides. If anything, the Ombuds advocates for fairness and objectivity as a neutral third party.

Things have been heated with my supervisor and a meeting was called. Can the Ombuds sit in and witness the discussion?

If the purpose of the meeting is to have a difficult conversation to address and resolve issues, the NPS Ombuds could (with permission from the employee and supervisor) help facilitate this discussion as a neutral third party. But the Ombuds should not serve as a witness or later testify about what was said in the meeting.

I would like to remain anonymous. Is that possible?

Yes. The NPS Ombuds is not part of any formal grievance, complaint process, investigative or oversight function. The Ombuds is also not authorized to receive notice of alleged violations on behalf of the agency. This means that if you have an issue that might be more appropriate in another office, such as a grievance (HR), discrimination (EEO) or fraud, waste or abuse (IG), the Ombuds will discuss those options with you so that you can choose what works best for you.

When talking to the Ombuds, I share that my issue is related to discrimination. What happens next?

The NPS Ombuds can still talk about options with you. You will also be reminded, “If you believe you have been subjected to unlawful discrimination, you must contact an [NPS EEO Counselor](#) within 45 calendars days from the date of the discriminatory action.” Contacting the Ombuds does not count as making timely contact with the agency for EEO purposes, since the Ombuds is not authorized to receive notice of alleged violations for NPS.

Are timelines for filing formal complaints put on hold?

No. Deadlines and timelines for filing and processing a complaint or appeal under any other complaint procedure are not changed by seeking Ombuds assistance.

How do I contact the Ombuds?

Simply call Scott or Sigal toll free (844-288-7046 or 844-775-7726) or send an email to set up an appointment: scott_deyo@contractor.nps.gov or sigal_shoham@ios.doi.gov.

NOTE: Scott and Sigal hope to return your email or call within one business day.

Visit us online: [InsideNPS](#) > [Employee Center](#) > [Employee Support Options](#) > [Ombuds](#)