

CODE OF ETHICS

PREAMBLE

The International Ombuds Association (IOA) is dedicated to excellence in Organizational Ombuds¹ practice. The Code of Ethics provides Practice Principles and Core Values that are the foundation for the IOA Standards of Practice.

The IOA's Code of Ethics reflects the IOA's commitment to the establishment of consistently structured Ombuds programs, ethical conduct by Ombuds, and the integrity of the Organizational Ombuds profession.

CORE VALUES

The Ombuds role requires Ombuds to conduct themselves as professionals. The following Core Values are essential to the work of Ombuds:

- Act with honesty and integrity;
- Promote fairness and support fair process;
- Remain non-judgmental, with empathy and respect for individual differences;
- Promote dignity, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging;
- Communicate accurate understanding through active listening;
- Promote individual empowerment, self-determination, and collaborative problem-solving; and
- Endeavor to be an accessible, trusted, and respected informal resource.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

INDEPENDENCE

The Ombuds is independent in structure, function, appearance, and decision-making. The Ombuds reports to the highest possible level within the organization and does not report to a function or entity that could affect, or be perceived as affecting, the Ombuds' independence.

IMPARTIALITY

The Ombuds is a designated neutral and impartial resource who does not take sides or serve as an advocate for any person or entity. The Ombuds avoids conflicts of interest and conduct that could be perceived as a conflict of interest.

INFORMALITY

The Ombuds does not participate in any evaluative, disciplinary, legal, or administrative proceedings related to concerns brought to the Ombuds' attention. The Ombuds is not authorized to make business and policy decisions or conduct formal investigations on behalf of the organization. The Ombuds is not an agent of the organization for purposes of receiving notice of claims against the organization and is not authorized to be a formal reporting channel for the organization on matters brought to the Ombuds' attention except when specifically and expressly mandated by law.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality is the defining characteristic of Ombuds practice. The identity of those seeking assistance from the Ombuds and all communications with them are confidential to the maximum extent permitted by law. The Ombuds may, at their sole discretion, disclose confidential information when the person seeking assistance gives permission to do so; when failure to do so might result in an imminent risk of serious harm; or as necessary to defend against a formal complaint of professional misconduct.

¹ The term "Ombuds" includes all applicable nomenclature in use for an organizational ombudsperson.