Candidate Name

Teresa Ralicki

Candidate Title

Senior Ombuds Lead

Organization

tralicki@pinterest.com

Candidate Statement

I believe our profession is in a period of transition. Many of the people who built and grounded organizational ombuds practice have retired or will soon, and that is a real passing of the torch. The good news is that much of the experience we need to lead next is already in our membership. IOA has been making room for those voices; I saw it clearly at the September Symposium, where members' expertise was front and center. I want to serve on the board to build on that momentum with even more intentionality. That means continuing to create seats at the table for experienced members, and fostering a culture where we recognize and value one another's expertise. If we do that well, the next generation of IOA leadership will grow from the depth we already have.

Pathway to the Profession

One of our biggest challenges over the next five years is staying relevant in a technological age. Organizations are rapidly adopting AI and data-driven tools, and they increasingly expect every function to show its value in those terms. If ombuds can't engage on that level, we risk being dismissed as outdated, no matter how essential our work is. At the same time, these tools raise real questions about confidentiality, record-keeping, and access. We need to use technology thoughtfully, both to strengthen our practice and to demonstrate the value we bring, while holding firmly to the IOA Standards of Practice. I work at a technology company, I'm comfortable adopting and building with new tools, and much of my recent work focuses on building that bridge. I'd help the board and our members approach technology with courage, grounded in critical reflection on our standards. I'd also help IOA provide practical guidance on mitigating real risks without creating barriers to access or quality of service.

IOA Values

I'll start with some humility. Having spent the last several years as a member rather than on the board, I don't assume I know more about what members need than the board and IOA leadership do, and I believe they're already working on much of this. What I can offer is my perspective as an experienced practitioner. IOA already has meaningful routes for aspiring and early-career ombuds to connect, learn, and find their way into the profession, and those should keep growing. I see the biggest opportunity at the other end of the career spectrum. Experienced practitioners often feel they got the most from IOA early in their careers and find less for them now. Mid- and senior-level ombuds want real skill building for the hardest parts of the work, like navigating leadership structures and organizational dynamics. The September Symposium was a strong step in that direction. I'd like to help the board build on their work so far with even more structured, ongoing support for experienced practitioners, including chances to

teach, mentor, and learn from one another. When members at every career stage, and across every sector and region, find learning that meets them where they are and see their expertise valued, they experience the value of membership and stay engaged.

Volunteer or Leadership Experience

I served on the IOA Board of Directors from 2015 to 2018, including a year as Vice President and a year as Assistant Treasurer. From 2011 to 2019, I also facilitated in-person strategic planning meetings for the IOA Board on four occasions. For those meetings I interviewed board members beforehand and designed the agendas with leadership. That gave me an unusual view of how the board works, both from inside it and from the facilitator's chair. I spent six years on the conference planning committee, three of them as chair of the programming subcommittee, where I supervised a team of volunteers reviewing and scheduling conference content. I also hosted IOA Radio, interviewing ombuds about their practice. Today I teach IOA's Foundations course and serve as an IOA mentor. Outside IOA, I founded and run the Ombuds Institute, and for eight years I co-created and ran the Ombuzz blog.

On the board, I'd bring the experiences of both governance and facilitation to help the board work well together, plan strategically, and make decisions with a clear understanding of how much of IOA's work depends on its volunteers.

Professional Expertise

Research and data are where I'd contribute most directly. I've been responsible for data in every ombuds role I've held. Over more than fifteen years, I've continually evolved what we capture, how we capture it, and how we report it, so that it better serves the people receiving it and clearly demonstrates the value of the ombuds function. My research experience goes back further, to my undergraduate studies. As an undergraduate, I presented a paper on laypersons' native theories of conflict at the National Communication Association convention, and in graduate school I worked as a research assistant coding and analyzing qualitative data on intergroup conflict. I bring both qualitative and quantitative skills.

Today I teach a graduate course in a business program at Juniata College that prepares students to apply this work inside their own organizations. I'm also leading a field-wide benchmarking survey on ombuds visitor rates as a percentage of constituents, because the figure our field commonly cites has no documented source. In addition, I'm co-leading a grounded-theory study of the systemic work ombuds do beyond one-on-one meetings.

Building the Ombuds Institute has also given me firsthand experience developing professional development offerings, and a sense of what practitioners will invest in. On the board, I'd use this experience to help IOA make data-informed decisions: gathering meaningful input from members, interpreting what we learn, and supporting members in using credible data to show the value of their own offices. I'd also bring a practitioner-founder's perspective to conversations about new offerings, revenue, and partnerships.

Candidate Bio

Professional roles:

Senior Ombuds Lead, Pinterest. Technology (private sector), Remote (Colorado), 2022–present

Ombuds, University of Colorado Denver | Anschutz Medical Campus. Higher education/academic medicine, Denver, CO, 2017–2022

Associate Ombudsman, Office of the Corporate Ombudsman, American Red Cross. Nonprofit, Washington, DC, 2011–2017 (preceded by an Ombudsman Presidential Internship, 2011)

Founder and Instructor, Ombuds Institute. Professional development for ombuds practitioners, 2021–present

Adjunct Professor, Juniata College. Higher education, teaching the graduate course “Conflict and Change,” 2020–present

Conflict Resolution and Organizational Development Consultant. Independent practice, 2019–present

Before becoming an ombuds, I worked as a restorative justice facilitator and community mediator in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts.