***Please use this document to help you prepare for your Organizational Ombuds Program Certification. These questions are all included in the application. When you are ready, please fill out your*** [***Organizational Ombuds Program Certification application on our website.***](https://ioa.memberclicks.net/certification-for-programs-and-offices)

This application solicits information for a review of eligibility for Organizational Ombuds Program Certification. It is a self-reflective assessment of the structure and operation of your Ombuds Office, and the degree to which it supports the ability of the ombuds to practice to IOA’s Standards of Practice. This application is submitted on behalf of your organization, not the individual Ombuds who work within the Office. Any Office with one or more employees is eligible to apply for Program Certification. Please note that the more detailed the information provided by you, the more accurately your Office’s application and alignment with Program Certification requirements may be evaluated. If you have questions or would like to discuss any aspect of the application, please contact us at certification@ombudsassociation.org.

For purposes of the application, staff is defined to include the lead ombuds, other ombuds in the office, and any other staff that support the ombuds office function (i.e. intake, other admin, training, data analysts).

**Background and Overview**

**1.** **Office History, Mission Statement and Sector Served**

*Provide a brief history of your Office, your mission statement and what sector it serves.*

**2.** **Governance Documents**

*Provide documents that your Office is governed by, in a method that is permitted by your organization. Documents you share may include materials such as your charter, standard operating manual, most recent annual report, marketing material, outreach slide deck, link to your website, and any other material you deem is appropriate to share. If sharing of Office governance documents is restricted by organizational policy please explain.*

**3.** **Ombuds Office Staffing, Organizational Chart, and Organizational Environment**

*Provide a description of how your Office is staffed (ie: internal, outsourced, etc.) and who the staff is, please explain where the office is situated, provide an organizational chart if available and to whom the Lead Ombuds reports.*

*How is your office physically set up for optimal visitor engagement either in person or remotely or both? If available, please provide a floor plan of your office location.*

*What efforts have you made to create a safe, confidential environment for your visitor(s) to engage with the ombuds office?*

**4.** **Professional Development for Members of the Office**

*Describe how your Office staff maintain their professional knowledge and skills through professional development.*

**5.** **Number of Constituents Served**

*Provide the types and numbers of constituents that your Office serves.*

**6.** **Voluntary Nature of the Office**

*Is the use of your Office strictly voluntary?* *If not, please explain.*

*Describe how your Office communicates to individuals that your services are voluntary.*

**7.** **Working as a Partner with Formal Offices**

*As a voluntary and informal office how does your Office work with other offices to meet the needs of the visitor(s)?*

**8.** **Meeting the Needs of the Individual and the Organization**

*Given the dual role of ombuds offices addressing needs of visitors and identifying systemic issues of the organization please describe how your office navigates both roles.*

**Operational Practices**

The next series of questions allow IOA to assess how you have structured the office and if your operational practices allow an ombuds to comply with IOA's Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics.

**1.** **Office Design and Reporting Structure**

*Discuss how your office maintains independence in appearance, purpose, practice, and decision-making.*

*Discuss whether office staff hold any other role within the organization that might compromise, or reasonably be perceived as compromising, its independence? If office staff hold other roles, please discuss what they are.*

**2.** **Staff Selection and Budget**

*Describe how the Office maintains its autonomy to select its staff and manage its budget and operations.*

**3.** **Office role in Policymaking other than the Ombuds Office**

*Describe what role, if any, your office takes in policymaking for your organization.*

**4.**  **Office role in Investigations and Grievances**

*Describe what role, if any, your office takes in investigations and/or grievances.*

**5.**  **Ombuds Authority**

*Do the ombuds in the office have independent authority whether or how to address an issue brought to your office?*

*Are there any barriers in the office structure that would limit this independent authority?*

**6.**  **Standards of Practice**

*What methods are used to communicate the Standards of Practice to visitors and other stakeholders? Do you use opening statements? What other methods of communication do you use?*

**7. Ombuds as Impartial, Neutral, and Unbiased Resource**

*Ombuds are an impartial, neutral, and unbiased resource.* *Are there barriers in your organization or reporting requirements for your ombuds that prevent the ombuds from being impartial, neutral, and an unbiased resource?* *If yes, please explain.*

*Are members of your office permitted to decline involvement when the ombuds determine they may have a real or perceived conflict of interest in a matter that is introduced to them?* *If no, please explain.*

*Please check all the communication/conflict resolution/group dialogue services your office provides:*

o Helping leaders and managers to be seen as approachable, fair, and inclusive

o Offering shuttle diplomacy (facilitating communication without bringing all parties together)

o Mediation between individuals

o Conducting facilitated conversation or discussion

o Exploring or "looking into" a problem informally

o Facilitating a generic approach to an individual problem, to lead to a fair outcome while protecting the identity of the individual

o Assisting with process issues involved in any formal or appeals process

o "Following up" on a specific case with relevant stakeholders

o Providing early warning of new or emerging issues

o Identifying and communicating about patterns of issues and their root causes

o Providing trainings

o Convening relevant stakeholders to examine an issue

o Facilitating meetings for senior leaders

o Recommending development of or changes to policies, procedures, and structures

o Serving as a non-voting resource person for policy committees

o Helping managers to work with issues related to diversity

o Working to support specific, mission-related, organizational initiatives

o Following up on system change recommendations that you have made

o Helping informally to coordinate organizational resources or offices related to conflict management

o Supporting efforts to assess organizational culture/climate

o Working informally to influence policies

**8.**  **Ombuds Involvement in Organizational Decision-Making**

*Other than decisions regarding the Ombuds Office, do staff make any business or policy decisions for the organization, and/or adjudicate issues, participate in disciplinary or grievance processes or conduct formal investigations?* *If yes, please explain.*

*Is consultation with the Ombuds Office a required step in any formal disciplinary process or grievance policy? If yes, please explain.*

**9.**  **Receiving Complaints for the Organization**

*Describe how your office communicates that it is not authorized to receive notice of claim, complaints, or grievance against the organization.*

**10.**  **Individual and Organizational Understanding**

*Describe how your Office protects your staff from being called to testify or to disclose confidential information in formal, legal, or other matters.*

**11.**  **Permanent Record and Office Record Retention Policy**

*Describe how your office manages visitor and systemic data. Discuss what case management system you use and data points you track, and if your office has its own data retention, destruction, or disposition policy. Please include if it is a separate database or attached/part of a larger organizational database.*

*Is your Office subject to public records law, FOIA, or Sunshine Laws?*

**12.**  **Individual Identity**

*Does the Office hold the identity of those seeking assistance, as well as all communications with them in strict confidence?* *If not, please explain.*

**13.** **Confidentiality to the Maximum Extent Permitted by Law**

*Describe how the Office, as well as the organization take reasonable steps to safeguard the security of confidential information about visitors to the maximum extent permitted by law.*

**14.** **Imminent Risk of Serious Harm**

*Are ombuds in your office able to disclose confidential information as necessary if they determine that there may be an imminent risk of harm?*

*Please describe how your Office defines imminent risk of harm.*

*Describe whether your organization requires staff in the ombuds office to breach confidentiality for any other reason than stated in the SOPs or if you are required to be a mandatory reporter of any kind? Are these exceptions to confidentiality included in your governing documents (i.e., charter, terms of reference, policy)?*

**15.**  **Data, Trends, and Reporting**

*Describe the process that your office uses to capture and share data, patterns, trends, and/or reports to your organization while protecting confidentiality.*

**16. Additional Staff Input**

*In addition to all staff signing the application, if there is any additional information other staff deem relevant, please send directly to* *certification@ombudsassocaition.org* *and reference the organizational name in the subject line.*

**17. Signature Page**

As part of your application for Organizational Ombuds Program Certification, please upload a signed acknowledgment that affirms your organization’s intent to apply for certification. This document must include:

* The signature, printed name, and title of the lead ombuds
* The signature, printed name, and title of a representative from the organization who is external to the ombuds office (e.g., a senior administrator)

This acknowledgment confirms institutional support for the ombuds program and verifies awareness of the certification application.

[*Please fill out and submit your Acknowledgement Form*](https://ioa.memberclicks.net/assets/CO-OP/IOA_Organizational%20Ombuds%20Program%20Certification%20Acknowledgement%20Form.pdf)