

## Traffic Light Guide for Ombuds Practice: Navigating Relationships & Principles

---

This tool provides Ombuds with practical guidance for navigating roles and relationships while upholding core Standards of Practice (SOP). Using the traffic light model, it helps assess when to proceed, pause with caution, or stop to protect independence, confidentiality, informality, and impartiality.

### Green Light (PROCEED – Full alignment with principles)

Proceed confidently because it aligns fully with your role and the guiding principles.

1. **Independence:**
  - The initiative allows you to operate autonomously without undue influence or interference from the organization or external parties.
  - Your role as an ombuds is clearly defined and respected in the context of the initiative.
2. **Confidentiality:**
  - The initiative does not require you to disclose any sensitive or identifying information shared by visitors.
  - Proper safeguards are in place to protect the confidentiality of those involved.
3. **Informality:**
  - The initiative does not involve creating formal records, binding decisions, or participating in formal grievance processes.
  - Engagement is voluntary and informal, in line with your role as an impartial or omnipartial resource.
4. **Impartiality:**
  - The initiative does not place you in a position where you are perceived to favor any party or stakeholder.
  - Your involvement is neutral and unbiased, without taking sides or advocating for any specific outcome.

### Yellow Light (CAUTION – potential risks to Principles)

Evaluate the risks and consider adjustments before proceeding to ensure alignment with your principles.

1. **Independence:**
  - The initiative involves collaboration with other organizational units, which may risk compromising your autonomy.
  - There is potential for perceived or actual pressure from leadership or stakeholders to align with their agendas.
2. **Confidentiality:**
  - The initiative may require sharing aggregated or anonymized data, which could inadvertently lead to identifying individuals if not handled carefully.
  - There is ambiguity about how confidentiality will be maintained throughout the process.
3. **Informality:**

## Traffic Light Guide for Ombuds Practice: Navigating Relationships & Principles

---

- The initiative risks blurring the line between informal and formal processes, such as being asked to document findings or participate in formal investigations.
  - There is a possibility that your involvement may be misinterpreted as formal endorsement or authority.
4. **Impartiality:**
- The initiative may involve stakeholders who perceive your involvement as biased or favoring one side.
  - There is a risk of being drawn into advocacy or decision-making roles that conflict with your neutral stance.

### Red Light (STOP – misalignment with Principles)

DON'T proceed because it conflicts with your guiding principles or your role as an ombuds.

1. **Independence:**
  - The initiative would require you to report directly to or take direction from a party with a vested interest in the outcome.
  - Your autonomy is clearly compromised, and your role as an independent resource is undermined.
2. **Confidentiality:**
  - The initiative requires you to disclose confidential information or breaches the trust of individuals who rely on you.
  - There are no adequate safeguards to protect sensitive information.
3. **Informality:**
  - The initiative involves formal processes, such as acting as a decision-maker, investigator, or arbitrator.
  - Your participation would create formal records or obligations that conflict with your informal role.
4. **Impartiality:**
  - The initiative places you in a position where you are expected to advocate for a specific party or outcome.
  - Your involvement would create a clear perception of bias or a conflict of interest.

### Key reminders

- Consider how you might adapt your role or adjust your level of involvement to strengthen and sustain collaborative relationships within your organization.
- Ensure that the purpose and scope of your involvement are clearly defined and communicated.
- Manage expectations to prevent misinterpretation of your role or actions.
- Regularly assess the potential risks to your guiding principles and document your reasoning for proceeding (or not proceeding).
- Seek advice from ombuds networks, trusted colleagues, legal advisors, if you are unsure about how to proceed.