

## Summary of the 2012 State of the Association Session and Participant Input

At the 2012 Annual Conference & Pre-Business Meeting in Houston, Texas, the Board of Directors launched an initiative to gather information from conference attendees about the top challenges and solutions faced by the International Ombudsman Association. Board members framed the state of the Association around four main topics: Finance, External Factors, Shared Purpose, and Leadership. (Click here to see the State of the Association presentation slides.) Session participants gathered around 30 tables where they exchanged valuable input in response to the questions below on the state of the Association.

### *Inquiry around challenges:*

- Are these areas the major challenges?
- Are there other major areas of concern?
- What are areas of strength for the IOA to build on?
- How should these be prioritized?

### *Inquiry around moving forward:*

- What are some ideas for addressing or resolving these challenges?
- What are ways the IOA can better meet your/member needs?
- Where would you like to see the IOA and the profession 6 years from now?

Board members collected participant feedback which was summarized by the table facilitators and provided a summary to members the next day at the Annual Business Meeting. Following is a brief summary of the top challenges and solutions discussed by session participants and summarized by facilitators on April 17, 2012.

## Shared Purpose

Challenges: Most of the feedback generated focused on IOA's "shared purpose" and organizational identity. In general, these concerns fell into 3 subcategories:

1. Concerns that IOA should be focused on organizational ombuds
2. Concerns about membership categories, including:
  - Clarity about existing membership categories
  - Need to be more inclusive in our membership
3. Concerns that IOA needs to be international or globally focused

Due to the volume of this feedback, the Board recognizes that clarifying the IOA's purpose is a priority to session attendees.

Solutions: Participant emphasized the need to make a decision and bring the issue to closure, and various approaches to broadening the structure and membership while at the same time to create a broader, more inclusive structure with multiple Standards of Practice for different groups, and to focus on organizational ombuds and protect the Standards of Practice.

## **Financial**

Challenges: Participants recognized the need to improve revenue and a few were optimistic that these financial challenges were not catastrophic and mirrored the dip in the economy.

Solutions: Participants ideas for addressing the financial challenges tended to be very specific. Ideas included such ideas as expanding training offerings, reducing costs, doing better financial planning, and hiring professionals to do development work.

## **External Factors**

Challenges: Participants concluded that explaining the ombuds profession to others and promoting the value and visibility of the ombuds role was the primary external challenge.

Solutions: Participants generated numerous ideas around marketing, lobbying and partnering, including the idea of hiring professionals for those purposes.

## **Leadership**

Challenges: In addition to member engagement and volunteerism, participants reported that communication and transparency between IOA and its members was a leadership challenge.

Solutions: Input included ideas for strengthening IOA leadership such as hiring an executive director, and strengthening continuity among the Board such as increasing the terms or professionalizing the Board

During the remainder of 2012 and the beginning of 2013, the Board has returned to the feedback provided to map out IOA's challenges and solutions in a clear and concise manner. After additional analysis of 283 comments, the challenges and solutions were compiled into three broad categories rather than those framed in the Board's opening presentation: (1) Finance; (2) IOA Structure; and (3) IOA Ideology/Shared Purpose. Promisingly, participants provided more solutions than challenges. Of the 148 solutions presented, 57% focused on changes to IOA's structure, including changes in leadership structure, membership, partnerships with other organizations, and communications. In addition, members offered many solutions to IOA's challenge of finding a Shared Purpose. The vast majority of these solutions focused on ways of demonstrating the value and resources that IOA offers to members and external organizations. Only 3% of the feedback provided pertained to solutions for IOA's financial challenges. For more information including a graphic display about the input collected, see [challenges](#) and [solutions](#).

The Board of Directors looks forward to continuing to engage with the IOA community and continue to hear from its members as we work on the a strategic plan for the next five years.