



# Conference Ombuds Charter

## International Ombudsman Association

2020 Annual Conference | Portland, OR | March 29-April 1, 2020

### Establishment of Conference Ombuds Program

To support the commitment of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) to its mission and its Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, IOA has decided to provide organizational ombuds services (Conference Ombuds Program) in connection with its 2020 Annual Conference in Portland, Oregon, from March 29 -April 1 (the Conference). IOA's goal is for the Conference to be as inclusive and accessible as possible for attendees, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, religion, employment status or status in the field. In addition, IOA desires to model the concept of a conference ombuds and to demonstrate the ability of an organizational ombuds to improve the conduct and climate at conferences with aggregate data and non-confidential feedback on trends and recommendations from the ombuds to conference sponsors.

The Conference Ombuds Program is designed to be an independent, impartial, off-the-record, and confidential channel for Conference attendees to discuss any concerns they may have concerning Conference related activities. The person selected to provide these services, Elaine Shaw ("Conference Ombuds" or "Ombuds") will be available to provide information confidentially and will provide a safe place for people to discuss such issues as safety, actions from "overly-friendliness to harassment, micro-aggressions, free speech, integrity, privacy, conflicts of interest ( including accessibility, lodging, and food), alcohol consumption and conference cliques. The Ombuds is a resource to informally discuss any of these or other conference-related concerns and help inquirers develop options, problem-solve, create paths for self-advocacy, and make informed choices about the best path forward.

This Charter sets forth the operating principles under which the Conference Ombuds Program will operate and reflect IOA's commitment to the Conference Ombuds and the role of this position.

### Standards of Operation

As provided in the Services Agreement between IOA and the Conference Ombuds (the "Agreement"), the Ombuds shall be a member of IOA and shall adhere to IOA's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice in performing ombuds services for attendees to the

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Conference. These tenets require organizational ombuds programs to be independent, neutral, informal, and confidential:

### **1. Independence**

The Conference Ombuds is an independent contractor and, while a member of IOA, will in no way be serving in any leadership role or other capacity at the Conference for IOA. The Ombuds functions outside existing administrative structures pursuant to the Agreement between the Conference Ombuds and IOA.

### **2. Impartiality**

The Conference Ombuds provides impartial assistance and assessments of concerns. As a neutral third-party, the Ombuds is a resource for equitable and fair process, and the fair administration of process. The Ombuds does not, however, provide legal or other kinds of advocacy or enforce IOA's Code of Ethics or Standards of Practice. The Ombuds does not render services or become involved in any matter in which it would be a conflict of interest for the Ombuds to do so.

### **3. Informality**

The Conference Ombuds provides a means for off-the-record discussions of concern. The Ombuds is empowered to provide only informal assistance, and does not have authority to conduct investigations, make or override decisions, determine policy, testify or participate in formal or administrative proceedings with respect to confidential communications, provide legal advice, or accept legal notice of claims or complaints against IOA or any other organization, entity, or person. For those wishing to assert claims or have on-the-record communications, the Conference Ombuds can make referrals to appropriate formal channels so that individuals may make informed choices about which process they decide is best for them to pursue.

### **4. Confidentiality**

Communications with the Conference Ombuds are confidential to the maximum extent permitted by law. This principle of confidentiality helps the Conference Ombuds provide a safe place for conference attendees to voice concerns, evaluate issues, and identify options for possible further action. The Conference Ombuds is a purely voluntary resource. No one is required to use it, but those who do will be deemed to have agreed to respect and abide by the principles on which it was created and not call the Ombuds to testify or produce documents related to confidential communications in any administrative or legal proceeding. IOA has also agreed not to call upon or attempt to have the Conference Ombuds disclose confidential communications or to testify or produce documents relating to confidential communications in any administrative or legal proceeding.



Consistent with the IOA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, the only exceptions to this confidentiality principle are: (a) when, during the course of communications with the Conference Ombuds, an inquirer gives the Ombuds permission to make a disclosure and the Ombuds agrees it is appropriate to do so, or (b) when the Conference Ombuds determines that there is an imminent threat of serious harm.

### **Scope of Services**

The Conference Ombuds will be available to consult with conference attendees during the term authorized by the Agreement (March 29-May 1, 2020) concerning any conference-related issues identified above. The Conference Ombuds will be available on-site during the meeting days of the Conference, and conference attendees will be advised of the ways Ombuds may be contacted as well as the times and places where the Ombuds may be found.

As a neutral third-party, the Ombuds is an advocate for equity and fair process.

Although the Conference Ombuds will not remain on-site after the Conference, the Ombuds has been authorized to continue to assist inquirers after the Conference (until May 1, 2020) where continuing consultation has not been concluded or when an issue is raised in a reasonable time following the conference.

### **Accountability and Reporting**

The Conference Ombuds will report to IOA's Executive Director and President, and as they deem appropriate, to IOA's Executive Committee and/or Board of Directors, as provided in the Agreement. The Ombuds may also meet with and alert senior leadership of IOA of any systemic issues or trends the Ombuds believes may help the organization address identified or potential issues, improve the climate for membership or future conferences, or improve its policies and practices. Even when reporting issues to senior leadership, the Conference Ombuds protects the confidentiality of those using the Ombuds' services.

### **Record Keeping**

The Ombuds provides only informal assistance, and although informal notes may be temporarily created only as needed, the Ombuds will destroy all notes, documents, and materials containing personally identifiable information or confidential communications once the engagement has ended. Any post-conference reporting to senior leadership, as provided in the Agreement, will contain only aggregate data and the Ombuds insights and observations on the types of issues raised and any organizational recommendations.