

Year 1 Public Description of Work for
Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

International Ombudsman Association

Project 1: Ombuds Toolkit

This Action Applies to Rubric Item(s):

13 and 14

Description of Work:

OVERVIEW: Ombuds play a critical role in addressing sexual harassment in higher education. In advance of the November 2019 Inaugural Summit of the Action Collaborative, the International Ombudsman Association created a resources kit to showcase during the poster session. The purpose of the resources kit is to aid in the consideration and establishment of ombuds offices as well as to help existing ombuds become more effective. The toolkit provides a guide for getting started, including resources to learn more about what an ombuds is, how organizations can benefit from having an ombuds, and how to establish a new office. Resources are specific to higher education.

What is an Ombuds?

For students, faculty, staff and postdoctoral appointees, an ombuds program offers a safe, off-the-record and knowledgeable resource to help address a conflict or concern. Ombuds work in a way that is confidential, impartial, informal and independent.

What do Ombuds do?

Ombuds engage in confidential and constructive problem-solving toward the goal of instilling respect in communities, organizations and professional relationships. An ombuds program:

- Empowers individuals to address disputes, conflicts and barriers.
- Supports individual control of disclosure.
- If desired, promotes resolution of issues without formal reporting, sanctions, or punishment.

How do Universities/Organizations benefit?

An Ombuds program:

- Increases leadership's awareness of important issues by identifying systemic issues and trends.

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- Helps institutions anticipate and avoid risk, litigation, and costly damage to an institution's reputation.
- Serves the whole system – faculty, staff, students and postdocs – including leadership and those accused.
- Offers confidential guidance to victims, who are more likely to report or resolve their issues informally thus improving campus climate.
- Advocates for fair processes and equity.
- Supports system improvement, suggesting new policies and procedures and assisting in training on conflict management, civility and respect.

How do Ombuds make an impact on sexual harassment?

The NAS report released in June 2018 found that sexual harassment in the academic sciences, engineering, and medicine is common, yet unlikely to be reported. An ombuds provides a place to receive confidential guidance BEFORE action is taken – a valuable resource for those who may be reluctant to come forward. For reporting sexual harassment, an ombuds program offers:

- A place to go that is outside formal reporting channels.
- A nonjudgmental, confidential and safe place to explore pathways forward.
- An alternative, informal means of resolution without fear of retaliation.
- A way to understand their institution's policies and processes.
- A completely voluntary process.

Website for further information (if applicable): ombudsassociation.org/ombuds-toolkit

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