

What is the Employee Ombud Office?

The Office of the Employee Ombud provides a safe space for you to report workplace issues, discuss concerns, and explore options. Our goal is to help you develop constructive strategies for dealing with conflict and find answers to questions about available programs and resources. We use a trauma-informed approach to provide support, validation, and de-escalation to City employees.

Who can use the Ombud Office?

The Office of the Employee Ombud is offered as a no-charge service to the entire City of Seattle Employee community.

What is an ombudsperson?

An ombudsperson is a neutral person who can assist in resolving concerns in an informal, confidential, impartial, and nonescalating manner. The ombudsperson provides services designed to support individuals and groups, optimize the effectiveness of programs and services, and enhance the overall learning and workplace environments. The ombudsperson does not provide legal advice or psychological counseling.

What procedures or approaches does the ombudsperson use to provide help?

To assist a visitor, the ombudsperson employs a wide variety of informal approaches, including but not limited to:

- Listening
- Informal consulting
- Informal mediation
- Suggesting referrals to existing services
- Coaching
- Facilitated dialogue
- Shuttle diplomacy

How is the Ombud Office different from other Employee services?

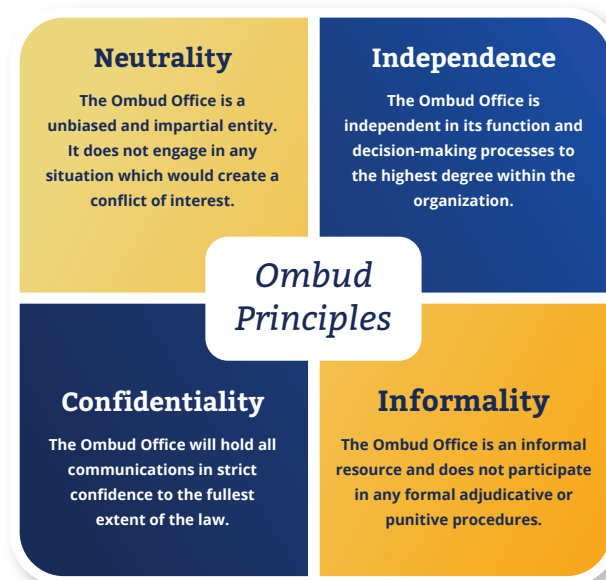
The Office of the Employee Ombud is a designated confidential resource for all employees. Additionally, the services provided by the Ombud Office are designed to complement rather than replace other services such as formal investigative processes. We are

an informal and confidential resource here to help amicably manage conflict with an intention to deescalate, or to identify other available options.

The Ombud Office offers a good alternative if you:

- Would appreciate a confidential sounding board
- Want help thinking through how to deal directly with a concern
- Are uncertain about taking a problem through other established channels
- Are unsure who to talk to about a problem or concern
- Want to strategize how to avoid a small problem becoming a big problem
- Want an informal non-escalating approach where the next steps remain within your control
- Need a fresh, impartial perspective
- Want to discuss strategies or possible options and resources for resolving a concern
- Want to maintain the greatest flexibility in addressing a concern
- Would like help communicating with another person or group (e.g., supervisor, co-workers, etc.)

Note: The OEO will not conduct investigations.



City of Seattle

Office of the Employee Ombud

Frequently Asked Questions

OFFICE OF THE EMPLOYEE OMBUD

City Hall
 600 4th Ave
 L-290 (next to Board & Commissions room)
 Seattle, WA 98124
 Phone: 206-684-4873
 Email: ombud@seattle.gov

Am I required to visit the Ombud Office before I contact other services?

The Office of the Employee Ombud is an entirely voluntary service and you are never required to contact the ombudsperson before seeking the assistance of other programs. If you are not sure which other programs may be available to help you resolve a particular issue or concern, you may visit the ombudsperson, who can discuss your concern and we will suggest options, approaches, and other resources.

Does visiting the Ombud Office put the City on notice?

No. Because of its confidentiality, impartiality, and independence, the Ombud Office is not an "office of notice" for reporting discrimination, crimes, or allegations of violations of law (such as a Title IX violation). If you want to put something on the record or obligate the City administration to respond in some way, you must pursue alternative avenues. We can work with you to figure out what those alternative avenues might be, given the situation.

Are there exceptions to Ombud Office confidentiality?

Confidentiality is an important principle for the Ombuds. The Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics of the International Ombuds Association provide standards for operating the Ombuds Office. These standards establish an important exception to confidentiality: when, in the judgment of the ombudsperson, failure to disclose information creates an imminent risk of serious harm to the visitor or to others. Additionally, the Ombuds Office will disclose information where expressly required by state or federal law (e.g., in cases of child abuse or neglect) or if ordered by a court with appropriate authority. Confidentiality extends not only to the spoken word but to all other forms of communication to and with an Ombud in their works. This includes information regarding whether someone did or did not contact the Ombud office. Such information may be shared if the complainant chooses not to request anonymity, according to State of Washington Legislation HB 2020.

Can I remain anonymous?

Confidentiality is an essential characteristic of ombud work. An ombud will not voluntarily disclose outside the ombud office information provided by visitors (including the visitor's identity) if the complainant actually requests his or her identity or any identifying information not be disclosed. According to State of Washington Legislation HB 2020, without this explicit request, the information provided is disclosable. At OEO, our standard of practice will be to offer every complainant a chance to decide if they wish to keep their identifying information private. If you wish to remain anonymous, the best way to communicate with OEO is in-person or via phone. Please note that if you send an email, ensure that you do not include confidential information.

Is the ombudsperson a "mandatory reporter" for Title IX or prohibited discrimination?

No. The ombudsperson is a designated confidential resource at the City of Seattle and is therefore not obligated to report situations that may implicate Title IX or prohibited discrimination. Additionally, the ombudsperson is not a "security authority," and thus does not pass along information about crimes that may have been committed. The only exceptions to confidentiality of the Ombud are child abuse or neglect; imminent risk of serious harm to the visitor or another person; or the order of a court with appropriate authority.

Can the ombudsperson come with me to my performance review?

No. The ombudsperson does not participate in formal processes, such as performance reviews or disciplinary action. Additionally, the ombudsperson will not participate as a "witness" in a meeting, because the ombudsperson cannot be called upon afterward to verify that something was or was not said. This is not to say that you must face all these processes and meetings alone. Come talk with us about your options in these situations.

Does the ombudsperson maintain records?

We will keep short-term working notes as necessary to keep track of commitments and follow-up activities. The ombudsperson does keep limited non-identifiable

information so that the program can track general trends and work with Employee governance and administration to identify opportunities for systemic improvements.

Whom do I contact if I have other questions about the Ombud Office?

You may call the Office of the Employee Ombud at **206-684-4873** or send an e-mail at **ombud@seattle.gov**. Please do not send confidential information via email.

What happens in a visit?

The Ombud will open the visit with a description of what the office does, and the principles of confidentiality, independence, informality, and impartiality to ensure that you are aware of what the office can and cannot do. We will then ask you to describe the issue you wish to discuss. You are free to disclose as much or as little as you want, although we find that the more information one can provide the better. We are here to support you in finding a solution.

What should I bring with me to visit?

There is nothing that you are required to bring. However, you are welcome to bring documentation that helps you explain the issue you wish to discuss. The Ombud will not keep any of the documents you bring with you.

How long is a visit? How many will there be?

Visits are scheduled for 30 minutes. There is no limit to how many visits you can schedule and you may see the Ombuds until the matter is resolved. We generally schedule a 30 minute consult; mediation and other processes take longer and will be scheduled as needed on a case-by-case basis.

See the full OEO FAQs on our InWeb for more information!

seattle.gov.sharepoint.com/Ombuds/