

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 free and available to all current City of Seattle employees (including temporary and contract employees).

What is an ombud?

An ombud is an informal, confidential, impartial and independent individual who can assist in raising concerns or resolving conflicts in a non-escalating manner. The ombud provides services designed to support individuals and groups, optimize the effectiveness of programs and services, and enhance the overall learning and work-place environments. The ombud does not provide legal advice or psychological counseling and does not do formal investigations.

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

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

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

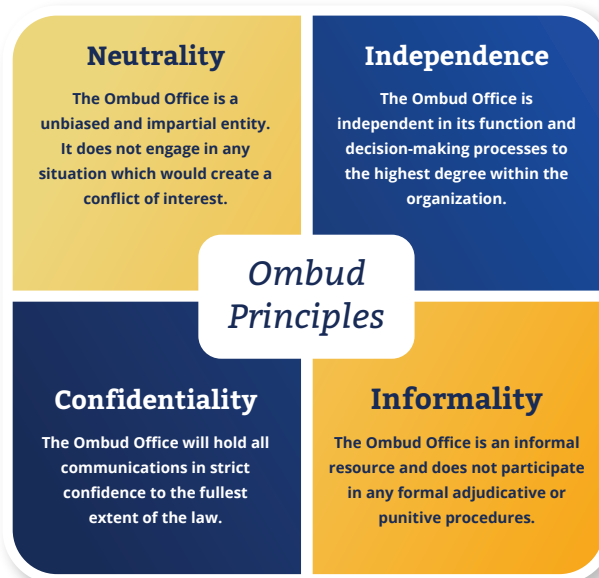
How is the Ombud Office different from other Employee services?

The Office of the Employee Ombud is a designated confidential resource for all employees. We are an informal resource to help amicably manage conflict with an intention to deescalate or identify other available options. Additionally, the services provided by the Ombud Office are designed to complement rather than replace other services such as formal investigative processes.

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 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.)
- Have exhausted all other options and do not know where else to turn to address lingering issues



City of Seattle Office of the Employee Ombud

Frequently Asked Questions

OFFICE OF THE EMPLOYEE OMBUD

Columbia Center
701 5th Ave, 20th Floor
STE 2010

Seattle, WA 98104

Phone: 206-233-7850

Email: ombud@seattle.gov

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

The Office of the Employee Ombud is a voluntary service and you are never required to contact the ombud 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 can discuss your concern with us, 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. If you want to put something on the record or obligate the City administration to respond, you must pursue alternative avenues. We can work with you to identify those alternative avenues.

Are there exceptions to Ombud Office confidentiality?

Confidentiality is an important principle for the Ombud. It extends not only to speech but to all other forms of communication to and with an Ombud. This includes information regarding whether someone did or did not contact the Ombud office. If a visitor to the Ombud Office expressly requests anonymity, their identity may not be shared, per State of Washington Legislation HB 2020. However, if the visitor does not request anonymity, then HB 2020 will not apply.

Additionally, under the operating Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics of the International Ombuds Association, there is exception to confidentiality: when, in the judgment of the ombud, failure to disclose information creates an imminent risk of serious harm to the visitor or to others.

Finally, the Ombud Office will disclose information where expressly required to do so by state or federal law (e.g., in cases of child abuse or neglect) or if ordered by a court with appropriate authority. Such information may be shared if the visitor chooses not to request anonymity, according to HB 2020.

Can I remain anonymous?

Yes. 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 is to offer every visitor 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. If you do send an email, please do not include confidential information.

Is the Ombud a "mandatory reporter" for prohibited discrimination?

No. The ombud is a designated confidential resource at the City of Seattle and is therefore not obligated to report situations that may implicate prohibited discrimination. 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 Ombud come with me to my performance review?

No. The Ombud does not participate in formal processes, such as performance reviews or disciplinary action. Additionally, the Ombud will not participate as a "witness" in a meeting, because the Ombud 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 Ombud maintain records?

We will keep short-term working notes as necessary to keep track of commitments and follow-up activities. The Ombud 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 **206-233-7850** 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 and what you believe respectful resolution would look like. You are free to disclose as much or as little as you want. Based on the information we have from you, we will then work with you to identify options, whether informal or formal, and come up with next steps to help you reach your respectful resolution.

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?

Intake visits are scheduled for 1 hour. 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 1-hour intake; 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