

What is the Employee Ombud Office?

The Office of the Employee Ombud (OEO) provides a safe space for you to raise concerns, explore options, and resolve conflicts. Our goal is to help you develop and implement constructive strategies for navigating and resolving conflict effectively as well as providing referrals to helpful resources. We use a trauma-informed approach to provide support, validation, and de-escalation. In addition to individual support, we also work with groups to optimize team effectiveness and enhance the overall work-place environment.

Who can use the OEO?

We are 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 person who can assist in raising concerns or resolving conflicts in a non-escalating manner. The ombud does not provide legal advice or psychological counseling and does not do formal investigations.

What approaches does the OEO use to help?

To assist each visitor, we employ a wide variety of informal approaches, including but not limited to:

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

How is the OEO different from other City Employee services?

We are a confidential, informal resource for all employees to help amicably manage conflict with an intention to de-escalate or identify available options. Our services are designed to complement rather than replace other services such as formal investigative processes.

The OEO is a good option if you:

- Desire a confidential sounding board
- Want help thinking through a concern
- Are uncertain about reporting a problem through formal channels
- Are unsure who to talk to about a problem or concern
- Want to strategize on how to avoid the escalation of an existing 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 flexibility in options for addressing a concern
- Want help communicating effectively 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*

Am I required to visit the OEO before I contact other services?

We are a voluntary resource. You are not required to work with our office, even if referred by your management. You are not required to contact us before seeking the assistance of other services, and you can seek out other resources at any time during your work with our office. If you are not sure about where to go to help you resolve a particular issue or concern, our office can suggest options, approaches, and other resources.

Does visiting the OEO put the City on notice?

We are not an office of notice. Because of our confidentiality, impartiality, and independence, we are NOT mandatory reporters of workplace discrimination and harassment. If you want to put something on record or require City administration to respond, you need to pursue formal avenues which we can help identify.

Are there exceptions to the OEO's confidentiality?

Confidentiality is an important principle for the OEO which extends to ALL forms of communication with our office. This includes whether or not someone has been in contact with our office. We maintain and retain our records with an emphasis on preserving confidentiality and anonymity. We are subject to the Public Records Act, which you can read about in more detail in this brochure, and are required to disclose records if responsive. If you wish to remain anonymous, the best way to communicate with OEO is in-person or via phone to avoid the creation of written records. You can also use our secure portal at oeointake.seattle.gov to submit an anonymous report.

Confidentiality in the OEO operates on the basis of client permissions, sharing information outside the office only when we have express permission from the client to do so. The only time we would go outside the office without express client permission is when there is an imminent risk of serious harm to the visitor or to others, 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 the appropriate authority.

Does the OEO maintain records?

We keep short-term working notes as necessary to keep track of commitments and follow-up activities. We maintain limited, non-identifiable information to track general trends, which we use in working with Employee governance and administration to identify opportunities for systemic improvements.

Is the OEO subject to Public Disclosure Requests?

Yes, the OEO is subject to Public Disclosure Requests. We anonymize our records and retain those with identifying information for the shortest time allowable within our records retention schedule. Any emails or text messages sent to our office could be subject to a public disclosure request, and as such, we do not recommend the use of email or text messages to communicate confidential information. Instead, we suggest that all visitors wishing to contact us do so by phone or submit documents to our office via our secure portal at oeointake.seattle.gov in an anonymous report.

Can an OEO staff member join me in my performance review?

As an informal and impartial entity, OEO staff do NOT participate in formal processes such as performance reviews or disciplinary action. We will not participate as a "witness" or act as your advocate during a meeting. The OEO can help you prepare for a performance review or other formal meetings and/or debrief afterwards.

How can I get in contact with the OEO?

You may call us at 206-233-7850 or send an e-mail at ombud@seattle.gov.

Please do not send confidential information via email.

You also have the option of reporting a concern anonymously via our secure portal:
oeointake.seattle.gov

What happens in a visit?

OEO staff will begin with a description of what the office does, and our guiding principles. 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 determine next steps to help you reach your respectful resolution.

What should I bring with me to a visit?

There is nothing that you are required to bring, but documentation may help explain the issue you wish to discuss. The OEO staff member will not keep any of the documents you bring with you.

How long is a visit? How many people 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 us until the matter is resolved. 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!

seattlegov.sharepoint.com/sites/OEO_HUB