

Ombuds Standards of Practice

The core standards — independence, confidentiality and impartiality, **encourage people to work with the ombuds office** and explore effective options. This is especially important for those who are reluctant or afraid of management, or those within the organization who are wary of complainants. By creating a safe space, **ombuds receive unvarnished feedback about an organization’s programs and processes**. This feedback informs the recommendations ombuds make to the organization as to how to better serve their constituents.

Confidentiality

- Encourages visitors to speak freely & honestly
- Often a “requirement” for participation
- Necessary condition for trust

Neutrality & Impartiality

- Supports fairness & confidentiality
- Contributes to the “safeness” of the ombuds
- Helps ensure the ombuds is viewed as credible
- Necessary condition for trust

Independence

- Supports neutrality and impartiality
- Enables flexibility
- Ensures access throughout the organization
- Necessary condition for trust

Ombuds Definitional Characteristics

Informality

- Reinforces perception as a safe, confidential resource
- Option to speak “off the record”
- Supplements formal procedures

Credible Review

- Necessary for the ombuds to be trusted to review & address matters impartially
- Enables ombuds to build trust with constituents

Fairness

- The raison d'être for many ombuds professionals
- Necessary guiding principle for neutrality & impartiality
- Fairness + standards plus informality & credible review?

The three definitional characteristics— **informality** (which is defined as **not having any formal management decision making power** nor providing **formal rights-based processes for redress**), **credibility** with regards to practices and procedures, and a **commitment to fairness** serve as a platform on which to practice the standards.