

AAVSO Ombuds Policy and Procedures

June 12, 2024

Purpose

This document describes the role of the Ombuds person and the procedures for handling complaints to that person. The AAVSO's Second Vice President is the organization's Ombuds person and in this capacity acts as an independent and confidential source for Board members, employees, and Members to express their grievances.

The purpose of the Ombuds is to be a designated neutral or impartial dispute resolution person whose major function is to provide independent, impartial, confidential, and informal assistance to managers and employees. Note that all of these adjectives are important, none more so than confidential. However, the Ombuds process is not meant to contravene regular management decisions, but rather to handle any complaints or grievances from a neutral position and offer a solution in an informal way to help management, Board members, and employees resolve any issues. It is important to recognize that before any complaint comes to the Ombuds person, the complaining party must have tried to resolve the problem directly with management first.

The following are the procedures to be followed when a complaint is filed with the Ombuds person.

Procedures

1. Ombuds complaints should be addressed to the Second VP via the address ombuds@aavso.org. This email address for complaints should be made available on the AAVSO website and access to it should be updated for each new Second VP.
2. Upon receipt of an Ombuds complaint, the Second VP should carefully read the complaint to determine if the complaint is appropriate to pursue. There may be cases where the complaint is not appropriate - there is no clear guidelines here, it is really in the Second VP's discretion to decide.
3. After verifying that the complaint is appropriate, the Second VP should contact the complainant and explain the Ombuds process and that all efforts will be made to maintain confidentiality during the process, which the complainant must also cooperate with as well. Additional information from the complainant may be required to understand the complaint in specific detail and those questions should be asked at the same time.
4. The first question for the Ombuds person to determine is whether the complainant made any effort to resolve the matter directly before appealing to the Ombuds process. It is assumed that the complainant must first make a direct attempt to resolve the problem through direct interaction first.
5. It may be possible to undertake an investigation into the problem directly, or it may be necessary to use an external consultant. It should be determined by the Second VP which is necessary. Approval for using an external consultant must be obtained from the AAVSO Board President.

6. The investigation should be undertaken confidentially if possible. If it is impossible to do so, permission must be obtained from the complainant to proceed without confidentiality retained.

7. After determining and considering the facts of the situation, the Ombuds person should seek a resolution to the complaint that (a) reasonably addresses the concerns of the complainant; (b) considers the best interests of the organization; and (c) is defensibly fair.

8. Resolution of the complaint could involve dialog with the complainant and the Ombuds person or external consultant, facilitated resolution of the matter between the individuals involved, or some other solution. The Ombuds person's decisions should attempt to provide the environment for a solution to be found between the individuals involved, facilitated or not, recognizing that a resolution is not always attainable. It is important, however, that all parties are heard, and grievances recognized and appreciated.

9. At the resolution of a complaint, a report will be given to the Board by the Ombuds person.

10. Appeals of the Ombuds person's decisions must be adjudicated by the President, who should be kept informed at all steps of the process unless the complaint received involves them, in which case the First VP should be involved. For more complicated situations, the Ombuds person should bring in other elected leaders as necessary to help resolve the situation.