

National Aeronautics and
Space Administration
Office of the Administrator
Washington, DC 20546-0001



January 7, 2004

TO: Directors, NASA Centers
FROM: AD/Deputy Administrator
SUBJECT: NASA Ombuds Program

I am pleased to announce the establishment of NASA's Ombuds Program. This program evolved from a recommendation of a NASA team that was organized to identify Agencywide actions that respond to the Columbia Accident Investigation Team's findings. The Ombuds Program provides the workforce with a supplemental channel of communication to raise significant issues and concerns that they perceive could impact safety, organizational performance, and mission success.

Each Center and Headquarters have identified their Ombuds designee. Enclosure 1 is a list of the designees. Mr. Jeffrey E. Sutton, Assistant Administrator for Management Systems, shall serve as the Agency's Ombuds Program lead. In this role, he will be supported by Ms. Olga M. Dominguez, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Management Systems, who is designated to serve as the Agency's Ombuds for Headquarters. Enclosure 2 is a white paper that describes the Ombuds role proposal. The Ombuds role, however, will be further defined as the program evolves. In this regard, Mr. Sutton has scheduled a video teleconference for January 15, 2004, from 10 a.m. – 12 noon, EST., with the Ombuds designees and other stakeholders to discuss and define how the role should operate.

I appreciate your support in this endeavor and look forward to an Ombuds Program that even further emphasizes NASA's commitment to safety as our number one core value.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Frederick D. Gregory".

Frederick D. Gregory

2 Enclosures

NASA Center and Headquarters Ombuds Designees

Ames Research Center	John W. Boyd Senior Advisor for History
Dryden Flight Research Center	Marta Bohn-Meyer Chief, Office of Safety and Mission Assurance
Goddard Space Flight Center	Judy Bruner Assistant to the Director for Safety and Security Office of the Center Director
Glenn Research Center	Dallas Lauderdale Chief of the Facilities Division Engineering and Technical Services Directorate
Headquarters	Olga M. Dominguez Deputy Assistant Administrator Office of Management Systems
Jet Propulsion Laboratory	Lewis Redding JPL Ombuds Person
Johnson Space Center	James (Milt) Heflin, Jr. Chief, Flight Director Office
Kennedy Space Center	Humberto T. Garrido Associate Director Safety and Mission Assurance
Langley Research Center	Grant Watson Head, Safety and Facility Assurance Office
Marshall Space Flight Center	Axel Roth MSFC Associate Director
Stennis Space Center	Douglas McLaughlin Deputy Director Business Management Directorate

Directors, NASA Centers:

ARC/Mr. Hubbard
Di-RC/Mr. Petersen
GRC/Dr. Earls
GSFC/Mr. Diaz
JSC/Gen. Howell
KSC/Mr. Kennedy
LaRC/Gen. Bridges
MSFC/Mr. King
SSC/Adm. Donaldson

Director, Jet Propulsion Laboratory:

Dr. Elachi

cc:

ADI/Mr. Jennings
C/Mr. Frelk
E/Dr. Hayden-Watkins
F/Ms. Novak
G/Mr. Pastorek
J/Mr. Sutton
J/Ms. Dominguez
M/Mr. Readdy
Q/Mr. O'Connor
R/Dr. Lebacqz (Acting)
S/Dr. Weiler
X/Mr. Cobb
Y/Dr. Asrar
ARC/Mr. Boyd
DFRC/Ms. Bohn-Meyer
GRC/Mr. Lauderdale
GSFC/Ms. Bruner
JPL/Mr. Redding
JSC/Mr. Heflin
KSC/Mr. Garrido
LaRC/Mr. Watson
MSFC/Mr. Roth
SSC/Mr. McLaughlin

A/Ms. Whewell
CIC/Ms. Grimes

Ombuds Proposal

Background: This is a recommendation of the Agencywide Action Team chaired by Al Diaz.

Summary of Proposal: Establish an Ombuds role at every Center and at Headquarters to provide the workforce (i.e., employees, contractors, students) an additional and supplemental channel of communication to raise significant issues and concerns that they perceive could impact organizational performance, safety, or mission success.

Does NOT include issues or concerns that are the exclusive responsibility of an existing administrative system or office to handle (i.e., IG; EEO, including use of Alternative Dispute Resolution techniques; negotiated employee grievances). These would be redirected to the responsible system or office.

Establish the Ombuds role as a collateral duty assignment reporting, in this role, directly to the Center Director and at Headquarters, to the Deputy Administrator.

Benefits: Provides the workforce with an alternate means to raise concerns and issues that management needs to hear. Communicates to the workforce and others that we are serious in our efforts to listen to, heed, and act in response to weak signals that may impart significant data/information.

Principal Responsibilities of Proposed Ombuds:

The essence of the role: Solicits workforce input, redirects as necessary, conducts informal inquiries, and then seeks to facilitate a mutually satisfactory resolution of the issue or concern.

Responds to incoming issues in an appropriate, timely, and impartial manner. This may involve immediately redirecting the issue to another more appropriate channel, such as the IG, EEO, NASA Safety Reporting System. It may also involve conducting a thorough, but informal, inquiry of the matter, using a variety of information sources, and attempting to achieve a mutually acceptable resolution.

Consults with necessary officials and works to facilitate a mutually satisfactory resolution of the issue.

If appropriate, generates options for consideration.

Acts as a change agent; advocating for changes to policies, procedures, and processes, as a necessary outcome to satisfactorily closing the issues or concerns.

Performs this role impartially, seeking input from all sides.

Serves in an independent chain of command when performing the Ombuds role, reporting directly to the Center Director, or in the case of Headquarters, the Deputy Administrator.

Maintains confidentiality at all times, unless waived by the submitter.

The Ombuds need to be readily accessible and available.

Communicates progress to the submitter.

Performs Ombuds duties in a diligent and timely manner.

Willingly addresses what may be at times unpopular issues that might ‘buck the system.’

Maintains a closed loop issue resolution system to ensure that issues referred to other NASA programs do not fall through the cracks and that the submitter is satisfied the issue is appropriately vetted.

Periodically networks with other NASA Ombuds to share best practices and lessons learned.

Recommended Characteristics of Ombuds:

- Fully understands and reflects NASA values.
- Able to grasp the big picture as well as the details.
- Ability to listen and act impartially.
- Sensitivity to diversity issues.
- Must have organizational knowledge with regard to structure, mission, culture, policies, practices).
- Excellent oral and written communication skills.
- Excellent analytical and problem solving skills.
- Skilled in negotiation and conflict resolution.
- Personal attributes, among which are integrity, compassion, trustworthiness.
- GS 15 or above.
- Existing encumbered position consists of duties and responsibilities not (or at least minimally) susceptible to NASA management influence.
- Can command the respect of the workforce.