

NASA
Ombudsman
Program
2010–2011 Report

Background

The NASA Ombudsman Program has been in place for more than 8 years. It was established in January 2004 in response to a recommendation of the Columbia Accident Investigation Board. Its purpose is to provide NASA employees and other NASA Center residents an additional avenue of communication to confidentially and informally raise concerns they perceive as having an impact on safety, organizational performance, or mission success without fear of retribution. The Ombudsman is an informal resource who complements existing formal resources such as Human Resources Management, the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Office, the Office of General Counsel's Ethics Program, the Office of Security and Program Protection, and the Office of Safety and Mission Assurance.

NASA Policy Directive (NPD) 2025.1, The NASA Ombuds Program, documents the program's policy and direction. In addition to the principles of confidentiality and informality, all of our Ombudsmen emphasize independence and neutrality and follow the International Ombudsman Association's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.

Why Establish a NASA Ombudsman Function?

In addition to providing an additional communication pathway for employees and other Center residents to seek resolution of problems and concerns, the Ombudsman Office has the potential to help NASA:

- Reduce safety risk by providing a confidential place to raise concerns.
- Reduce time and cost of resolving conflict.
- Reduce costs associated with error and fraud.
- Promote trust and an ethical work environment.
- Eliminate barriers to an engaged and productive workforce.
- Provide one more resource to ensure people have a place to be heard.

Research into other organizations that have Ombudsman programs have found that employees observe or experience actions that they know are inappropriate but have chosen not to do anything about. A recent Ethics Resource Center Study found that 22 percent of the employees in the study reported that they had observed misconduct in their organizations and did not report it.

Why did they choose not to report the incident? Of the 22 percent who did not report:

- 70 percent thought no action would be taken.
- 57 percent feared their report would not be kept confidential.

- ❑ 41 percent feared retaliation.
- ❑ 16 percent said they did not know who to contact.

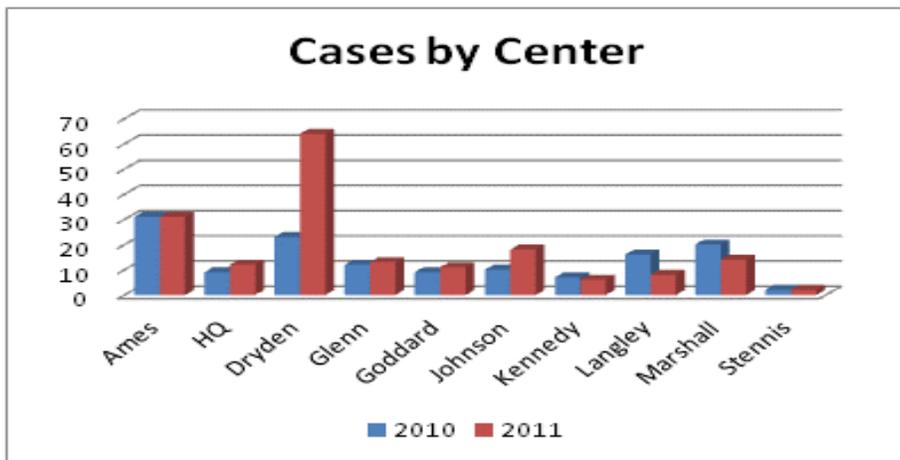
The Ombudsman function helps eliminate the concerns about confidentiality and retribution and ensures that concerns get a response.

Ombudsman Organizational Structure

Today, each Center and Headquarters has at least one Ombudsman. Ms. Olga Dominguez, Assistant Administrator for Strategic Infrastructure, provides oversight and management of the program. Each Ombudsman has a dual reporting relationship both to their supervisor for their “regular work” and to their Center Director for their Ombudsman responsibilities. This ensures that the Ombudsman is informed about all Center priorities and allows the Ombudsman easy access to raise major trends and issues with NASA senior management. The Ombudsman does not share specific information that would reveal “visitors” identities without direct permission of the “visitor.”

Note: Anyone who seeks the advice of an Ombudsman is considered a “visitor” because of the confidential, informal, independent, and neutral nature of the guidance provided as opposed to the “client” or “customer” relationships of more formal programs.

Highlights of 2010 and 2011



2010

- ❑ There were 156 cases in 2010 versus 264 in 2009. Although not directly correlated, the decline in Ombudsman cases may reflect use of formal agency resources, such as Employee Assistance Program (EAP), Equal Employment Opportunity Program (EEO), and the newly enacted Anti-Harassment Program.

- ❑ Decrease in volume can also be linked to the discontinuation of the Ombudsman Program at JPL.
- ❑ The top three types of issues heard by the Ombudsman were: (1) interpersonal conflict, (2) performance or discipline-related issues, and (3) leadership behavior.
- ❑ 27 percent of all the cases were fully resolved. In one case an issue brought to the Ombudsman was influential in changes made to classification of contractors and related pay issues.
- ❑ 13 percent of the cases were referred to a formal resource while 6 percent were elevated to higher level management for input or resolution.
- ❑ Many cases had to do with changing priorities within Centers and redefining roles, budgets, expectations, and need for effective communication.
- ❑ Safety concerns pointed to a need to ensure that all employees interpret the rules in a consistent manner. Procedures changed in at least one case due to Ombudsman involvement.
- ❑ Increasingly, contractors found their way to the Ombudsmen. The Ombudsmen identified a need to help this population understand what resources are available to them.
- ❑ Visitors to the Ombudsman expressed frustration with lack of or ineffective feedback. Additional training and modeling at all levels would be beneficial.
- ❑ There has been an increase in reports of bullying behavior. Langley has responded with an anti-bullying policy. General lack of respect between different “classes” of employees has also been identified as part of this broader issue.
- ❑ Employees have sought help understanding the process and criteria used in promoting individuals.

2011

- ❑ The number of cases went up 15 percent to 179. Two Centers remained flat, in five Centers caseload went up, and in three Centers caseload went down.
- ❑ Two safety cases were addressed—Langley and Stennis.
- ❑ 11 mission success cases (that could have impacted quality, timing, integrity of information, or work directed at a mission) were addressed—Dryden (9), Langley, and Marshall.
- ❑ Within organizational performance, interpersonal conflict had the most cases followed by leadership behavior and policy. In 2010, performance/discipline cases were the second highest but this category dropped to seventh this year.
- ❑ Three Centers had cases that were elevated to Center Directors—Dryden (9), Goddard, and Marshall. This made up 6 percent of cases, which is the same percentage as 2010.
- ❑ Dryden had 15 harassment cases and 14 waste, fraud, and abuse cases.

- In almost all cases the Ombudsman was able to get to the generating options stage.
- 12 percent of the cases were referred elsewhere.
- Cases involving leadership/management issues dealt with perceived ineffectiveness, favoritism, poor communications around expectations, or setting clear direction.

Note: It is important to understand that the Ombudsman program is confidential and informal, so many of the accomplishments listed above (and those that are not mentioned) are purposely nonspecific or generic to protect the identity of the visitors.

Awareness Activities

Unlike most Ombudsman programs at colleges and universities, private companies, and some other Federal Agencies, NASA's Ombudsman Program does not employ full-time Ombudsmen. NASA's program generally requires the Ombudsman to balance the Ombudsman responsibilities with other duties; however, the program has still been successful. The Ombudsman Program Lead monitors Ombudsman activities at the Centers to ensure the program continues to provide the level of service for which it was intended.

There is currently no formal evaluation of Ombudsman effectiveness at the Centers, primarily because of the informality of their work with visitors. Even so, we have collected some of the most effective practices at the Centers and Headquarters to ensure that employees are aware of the program:

- Ombudsmen continued to distribute brochures, attend Center-wide events (e.g., New Employee Orientation), and update Web sites with Ombudsman-related information.
- Ombudsmen at most Centers have begun meeting with formal resources as a group (like EEO, Diversity, Human Capital, and others) on a regular basis to share trends and get updates on new policies and practices being implemented in their Centers.
- At some Centers, a combined Web site has been implemented to list all "help resources" for employees and contractors with descriptions of what each area can do for the employee or contractor.
- Goddard has produced a wallet-size card for new employees with a list of who to go to with different sorts of issues.

Program Statistics to Date

Center	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Ames	33	56	42	46	31	39	31	31
HQ	8	25	34	8	0	18	9	12
Dryden	8	33	36	32	53	57	23	64
Glenn	24	25	22	9	9	16	12	13
Goddard	13	19	27	12	9	16	9	11
JPL*	105	88	60	73	59	58	17	0
Johnson	0	18	18	11	13	13	10	18
Kennedy	11	15	23	34	28	19	7	6
Langley	5	17	7	36	29	11	16	8
Marshall	8	18	10	22	24	16	20	14
Stennis	11	5	0	4	1	1	2	2
Total	226	319	279	287	256	264	156	179

**JPL was the only NASA Center to employ a full-time Ombudsman. The incumbent retired in 2010 and has not been replaced by JPL.*

Center Ombudsman Changes

NASA would like to thank each of the Ombudsmen below for serving with integrity, honesty, and compassion during their time of service to the NASA Ombudsman Program.

- Geoffrey Briggs, ARC
- Gail Williams, GSFC
- Linda Godwin, JSC
- Lewis Redding, JPL
- G.L. (Lee) Norbraten, JSC
- Gilda Knight, LaRC
- Barry Musick, MSFC

We also would like to welcome aboard the following new Ombudsmen who have joined our ranks.

- James Arnold, ARC
- George Grimshaw, DFRC
- Kevin Riley, DFRC
- Ruth McWilliams, HQ
- Ed Rogers, GSFC
- Donna Blackshear-Reynolds, JSC
- John Casper, JSC
- Pamela Caruso, MSFC

Professional Development

NASA’s policy is to select senior-level employees as Ombudsman who are separate from management or organizational processes and who supervise only a minimal number of employees. Each Ombudsman must complete basic Ombudsman training as provided by the International Ombudsman Association either before or within 6 months of their appointment, and undertake, on at least an annual basis, training intended to develop and expand their Ombudsman skills. In addition, the Program Lead sponsors an annual meeting for Ombudsmen to discuss issues, concerns, and future plans. Most Ombudsmen also attend the Annual Conference of the International Ombudsman Association, which provides an excellent forum for learning about best practices all over the world. NASA Ombudsmen also participate in Dispute Resolution, Ethics, Equal Employment Opportunity, and other training offered at their Centers.

Contact Information

For more information about the NASA Ombudsman Program, please contact one of the following Ombudsmen:

Center	Ombudsman	Phone Number	Email Address
ARC	Arnold, James	650.604.5265	james.o.arnold@nasa.gov
ARC	Boyd, John	650.604.5222	john.w.boyd@nasa.gov
DFRC	Boyd, Louise	661.276.5048	louise.y.boyd@nasa.gov
DFRC	Grimshaw, George	661.276.3425	george.h.grimshaw@nasa.gov
DFRC	Reilly, Kevin	661.276.3862	kevin.t.reilly@nasa.gov
DFRC	Williams, Keith	661.276.7958	keith.d.williams@nasa.gov
GRC	Seablom, Kirk	216.433.5593	kirk.d.seablom@nasa.gov
GSFC	Brown, Sheri	301.286.2374	sheri.t.brown@nasa.gov
GSFC	Rogers, Ed	301.286.4467	edward.w.rogers@nasa.gov
HQ	Elliott, Rex	202.358.3758	rex.elliott@nasa.gov
HQ	McWilliams, Ruth	202.358.5125	ruth.s.mcwilliams@nasa.gov
JSC	Blackshear-Reynolds, Donna	281.483.2814	donna.m.blackshear-reynolds@nasa.gov
JSC	Casper, John	281.483.3191	john.h.casper@nasa.gov
KSC	Burt, Hortense	321.867.8768	hortense.b.burt@nasa.gov
KSC	Ferris, Timothy	321.867.2505	timothy.p.ferris@nasa.gov
LARC	Brown, Rolla	757.864.3164	rolla.j.brown@nasa.gov
LARC	Kepics, Nicholas	757.864.3159	nicholas.a.kepics@nasa.gov
MSFC	Caruso, Pamela	256.544.8044	pamela.w.caruso@nasa.gov
MSFC	Cloud, Susan	256.544.5377	susan.l.cloud@nasa.gov
SSC	Vander, Karen Lee	228.688.3054	karen.l.vander@nasa

Note: If you are seeking assistance in resolving a problem, do not contact an Ombudsman via e-mail.