

The Rationale for a “Whenever an Outcome” Checklist for Ombuds to Track Achievements:

An idea for tracking the *outcome-effectiveness* of Organizational Ombuds

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There are almost no metrics for measuring the *outcomes* of ombuds practice or of measuring ombuds achievements.¹ Here is a very easy one to try.

It is difficult for organizational ombuds to track—or even know—the outcomes of their practice. There are many reasons. Most ombuds cases involve at least one other person other than the ombuds. There is no agreed-upon scientific method available.² The outcomes of many cases may not be apparent for days or months or even years. The outcomes may have several or many facets. People who were not directly involved may be affected. Ombuds—on their own, by themselves—very rarely determine *any* case outcomes; rather, ombuds offer options for the choice of their visitors.

And then, “fixing things” and/or taking advantage of “good ideas” is usually in the hands of the others (including the visitors) involved in the options that have been chosen. (Many of the people that “fix things” are the relevant managers.) Ombuds also may or may not know what happens next when a visitor leaves the Ombuds Office. And, if an ombuds *does* learn “what happened next”—whether wonderful or not wonderful—they are still bound by confidentiality unless they have permission to speak.

Sometimes an ombuds does make a major difference right way, and in a way that is publicly known, when they have worked on a [Most Serious Case](#). There was an ombuds who helped settle many class action cases in their first year in the job. Others have helped an organization create badly needed policies or procedures in their first years. Still others have helped scientific teams to work together, where a serious dispute has been resolved—and a breakthrough has occurred, almost immediately. Several ombuds have been publicly credited by their organizations for reduced legal costs, fewer patent fights, and fewer external worker complaints. Helping to settle a Most Serious Case is, occasionally, (one) easily tracked “outcome” of ombuds practice.

Q. Why a *Whenever an Outcome* Checklist?

A. Many ombuds go home at night with ephemeral thoughts about the day. Consider having a paper and pencil checklist where you will see it very frequently. Checking a short list takes only five minutes when you have achieved something. *This way you will not forget that something good happened—something that you “achieved.”*

Q. What should be on it?

A. Whatever the outcomes are that you know you may have helped to achieve. Look at the list below and then make your own list. Include frequent wins and very rare wins. And if you have a very rare win that is not on the list, go back, make a new (undated) page, and add it.

¹ The International Ombuds Association (IOA) Survey team has worked to *aggregate* reports of ombuds achievements in its biennial survey. But individual ombuds do not habitually report achievements for all the reasons here. Therefore, we are introducing a new way for *individual* ombuds to capture some achievements.

² Mary Rowe, [“Identifying and Communicating the Usefulness of Organizational Ombuds. With Ideas about OO Effectiveness and Cost-Effectiveness” \(PDF\)](#), *Journal of the International Ombudsman Association* 3, No. 1 (Winter 2010): 9-23. (Note: This article reviews many of the methodological problems in assessing the effectiveness of an ombuds office and emphasizes the importance of the “most serious cases” in demonstrating effectiveness and the importance of benchmarking before an ombuds office opens.)

Q. Paper and pencil? A diary?????????

A. Graph paper. *Not a diary. Please NO dates.* If you are ever asked about this list, you will not want to be able to remember when you checked it. Start with a graph paper pad or notebook. Put one Outcome/Achievement from your list at the top of each page. Put check marks *randomly* in any little box on the relevant page every time you wish to record that outcome. (The check marks will be easy to count later). If you are one of many ombuds for one organization, everyone could have an identical set of these graph paper pads, with typed headings, so no one's handwriting is on any of them.

If the list is a good one—and implementation is done with both courage and humility—the Whenever an Outcome list will, over time, illuminate many outcomes of ombuds practice. It will include both frequent ones and rare ones.

Most days will not have a “Most Serious Case.” However, many days may earn a check mark on several graph pages.

Q. But I hate pencils and paper?

A. Ok ...Get an AI design to do this on a computer, ... WITH NO DATES.

The Whenever an Outcome Checklist (and the weekly Friday Checklist described elsewhere in the Resource Repository) are steps toward metrics. They are self-reports, rather than scientific measures, but they are a real step.

- a) The Friday Checklist gives a snapshot about aggregated functions of the ombuds in the context of visitor choice: *What did the ombuds do? What kind of option did visitors choose?* Consider using a computer set up with no dates or with date masking.
- b) The Whenever an Outcome Checklist can serve a different purpose: tracking the ombuds' own view of some of the outcomes of practice: *What does the Ombuds believe happened?* Remember: with no dates. Go find the Outcome list whenever you have an achievement and check it off on the relevant page.

Neither of these checklists is a substitute for an ombuds office database, which usually captures some information about cases. These two checklists add to our knowledge of *what ombuds do and (a little bit about) what happens—about Ombuds' achievements*. In the aggregate, they also help the ombuds reflect on their work—what worked? What could go better and how? (In addition, your data from this checklist will be there when the International Ombuds Association (IOA) puts out the next Practice Survey, which is currently the only aggregation of all ombuds' achievements.)

All checklists in the Resource Repository can be used as templates—easily modified to fit a particular practice and organization. The ideas are meant for brainstorming. Review this list and maybe make your own?

Resource: Some OO Achievements
Data that might be useful for a Checklist with paper-and-pencil notes
Adapted from the IOA Practice Survey
2026. Hedeem, Rowe, Schneider, Escalante

-Helped bring change in an organizational procedure

- Helped bring change in a policy
- Helped bring change in an organizational structure
- Contributed to establishment of a new policy, procedure and/or process management
- Contributed to improvements in organizational culture

- Fostered an important "bridge" between or among visitors/managers/groups/units/agencies
- Fostered improvement in morale or retention in a department or unit
- Fostered improvement in excellence, integrity, and rigor in analytic thinking and work practice

- High probability of having helped to save a life
- High probability of having helped to avert criminal or near-criminal behavior
- High probability of having helped to prevent a likely-disastrous outcome
- High probability of having avoided significant talent leakage
- Significant action taken in an emergency or imminent risk of serious harm

- Identified/communicated a significant good idea, new idea, issue, or pattern of concerns that was not well known

- Significant cost savings for the organization from reduction in lawsuits or formal complaints
- Significant cost savings for individuals from reduction in lawsuits or formal complaints

- Significant reduction of reputational risk for the organization
- Significant reduction of reputational risk for individuals

- Significant reduction of financial risk for the organization
- Significant reduction of financial risk for individuals

- Significant reduction of operational risk for the organization
- Significant reduction of operational risk for individuals

- Significant reduction of strategic risk for the organization
- Significant reduction of strategic risk for individuals

- An individual received a fair and equitable process in a matter—which they otherwise might not have received.
- An individual faces the future expressing apparently appropriate, justifiable, renewed hope.

- Provided service using special skills/special expertise (e.g. Talking circles, restorative justice, trainings, cross-cultural, disabilities issues)

- Was this case—in your judgment a [Most Serious Case](#)? (You may wish to consider having a pad of graph paper for MSCs if you have many of them; see the Repository list for a checklist about MSCs).

Checklists—like an ombuds database—should be used in accordance with the IOA Standards of Practice so the data cannot easily be used to identify visitors, or hacked, or otherwise misused.

Note: This article draft is part of a Resource Repository designed to support identifying—and helping to quantify—the value of an Organizational Ombuds (OO). This Resource Repository is a work in progress. It is open to improvements, additions, deletions, critique, revision and random commentary. If any page in the repository is helpful, or needs revision, please let us know. Please contact [Mary Rowe](#) or other co-authors, if you can help to improve these pages or have another page to offer.