

PLENARY II : "Innovative ideas in the Ombudsworld"

Topic : Starter Kit for New Ombudsman and Developing or Expanding Offices

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Thank you Nick. Good morning to delegates.

In this session, featuring innovative ideas in the Ombudsman world, I am absolutely delighted to present to you the newest Australasian and Pacific Ombudsman Region and International Ombudsman Institute project, the Starter kit for new ombudsman and developing or expanding offices.

As many of you know, the IOI, through its regional subvention project, allocates a portion of its yearly budget to fund subventions to IOI regions.

Following this allocation, each year the Executive Committee and the Board of the IOI considers applications from the IOI regions for projects to support the purposes of the IOI.

Project proposals are assessed against a range of criteria, including:

- Contribution of the project to increase regional visibility of the IOI;
- The particular needs of the region;
- Strengthening the capacity and capability of Member offices; and
- The broader impact and wider application for the IOI community.

In 2013, following consultation with all APOR Members, the (then) New South Wales Ombudsman, Bruce Barbour, and I applied, on behalf of APOR, for an IOI Regional subvention for what we believed was an innovative idea.

We proposed to create a comprehensive resource for newly created Ombudsman offices, newly appointed Ombudsman and developing or expanding Ombudsman offices – a resource that would draw upon the collective expertise and experience of APOR Members.

The objective of the project was twofold.

First, to provide a highly accessible and practical web-based induction tool for newly created Ombudsman offices or newly appointed Ombudsmen utilising the knowledge and experience of existing Ombudsmen. In this way, the Kit is designed to answer all those questions that each of us have no doubt asked in those first few months when we are new to our roles.

Second, to provide a resource for those offices undergoing an expansion of functions or dealing with novel or challenging issues. As you know, and as we are discussing at this World Conference, the recent experience of Ombudsman around the world has been one of expansion of functions. Successfully navigating such expansion was very much in our minds in developing the Kit.

By bringing together these works in one central place, and of course adding to this body of work over time, we aimed to create a rich library of resources to inform the work of new Ombudsmen and developing or expanding offices.

Following approval of the subvention grant, the project team surveyed APOR Members to identify useful topics, information and resources for the Kit. Additionally, many APOR Member offices provided various resources for the Kit, and these are now available as a resource for new ombudsmen and developing or expanding offices. I take this opportunity to thank APOR Members for generously contributing to the Kit.

The Kit is accessed through a secure web portal on the IOI website, and it is intended to be a living document. The resources and information in the Kit can be updated and replaced as required, and my office will coordinate any changes to the Kit.

As Rebecca my Director Research and Projects is demonstrating, when you log in to the Member area of the IOI website, you will see a link to the Kit that will take you to the Kit home page.

[Slides 1,2,3,4]

The resources in the Kit are structured into four broad topics:

- Core principles;
- Governance and Office Management;
- Complaints and Investigations; and
- Stakeholder Engagement.

Within each topic area of the Kit there are a number of pages that provide further information on the chosen topic area.

As I have said, the topics covered in the Kit were identified through the survey of IOI Members from APOR and in this way we hope the Kit is truly a work that draws on the collective expertise of IOI Members and meets the needs of new ombudsmen or offices expanding their functions both in APOR, and the IOI more generally.

Each section of the Kit contains an overview, as well as public resources and resources provided by APOR Members available for download. Over time, we welcome, and I encourage, IOI Members from around the globe to contribute materials from their offices that they believe could be of assistance to new ombudsmen or those expanding their functions.

I will now briefly walk through each of these four broad topic areas. Looking first to Core Principles.

[Slide 5 Core Principles landing page]

The Core Principles section of the Kit provides information and resources relating to what it means to be an Ombudsman.

The resources in the Core Principles section provide a range of perspectives on these themes, including text books, journal articles, conference papers, submissions and presentations.

[Slide 6 1 level down to Guiding Principles]

Next the Kit explores guiding principles in more detail.

[Slide 7 How to build and maintain independence]

Before moving to further detail about how to build and maintain independence.

Where the Core principles section of the Starter Kit speaks to the fundamental principles of what it means to be an Ombudsman, the following sections provide guidance to assist new Ombudsman and expanding or developing Ombudsman offices in relation to a range of key strategic and operational matters.

[Slide 8 Governance and Office Management]

For example, in Governance and Office Management, new offices and newly appointed Ombudsman will find not only principles based papers, but also practical frameworks and guidelines provided by APOR Members, that have been developed by, and used in, their own offices in a range of areas, namely:

[Slide 9 Strategic and business planning]

- The ever important issue of strategic and business planning;

[Slide 10 Measuring and monitoring performance]

- Why and how we measure and monitor performance;

[Slide 11 New functions and a growing office]

- Developing and managing new functions and a growing office;

[Slide 12 Risk management]

- The critical issue of risk management;

[Slide 13 Records management]

- As Chairman of the State Records Commission of Western Australia, a matter close to my heart – the importance of good records management; and

[Slide 14 Challenges to jurisdiction]

- A matter that hopefully will not arise very often – how to respond to challenges to jurisdiction.

[Slide 15 Complaints and investigations]

Next the Kit examines our core business of complaints and investigations.

The resources in this section are arranged into:

[Slide 16 Receiving and assessing complaints]

- Receiving and assessing complaints;

[Slide 17 Conducting investigations]

- Conducting investigations; and

[Slide 18 Managing parties to a complaint]

- Managing parties to a complaint.

Reflecting the diversity of the region, these resources were provided by Ombudsman offices in Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of Kiribati and Hong Kong.

These offices provided a large range of very practical tools for dealing with complaints and complainants, including manuals, frameworks, fact sheets, assessment tools, all available for new Ombudsman, or offices who are expanding functions, to download and adopt in their jurisdiction.

[Slide 19 Stakeholder Engagement]

Next the Kit provides information and resources relating to the office's engagement and communication with its key stakeholders, more particularly:

[Slide 20 Members of Parliament]

- Members of Parliament;

[Slide 21 Journalists]

- Journalists; and

[Slide 22 Government agencies]

- Public agencies.

[Slide 23 (Outreach and awareness)]

We also provide information and material on the approaches taken by Ombudsman offices to raise awareness of, and accessibility to, their offices.

[Slide 24 (Contacts)]

Lastly, there is a page with the contact information for APOR Member offices, including details to contact my office if you have questions about, or would like to add to, the Kit.

I encourage you to log in and explore the Kit. As I mentioned, the Kit is intended to be a living document, so please feel free to provide additional or updated resources to my office for inclusion in the Kit.

I am also pleased, and excited, that the Kit, originally available to APOR Members, has been made available to all IOI Members – further enhancing the value of the Kit and the assistance that is able to be provided to new Ombudsmen taking office all around the world and those who are considering the expansion of functions for their offices.

Can I finally acknowledge my sincere appreciation for the support of the office of the New South Wales Ombudsman, particularly to my colleagues, the immediate former New South Wales Ombudsman, Bruce Barbour, colleague Professor John McMillan, the acting New South Wales Ombudsman, and Tom Millet of John's office, Rebecca Poole and Lindon McKenna of my office, and the staff of the IOI Secretariat in Vienna for their very hard work in delivering the Kit. I am delighted to be able to present a project that I believe provides a rich library of very helpful information in one central place that I think will be a valuable resource for all of us and our offices.

Thank you.