



## ACVIM Ombuds Volunteer Role Description

### Position Description

The purpose of the ACVIM Ombudsperson (Ombuds) is to serve as a neutral, independent and impartial resource for residents in training **OR** post residency Candidates actively pursuing Board-certification to provide guidance in resolving concerns, conflicts, or complaints in a confidential and informal manner. These concerns may be regarding a Residency Training Program (RTP) and/or training officer (i.e., Program Director, Resident Advisor or Supervising Diplomate) or with the ACVIM Board-certification process (i.e., change in status, communications with the Central Office).

Ombuds adhere to the International Ombuds Association (IOA) Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, and are guided by the following core principles:

**Confidentiality:** Confidentiality is the defining characteristic of Ombuds practice. The Ombuds hold all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence and do not disclose confidential communications. The Ombuds may, at their sole discretion, disclose confidential information when the person seeking assistance gives permission to do so; when failure to do so might result in an imminent risk of serious harm; or as necessary to defend against a formal complaint of professional misconduct.

**Independence:** The Ombuds is independent in structure, function and appearance to the highest degree possible within the ACVIM organization.

**Impartiality:** The Ombuds is a designated neutral and impartial resource who does not take sides or serve as an advocate for any person or entity. The Ombuds strives to promote procedural fairness in the content and administration of the ACVIM RTP and Certification practices, processes, and policies. The Ombuds does not engage in any situation that could create a conflict of interest.

**Informality:** The Ombuds does not participate in any evaluative, disciplinary, legal, or administrative proceedings related to concerns brought to the Ombuds' attention. The Ombuds is not authorized to make business and policy decisions or conduct formal investigations on behalf of the ACVIM.

### Ombuds Responsibilities

The Ombuds first responsibility is to listen to the Candidate's concern and work to understand the matters put before them. The Ombuds offers a safe place where Candidates can speak confidentially about an issue or a conflict and obtain guidance.

This setting provides Candidates a place to talk about concerns in an open and candid manner without fear of reprisal.

Types of assistance provided by the Ombuds include:

- **Exploration of Options:** The Ombuds is responsible for helping identify possible avenues for resolution, alternative resources, and strategies, and weigh the relative merits of options.
- **Coaching:** The Ombuds can provide a safe and neutral place to help Candidates recognize they have options and to thoughtfully weigh those options or simply vent. The Ombuds can coach the Candidate to better identify the options available to them. They can also coach Candidates for a difficult conversation, providing them with alternative approaches and methods, role play, rehearse communications, help the Candidate plan next steps, and advise on choice of languages, tone, etc.
- **Mediate/Facilitate Conversations:** The Ombuds can offer to serve as a neutral intermediary between parties wishing to meet to discuss issues, concerns, conflicts, etc. upon request and mutual agreement of all parties.
  - If a Candidate needs to change programs, the Ombuds can aid the Candidate in having that conversation with their current mentor. Ombuds do not provide assistance in identifying new mentors.
- **Shuttle Diplomacy:** Serve as a conduit between parties who cannot or are not willing to communicate directly with each other.
- **Information Gathering:** Although the Ombuds does not conduct formal investigations, with consent of the Candidate, the Ombuds is able to inquire about issues raised. The Ombuds may contact ACVIM resources or other offices to gather information pertinent to the resolution of the dispute.
- **Referral to ACVIM Policy:** The Ombuds can direct Candidates to and clarify formal ACVIM policies, procedures, and practices, and help an individual explore a range of next steps. Although they do not make or enforce policies, they are able, while maintaining confidentiality, to recommend the review of policies or procedures when they see a pattern of problems or a systemic issue. While the Ombuds office has no authority to impose resolutions on disputes, they can and do advocate for fairness and consistency.
- **Referral to Internal ACVIM Resources:** Sometimes a Candidate is overwhelmed and needs a safe "starting point" to find out what office can address their concerns and to discuss fears of retaliation. The Ombuds can provide a Candidate with a description of and contact information for potentially useful resource(s) within the ACVIM.

### **Other Roles/Responsibilities**

- **Reporting:** The Ombuds reports to the ACVIM Board of Regents, using the Certification Liaison or the Specialty President as the initial contact point. Biannually, the Ombuds may provide the Specialty President a report which includes the number and general nature of the cases handled. This report is also a tool for the Ombuds to raise issues they see arising with processes or programs as described in the "Role as Change Agent" responsibility below.

- **Role as Change Agent:** The Ombuds cannot report on the substance of individual cases to protect anonymity. However, the Ombuds reports on trends and areas of concern to relevant ACVIM staff and in the report to the Specialty President. While confidentiality limits the ability to provide certain information or great detail about the issues, the sharing of needed changes, concerns, or trends is key to the role of the Ombuds in the ACVIM.
- **Conflict of Interest:** For Candidates with potential conflict (i.e., persons at the institution that houses one of the Ombuds), an alternate Ombuds can be contacted and maintain confidentiality.
- In any situation in which the Ombuds is unsure or uncomfortable with the circumstances of the case (be it legal, ethical, conflict of interest, etc.), the Ombuds may contact the Certification Liaison for consultation. ACVIM staff, other ACVIM Ombuds, and the Specialty President are also resources for support.

**Restrictions on scope: The ACVIM (and therefore the Ombuds) has no standing in HR matters between a Candidate and the Sponsoring Institution or their mentors.**

Ombuds may NOT:

- Advocate for any individual or resolution
- Participate in formal hearings or grievance processes
- Provide legal advice
- Provide psychological counseling
- Make rulings or conduct formal investigations
- Set or modify ACVIM policies or guidelines

### **Time Commitment, Term Length, and Term Dates**

Time Commitment: 40-50 hours annually.

Term Length: 3 years\*

*\*Ombuds may be reappointed for one additional 3-year term.*

Term Dates: January 1 – December 31

### **Committee Meeting Schedule**

Ombuds will aim to meet virtually biannually as a full group. Additional meetings may be scheduled if necessary. Most work of the Ombuds is performed individually via email.

### **Recommended Prior Experience**

Knowledge of the current ACVIM Certification Manual (CM). Familiarity with ACVIM policies and procedures.

### **Benefits**

Opportunity to positively impact Candidates going through a range of experiences.