



OFFICE OF THE

WHISTLEBLOWER OMBUDS

Strategic Plan

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117th
CONGRESS

The 117th Congress Strategic Plan for the Office of the Whistleblower Ombuds was authored by Shanna Devine, Director; Rebecca Jones, Deputy Director; and John Whitty, Deputy Director of Operations. The Office of Employee Assistance served as facilitator for the strategic planning process.

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OVERVIEW

The House of Representatives took an important step to support House offices as they work with whistleblowers from the public and private sectors by codifying the independent, nonpartisan Office of the Whistleblower Ombuds in the 117th Congress. In accordance with the House Rules, the Office has two main responsibilities¹:

1. Promulgate best practices for whistleblower intake for offices of the House.
2. Provide training for offices of the House on whistleblower intake, including establishing an effective reporting system for whistleblowers, maintaining whistleblower confidentiality, advising staff of relevant laws and policies, and protecting information provided by whistleblowers.

The Office conducted its first strategic planning process, which spans the 117th Congress (2021 – 2022). Through surveys and direct consultations, the Office incorporated input from stakeholders to inform its strategic plan.² The planning process utilized an outcome/impact-based framework, in support of the Office's vision to institutionalize effective, safe, and consistent practices throughout the House for working with whistleblowers. This plan includes the Office's aspirational goals for the 117th Congress and its strategy narrative, a general explanation of how the Office intends to pursue those goals.

MISSION

To support the House community in an independent and nonpartisan capacity by providing education, training, and guidance for effectively working with whistleblowers, in order to assist the House in protecting its sources and constituents while conducting its oversight function.

VISION

To be a valuable, nonpartisan resource for every House office, by institutionalizing safe, effective, and consistent practices for working with whistleblowers.

OFFICE CULTURE

- We value and practice:
 - *Respect, integrity, transparency, overall balance, and effective communication and collaboration*
 - *Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging*
- We embrace:
 - *Our nonpartisan and independent identity*
 - *Narrative as an educational tool*
- We are committed to:
 - *Providing thorough, professional, and valuable services*
 - *Using our strategic narrative as a guiding light toward realizing our vision*
- We strive to:
 - *Be an office that challenges itself, and engages in continuous reflection in order to improve*
 - *Foster an environment of mutual trust where we feel empowered, personally and as team members*
 - *Be thoughtful members of the House community and consider all who may be impacted by our work, including whistleblowers*

STRATEGY NARRATIVE

The Office developed the following strategy narrative to guide its performance throughout the 117th Congress:

We will expand our value and visibility throughout the House community by using strategic internal and external outreach, leveraging new opportunities and relationships for engagement, and offering expanded services.

We will provide valuable training for every House office and support every House office in its development of a best practice intake process by maintaining current and robust educational materials and model resources. All the while, we recognize that improving visibility and outreach are essential steps to achieving this goal.

We will provide transparency around our office's operations while upholding confidentiality, by regularly communicating programmatic updates, performance metrics, and vision, while engaging stakeholders to ensure responsible public disclosure of the office's operations and resources.

We will measure our success through comprehensive tracking tools and by seeking regular input from the House community and external stakeholders, while acknowledging the inherent difficulties of measuring value.

We will accomplish these actions, while prioritizing nonpartisanship and acknowledging the office's structural limitations. Further, to address any capacity issues, we will maximally use tools, resources, personnel, and relationships beyond our existing capacity to accomplish our strategic plan.

This process will yield House-wide understanding of the value of safely working with whistleblowers to conduct its oversight responsibilities, resulting in the institutionalization of effective, safe and consistent practices for working with whistleblowers through the House.

SWOT ANALYSIS

The Office, through stakeholder input and its own analysis, identified its top five strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOTs). SWOT interactions informed its goal setting and strategic actions, with a focus on *leveraging* strengths, *fortifying* weaknesses, *seizing* opportunities, and *blocking* threats.

Strengths

- Clear statutory mandate that facilitates powerful mission and vision
- Staff leadership, expertise, commitment, and team dynamic create an effective work environment
- Office provides a diverse menu of unique services that increase its inherent value
- Bipartisan relationships among authorizing and other key House stakeholders reinforces nonpartisan identity
- Strong relationships with external stakeholders enable Office to maintain balanced perspective

Weaknesses

- Lack of visibility and understanding of the Office throughout the House
- Voluntary nature of trainings and compliance with guidelines
- Staff's limited institutional House knowledge
- Small staff size contributes to limited bandwidth for fulfilling a large mission
- Limited mandate demands a cautious approach

Opportunities

- Reinforce bipartisan support for whistleblowers and, in effect, whistleblowers' trust in Congress
- New whistleblower-related laws will expand the need for Office's services
- Active engagement by the bipartisan advisory group will help expand Office's reach

- Have a broader impact through engagement with the external whistleblower stakeholder community
- Improve communications between the House, whistleblowers, and executive branch
- Expand internal capacity and expertise by recruiting fellow(s) to the Office

Threats

- Cultural misrepresentation of the role of whistleblowers could undermine Office's mandate
- House realities (e.g. 435 Member offices, high turnover rate) inhibit institutionalizing new practices
- Lack of awareness of the Office within and outside of the House
- Potential for Office funding lapses due to budget volatility
- Constantly evolving hostile whistleblower landscape among retaliators

GOAL SETTING

The Office developed outcome-based stretch goals to help it achieve its mission and advance it toward its vision. The Office identified its primary services (trainings, developing guidelines and procedures for intake, confidential consultations, and technical expertise for whistleblower legislation) to inform its goal setting. The goals encompass each service and focus in year one and year two. An additional goal discussed for year two is the continuation of year one goals, as these focus on increasing visibility and understanding of the scope of the Office.

YEAR ONE GOALS

Goal 1: Visibility of Office and its role/value throughout the House community

- **Strategic Actions**
 - Regular House-wide communication via eDear colleagues and routine targeted outreach to each office
 - Planned outreach to Office of Inspectors General (OIG) Whistleblower Protection Coordinators
 - Leverage new whistleblower legal reforms to promote Office's services
 - Actively participate in House events, and as appropriate, events outside of the House
 - Expand services provided through the legislative tracker, jurisdictional tool, and other unique resources
 - Expand Office's repertoire of resources/curriculum/delivery mechanisms
 - Leverage Office's strong bipartisan and nonpartisan relationships to expand its reach throughout the House
- **Performance Metrics**
 - Track increase in demand of services, including training
 - Conduct a House-wide or sample-size survey at the beginning and end of the year on this goal
 - Monitor the number of Office's website visits
 - Track open rate of administrative eDear Colleagues

Goal 2: Providing valuable training for every House office, including District Offices and Committees

- **Strategic Actions**
 - Expand Office's repertoire of resources/curriculum/delivery mechanisms
 - Incorporate new retaliatory tactics and whistleblower experiences into educational materials, via stakeholder input and public reporting
 - Expand Office's outreach by connecting with every office twice a year
 - Incorporate new whistleblower requirements (e.g. House confidentiality requirement) into training
 - Strengthen and leverage bipartisan relationships with committee leadership
 - Develop a comprehensive tracking system to facilitate completion of this goal
- **Performance Metrics**
 - Track how many offices the Office reaches through public trainings

- Track how many offices the Office reaches through private trainings
- Track the overlap between offices reached through public and private trainings
- Track how many offices follow up with the Office after the training for additional support
- Track the percentage of training participants that found the training valuable and would recommend it
- Track the percentage of training participants that indicated an impact in a subsequent survey/evaluation
- Track the percentage of participants that indicated an average increase in knowledge by in-class polling

Goal 3: Transparency around Office's operations while prioritizing confidentiality

- **Strategic Actions**
 - Release an annual report with an overview of the Office's general operations and key metrics
 - Provide regular updates with metrics for stakeholders within and outside of the House
 - Consult committees of jurisdiction around new initiatives to determine suitability for public domain
 - Work toward publicly posting all educational materials
- **Performance Metrics**
 - Solicit routine feedback from committees of jurisdiction and the whistleblower stakeholder community
 - Include a question in the year-end impact survey on awareness of the Office's commitment to confidentiality
 - Publicly release the Office's annual report
 - Measure the frequency of meetings and updates with key internal and external stakeholders

YEAR TWO GOALS

Goal 4: House-wide understanding of the value in safely working with whistleblowers to conduct its oversight responsibilities

- **Strategic Actions**
 - Connect with each office twice per year
 - Train each office once per year
 - Obtain an increase in pre-training and post-training surveys/evaluations to inform performance metrics
 - Support each office in establishing a best-practice whistleblower intake process
- **Performance Metrics**
 - Conduct a House-wide or sample-size survey at the beginning and end of the 117th Congress on this goal
 - Include a related question in annual survey with House staff who have used our services
 - Incorporate live polls at the beginning and end of each training to gauge impact of training on this goal
 - Measure the number of annual survey respondents who are making use of model resources
 - Measure the number of staff who download model template materials from website

Goal 5: Every House office has a best practice intake process using model resources

- **Strategic Actions**
 - Expand model resources and services to facilitate with the development of an intake process, including establishing standards to evaluate intake processes (e.g. checklist), with stakeholder input
 - Connect with each office twice per year
 - Provide training to each office once a year
 - Engage committees of jurisdiction as pioneers to incorporate model intake practices
 - Develop a comprehensive tracking system to facilitate completion of this goal
- **Performance Metrics**
 - Percentage of offices that have an intake process that meets the Office's minimum standards

¹ H. Res. 8, Sec. 2 (b).

² Stakeholders included majority and minority staff contacts on key committees of jurisdiction, House staff who have utilized the Office's services, and nongovernmental organizations that work with whistleblowers.