



## **Ombudsperson Terms of Reference**

**(Approved April 2022)**

### **Context**

The WPSN-C strives to be an inclusive and accountable Network, where all voices and contributions are valued.

We recognize that this is a volunteer network and members contribute as they are able. Time is often in short supply. Steering committee members and other volunteers contribute to the Network as volunteers, often working evenings and weekends.

As well, we would like to ensure that all perspectives are heard and respected. An independent mechanism to hear concerns holds the potential to address implicit power imbalances.

**In order to have a constructive path for people to raise issues, concerns or complaints regarding Network decisions, processes, communications materials, or other issues, the Network will establish the position of volunteer ombudsperson.**

### **Objective**

Provide a constructive mechanism for Network members to voice concerns or issues regarding the work of the Network and to have these concerns addressed in a positive way (valuing compassion, inclusivity, and diversity).

### **What will the Ombudsperson do?**

- Receive any concerns/complaints/suggestions regarding the WPSN-C, acknowledging any correspondence within 3 weeks of receipt.
- Perform fact-finding on these complaints with sensitivity and compassion. This is not an adversarial process. Rather the process is to strengthen inclusivity and respect for diversity (not establishing 'right' or 'wrong'). The Ombudsperson

guides the problem solving and the conflict resolution through processes such as facilitation, mediation, and coaching.

- Report out (as relevant and respecting confidentiality as requested) complaints and actions taken (with the acknowledgement that not all complaints may require public accountability).
- Report annually (at the AGM) how many complaints were received and any actions taken.

### **Selection Criteria**

- Have been a Network member for at least 2 years and attended at least 3 Network meetings/functions in the last year.
- Willing to take on the ombudsperson role for a minimum of 2 years.
- Willing to function in good faith, balancing accountability to the Network with privacy considerations.
- Willing to have their name listed on the WPSN-C website. An official 'WPSN-C' email will be provided.
- Past experience in mediation and/or conflict resolution. Ideally with experience in anti-racism/anti-oppression work.

### **Selection Process**

- The Steering Committee will issue a call for volunteers 6 weeks prior to the AGM. Volunteers will send a 'letter of interest' to the Coordinator, outlining why they are interested in the position and how they meet the criteria.
- If there is more than one candidate, the Steering Committee will ask for volunteers for a 3-person Selection Committee. If there are not 3 volunteers to form a Selection Committee, the Steering Committee will review the candidates and make a recommendation. (ALTERNATIVE: all volunteers who meet the criteria are presented for a vote at the AGM).
- The Ombudsperson will start their term at the AGM.

### **How will it work?**

- A description of the Ombudsperson's role and contact information will be posted on the WPSN-C website.
- Concerns and queries can be sent to the official ombudsperson email, with the aim of a reply within three weeks.
- The Ombudsperson does not have jurisdiction on matters of internal governance of the network or make decisions for the WPSN.
- Confidentiality of the person with the concern will be maintained, if requested. Similarly, the Ombudsperson will respect the request of the person with the concern that the information be shared with some or all of the members. Limits to the confidentiality: the Ombudsperson is required to respect the law, and must disclose information contained in her files when compelled by law. In addition, the Ombudsperson is not required to maintain confidentiality if she has

reason to believe that the life or safety of a person or persons may be at risk, or that a serious crime has been or may be committed, and must by law provide the appropriate authorities with the information required.

- The Ombudsperson will talk with the person with the concern to understand the situation.
- The Ombudsperson will talk to any involved Network members.
- The ombudsperson will then propose a constructive way forward. For some matters, the ombudsperson may relay a concern or a point that has been overlooked. Network members may wish to consult the Ombudsperson if they feel their perspective has not been heard. In other cases there may be a question for discussion by the Steering Committee or the whole Network. In other cases, conflict mediation may be proposed. If appropriate, the Ombudsperson may propose new policies or procedures for the Network through issuing recommendations.