



2018

OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM

CONFIDENTIALITY  NEUTRALITY  INFORMALITY  INDEPENDENCE

ANNUAL REPORT

Our Principles:

Confidentiality – The Ombudsman maintains complete confidentiality as to the identity of visitors, except in situations that present an imminent risk of harm to an individual, damage to property, or a crime.

Neutrality – The Ombudsman is not an advocate for the visitor and is not an advocate for management. The Ombudsman is an advocate for a fair process.

Informality – The Ombudsman functions outside all formal management, administrative, or criminal processes. The Ombudsman does not serve as an agent of notice to NASA. The Ombudsman assists the visitor in accessing appropriate formal systems, offices, or processes as needed.

Independence – The Ombudsman is not encumbered by line management functions and in their Ombudsman role report to the Center Director (Center Ombudsman) or Headquarters Executive Director (HQ Ombudsman).

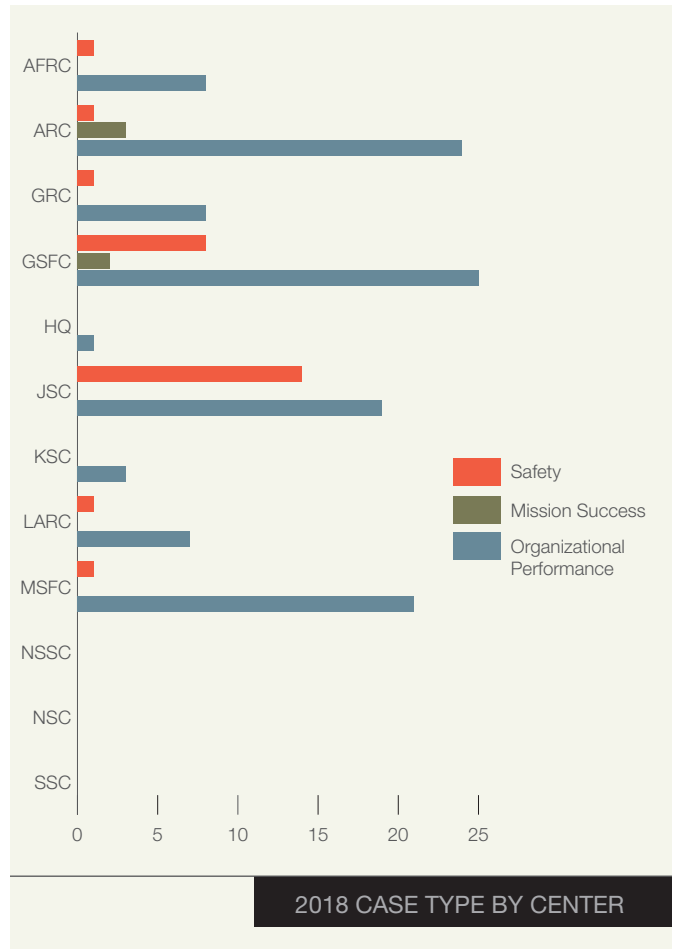
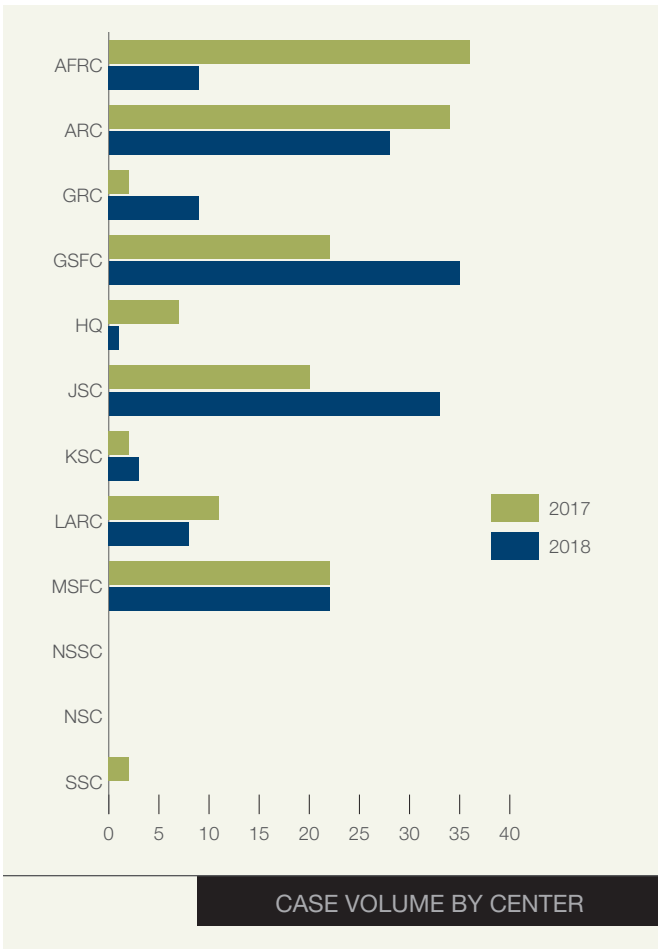
The NASA Ombudsman Program serves civil servants, on-site contractors, and students. The program differs from formal resources like Human Resources, Unions, the Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity (ODEO), and the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) in that it provides an opportunity to raise concerns in an “off-the-record” manner.

An Overview of 2018

The NASA Ombudsman program is based on the principles of confidentiality, neutrality, informality, and independence, as laid out by the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice established by the International Ombudsman Association. NASA Policy Directive (NPD) 2025.1B, the NASA Ombudsman Program, documents the program policy and direction.

In 2018, the NASA Ombudsmen saw a total of 148 visitors. This was a 12 percent decrease in volume from the previous year. Of the total 148 cases in 2018, 75 percent were civil servants, 23 percent were contractors, and 2 percent were students or individuals categorized as “other.” Year over year, we saw a decrease in contractors as visitors, while the number of civil servants who visited increased.

The majority of cases across all Centers were related to “Organizational Performance” (78 percent), a category which includes interpersonal conflict, management behavior, career development or job fit, changes in position, and policy-related issues.



Interpersonal Conflict

- Most often between supervisors and direct reports.
- Conflict resulted from supervisor reportedly using negative language/ tone with visitor.
- Supervisors not actively helping direct reports to grow and advance.
- Conflict between peers consisted of undermining work of a colleague or space/environment issues.

The Ombudsman often coached the visitor on how to best communicate with the other individual, provided an unbiased perspective, and sometimes escalated to Human Resources (HR) or legal when the visitor gave permission.

Management Behavior

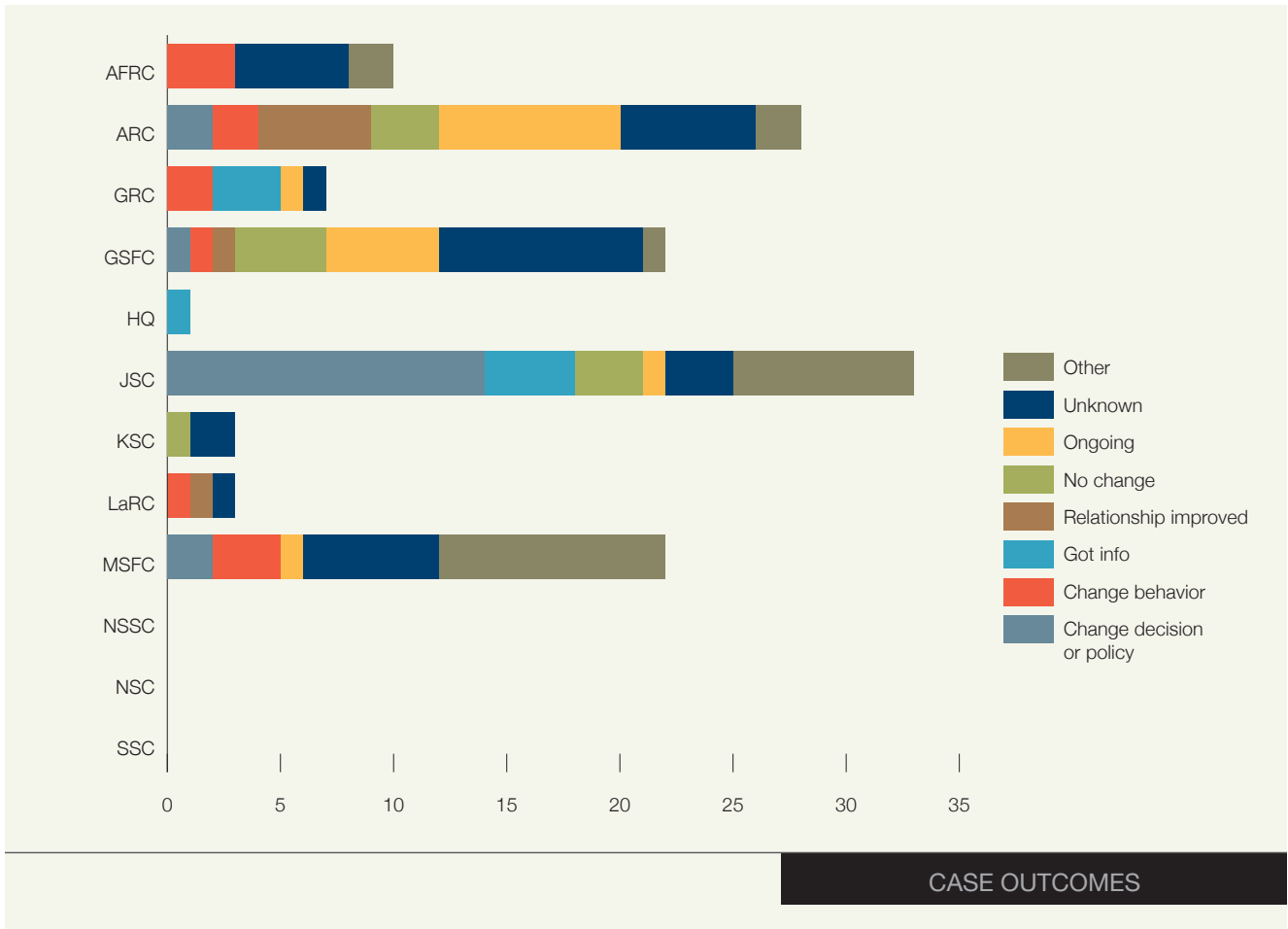
- Allegations that management is making statements that are not consistent with the NASA Code of Conduct or is showing favoritism or discrimination, especially toward women, older workers, and people with accents.

- Allegations of harsh consequences for those “out of favor.”
- Disrespectful treatment.

In these situations, the Ombudsmen were able to coach visitors to address the issues themselves or educated them on the formal process, including who to contact if they chose to follow that path. When the visitor allowed the Ombudsman to take their issue to HR anonymously, change occurred. In one situation a supervisor was removed, and in another, the visitor was allowed to change reporting relationships.

Career Development/Job Fit

- Lack of upward mobility opportunities, being blocked from applying for jobs, or perceiving that advantages are being given to others in the recruitment process.
- Long-term employees perceiving that advantages are being given to newer employees, and women not being taken seriously when applying for management positions.



The Ombudsman Program saw more long-term employees choose to leave the organization in 2018 because of lack of growth.

Coaching was provided to visitors on how to best position themselves for future opportunities and how to seek out mentors in the organization. Referrals were made to HR and ODEO as needed.

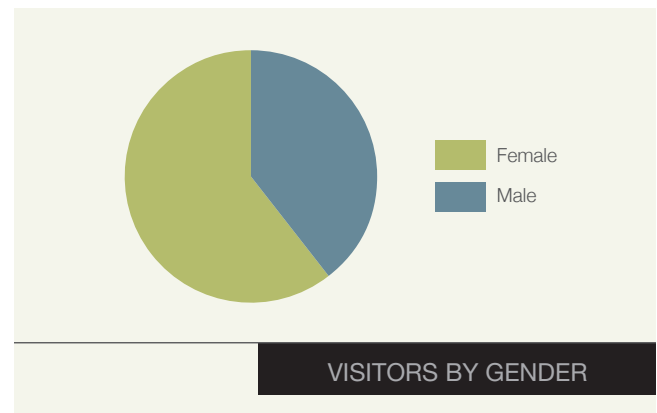
Policy

- Helped locate and explain policies regarding telework, the job posting process, substance abuse, fraudulent time sheets, and steps to retirement.

At one Center, the Ombudsman was successful in influencing the Center to document the rights of the person accused in a harassment investigation. Additionally, the NPR is being revised to clarify that an accuser does not need to go to their immediate

supervisor if the supervisor is in anyway involved or seen as the alleged harasser.

Safety and Mission Success issues accounted for 21 percent of the cases (which was a 67 percent increase over 2017) and the remaining percentage fell in the “Other” category.



Safety

- Several visitors perceived that a culture of risk acceptance existed in one project.
- Many visitors were concerned with management's unresponsiveness to several safety mishaps at one Center over a short period of time.

Other issues brought forth included:

- Use of drugs in the workplace, threatening behavior, traffic safety, and poor air quality due to HVAC systems being down.

Regarding the project concerns, the Ombudsman escalated the concerns to the Center Director and the Office of Safety and Mission Assurance. Management assessed the situation and addressed risk posture and communication gaps. Management also conducted audits, enhanced communication, and provided additional training. Visitors have reported that their risk/safety concerns have been resolved.

Mission Success

- How to raise harassment concerns when on field assignments.
- Concern that individuals traveling internationally have to pay large costs upfront while reimbursement is often delayed.

The Ombudsman at one Center was able to influence formal resources to write a new policy for addressing harassment while on field assignments. While not totally resolved, the international travel issue was escalated with the visitor's permission and is still under review.

Options for Management to Address Key Messages and 2018 Case Trends:

- Review of hiring/selection procedures for fairness of and adherence to the process.
- Provide management training on an ongoing basis to enhance supervisory skills in coaching, providing feedback, and motivating the workforce.
- Hold the NASA workforce accountable when they exhibit behavior that is inconsistent with the Code of Conduct or disrespectful treatment of others.
- Encourage and recognize those who speak up regarding safety/risk concerns.
- Recognize and reward supervisors who listen and take action on concerns, even when the message isn't popular or convenient.

For more information on NASA's Ombudsman Program and a list of Center Ombudsmen, visit our Web site at: <https://ombuds.hq.nasa.gov/index.html.gov>.