

Best Practices for Improving Communication and Working Relationships between Scientists

Communication is enhanced and working relationships between scientists have the best opportunities for improvement when individuals adhere to these essential elements:

- **Access:**
Freedom for fellows or others to speak to anyone at any level in the IC or NIH, including the freedom to seek scientific and career advice, ensures a responsive and informed organization.
- **Direct-dealing:**
As a first step, except in unusual circumstances, it is generally best for a person with a concern to raise that issue directly with the other person or people involved.
- **Clarity:**
Putting concerns in writing helps the person raising the issue think through the exact nature and relative significance of his or her concern.
- **Follow through:**
To clarify how particular concerns have been resolved, it can help to have those responsible for acting on the issue raised write some kind of memo to the file. The person raising the concern may do so as well. This avoids subsequent misunderstandings once memories have faded about whether or how matters were resolved.
- **Receptivity:**
Concerns can be raised in an organization only when people who are not in positions of authority know that the concerns they raise will be seriously considered rather than simply denied or refuted and when they feel some security that they will not experience retaliation for raising issues.
- **Neutral, outside assistance:**
If a person raising an issue, or those responsible for acting on it, become deadlocked, the Office of the Ombudsman can provide neutral, confidential assistance.

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