Astrobites Ombudsperson Procedures and Information

Updated March 2026

Note to Collaboration: This is a living document. As we work through issues, receive feedback from collaboration members, and learn more on these topics, we will update our approaches. If you have a comment or question about this document or the ombudsperson approach, please contact one of the ombudspersons.

Note to Ombudspersons and Investigating Committees: Please read this document and its constituent resources, especially to gain familiarity with transformative justice concepts and ways to practice accountability within the context of Astrobites. Past ombudspersons are useful connections in this regard.

Astrobites Code of Conduct (CoC)

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What is Ombuds?

What is the role of the ombudspersons?

Ombudspeople are point people for any issues, complaints, or concerns, and they are responsible for communicating with the collaboration and leadership to redress the situation.

Ombudspeople are your contact persons for both interpersonal mediations or disputes, as well as violations of the Astrobites Code of Conduct (CoC). Some of these violations include, but are not limited to: bullying, harassment, sexual harassment, and plagiarism (also see here for some definitions of harassment, discrimination, and bullying). These issues may also be other instances of harm caused unto a collaboration member, perhaps related to the publication process or other Astrobites structures.

The role of the ombudspeople is *not* to protect Astrobites leadership or the collaboration as a whole. Our role is also *not* to adjudicate or enact punishment, or to handle disputes in any legal capacity. Rather, the intention is to have a process in place to support any member of the Astrobites collaboration if an issue arises.

What can you expect from an ombuds process?

You are free to report any issue, or perceived or suspected issue, to the ombudspersons. The goal of reporting and the subsequent ombuds process is to have an established procedure (see Code of Conduct: Addressing Breaches of Conduct) when issues arise, in order to work through issues in the collaboration with transparency and accountability. The ombuds process is intended to center the needs of the person who was harmed.

What does this mean in practice? First, all reports and discussions are confidential; the current ombudspersons—and, in cases of CoC breaches, members of the Investigating Committee (a subset of Admin Committee members)—are the only ones who will have access. Further, there is no obligation to continue with the process after reporting an issue, or at any time thereafter. We will maintain as much communication with the reporting person as they like. If the report is not anonymous and the reporting person remains in communication with the ombudspeople, any actions taken as a result of a report will be discussed with and agreed upon. We will not share any information or take any action without the explicit consent of the harmed person.

If desired, we will work with the person harmed to determine a path forward that addresses the harm that was caused. This could include facilitating communication between the relevant people, formal mediation, referring someone to relevant resources, raising the issue to collaboration leadership, bringing up an issue for discussion within the collaboration as a whole, and more.

If a report is made anonymously, or by a person who does not desire further communication, we will act according to the stated desires of the reporter, and where these are not explicit, according to our best judgment and accepted best practices. It is also important to note that this is a living document, and the role and processes of the ombudspersons are meant to be continuously shaped by the needs of those within the collaboration. We always invite and encourage discussion about how to best uphold accountability within our community.

For more details, see Section “Addressing breaches of conduct” in the Astrobites Code of Conduct**.**

Accountability Processes and Transformative Justice

Our approach to the role of ombudspersons is rooted in work by many organizers and activists on accountability and transformative justice. Transformative justice, as defined by organizer and author adrienne maree brown, is “justice that goes beyond punitive justice – punishment in response to transgression...it seeks to go deep into the soil and find the root causes for harm

and transform the systems and societies such that harm becomes impossible." Some of the main questions transformative justice seeks to answer are: how do we handle when one community member has been hurt by another, without discarding the person who has done harm? How do we create a process where someone who does harm can be held accountable, and then welcomed back into good standing in the community?

We adopt these six principles from the book Beyond Survival (pgs. 92, 93, 117) for what accountability means to us. To be "held accountable," a person who has caused harm must:

1. Stop doing the harm.
2. Recognize the harm they have done, even if it wasn't intentional.
3. Acknowledge that harm's impact on individuals and the community.
4. Make appropriate restitution to the individual and community.
5. Develop solid skills for transforming their attitudes and behaviors to prevent further harm.
6. Engage in the ongoing work of accountability, healing, and integration.

Community accountability processes—conversations and other work, led by facilitators, that help to hold someone accountable and ensure the safety of the person who was harmed—can take many shapes. Generally, processes begin by assessing the situation and determining the needs of the person who was harmed, and then some sort of action is taken. Organizers and activists have been practicing and iterating versions of this work for decades, so we take their lead and learn from their experience, with references that have shaped our thinking given at the end of this document.

So, how does this apply to Astrobites?

We will intentionally ground our approach to any issues brought to us in the framework and principles above, and we will revisit these resources and find new ones relevant to the situation as needed. Some issues might arise in the context of the Astrobites collaboration that could come up in any collaboration, such as direct discriminatory language or harassment.

On the other hand, some might be very specific to Astrobites. For example, say that someone raised an issue that an editor was repeatedly giving hurtful comments on post drafts, and that the person did not want to approach the editor directly. The ombudspersons could meet with the person causing harm to discuss their behavior, help work through how the comments were harmful, and come up with a plan to prevent future occurrences of this issue. As another example, say that an author published a post on a contentious topic, and another collaboration member found the post offensive. The ombudspersons could facilitate a discussion between the writers and try to work towards a common understanding of why the post was offensive, collect resources to further the writer's understanding on the topic, and figure out actions that need to be taken regarding the published post.

We emphasize that these are just two examples, and cases different from these are just as valid issues to report. Further, this is a living document and a living framework; as we work through

issues, receive feedback from collaboration members, and learn more on these topics, we will update our approaches.

Contacting the Ombudspersons

To discuss an issue with Astrobites ombuds, you can contact either (or both!) of our ombudspersons directly, or fill out this google form (which has an option to remain anonymous). Your responses will only be visible to the ombudspersons, and anything you tell us will not be shared beyond the ombudspersons without your consent.

You can contact us however you are most comfortable: filling out the form, email, Astrobites Slack direct message (DM), or text message. We are also happy to set up a phone call or Zoom/Skype call.

2025-26 Ombudsperson

Roel Lefever (he/him): roel.lefever@uni-heidelberg.de
Roel has been a writer since January 2022 and serves on the admin, climate change, education and recruitment committees. He's a 5th year PhD student in Astrophysics at the University of Heidelberg, Germany. He has long experience in representing students at past and current institutes and has helped overseeing external DEI issues with Astrobites.

2024-25 Ombudspersons

Abby Lee (she/her/hers): abbyl@uchicago.edu
Abby has been a writer for Astrobites since January 2022, and also serves on the hiring committee. She is a 5th year graduate student in Astronomy & Astrophysics at the University of Chicago, and has worked extensively to improve the equity, diversity, and inclusion at her department. She has one dog named Mando.

Ivey Davis (they/them): idavs@caltech.edu

2023-24 Ombudspersons

Jessie Thwaites (they/them): thwaites@wisc.edu
Jessie has been a writer for Astrobites since January 2022, and is currently also serving as scheduling chair. They are a 4th year graduate student in Astroparticle physics at UW-Madison, and have been very involved in equity, diversity and inclusion work in physics/astronomy within their department and the IceCube collaboration. They are also a cat parent.

Abby Lee (she/her/hers): abbyl@uchicago.edu

Abby has been a writer for Astrobites since January 2022, and also serves on the hiring committee. She is a 5th year graduate student in Astronomy & Astrophysics at the University of Chicago, and has worked extensively to improve the equity, diversity, and inclusion at her department. She has one dog named Mando.

2022-23 Ombudspersons

Briley Lewis (she/her/hers): brileylewis@g.ucla.edu
Briley has been a writer for Astrobites since January 2019, and is currently also serving as Education Co-Chair and Admin Vice-Chair. She is a 5th year graduate student in Astronomy at UCLA, with significant experience in inclusive and accessible practices, and also a happy dog mom to her senior rescue Rocky.

Lili Alderson (she/her/hers): lili.alderson@bristol.ac.uk
Lili has been a writer for Astrobites since January 2021, and is currently also serving as Scheduling Chair. She is a 3rd year PhD student in Astronomy at the University of Bristol, with significant experience in the UK student representative system, although has also spent time studying within the US.

2021-22 Ombudspersons

Gourav Khullar (he/him/his): gkhullar04@gmail.com
Gourav joined Astrobites in January 2016, and has played many roles across the collaboration. He is a final year PhD Candidate in Astronomy and Astrophysics at UChicago, and a visiting researcher at MIT. He is a union organizer, and excited to participate in inclusive pedagogy and social justice efforts in his community.

Macy Huston (they/them): mhuston@psu.edu
Macy joined Astrobites in January 2021. They are a PhD candidate in Astronomy and Astrophysics at Penn State and a mutual aid project organizer in their community, as well as a cat parent.

2020-21 Ombudspersons

Kate Storey-Fisher (she/her/hers): k.sf@nyu.edu
Kate has been a writer for Astrobites since January 2019. She is a PhD candidate in Physics at NYU, where she is also an active organizer in her department and with her graduate student union.

Briley Lewis (she/her/hers): blewis@astro.ucla.edu
Briley has been a writer for Astrobites since January 2019. She is a graduate student in Astronomy at UCLA and a mutual aid volunteer in her community, and also a happy dog mom to her senior rescue Rocky.

Resources

Transformative Justice and Accountability

Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement, Edited by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha and Ejeris Dixon

Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Shaping Worlds by adrienne maree brown

Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good by adrienne maree brown

Turn This World Inside Out: The Emergence of Nurturance Culture by Nora Samaran

The Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective (collected resources)

Ombuds Information from Other Organizations

Coalition of Student Employee Unions Constitution

History of “Ombuds” from Oberlin

“What is an Ombudsman?” from FIU

UCLA Ombuds Principles

Old Versions of the Astrobites Ombuds Documentation

Astrobites Ombudsperson Procedures and Information 2020