

The Seattle Federal Executive Board (SFEB) Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Consortium

The SFEB ADR Program is an intergovernmental pool of certified mediators from approximately 20 different federal agencies around Western Washington, the State of Washington, the City of Seattle and the Port of Seattle.

It is a “Shared Neutrals” program that was created in 1993. In Shared Neutrals programs, public agencies receive mediation services at no charge in exchange for providing support (typically trained mediators) to the consortium.

We were the first FEB ADR Consortium in the country and, partly due to our success every FEB in the country now has an ADR Consortium.

The SFEB ADR Program was selected to receive the National OPM Director’s Award for an Outstanding ADR Program, which was awarded to us by Attorney General Janet Reno and OPM Director Janice LaChance.

The average grade of our mediator cadre is GS-13.5. 25% are attorneys. Of the approximately 80 mediators on our roster, a majority hold advanced degrees, Masters or higher. We are a very diverse group in ethnicity, cultures, languages and Bargaining Unit/Non-Bargaining Unit status and we try, as much as possible, to match our mediators to the parties.

Our mediators have an advanced level of skill, which is developed through an extensive training program that takes approximately two years to complete. The mediators are certified through a nationally recognized certification process - the same process used by outside, contract mediators.

Many mediators in the SFEB ADR Consortium are also certified by the Washington Mediation Association (WMA), which is hard to attain and not very common. The WMA requires completion of Basic Mediation Training, plus a minimum of 200 hours mediation experience. Washington State is one of the most difficult states in the country in which to be certified as mediator.

The SFEB ADR Consortium’s overall mediation settlement rate for PY2009 was 89%. The satisfaction rate was 95% (of those who went through mediation). Even among those whose cases did not “settle” formally, 95% were satisfied with the process.

We mediate and facilitate ALL types of workplace cases, e.g., supervisor/employee; employee/employee; groups, etc. We mediate cases across the full spectrum of workplace issues, from employee personality disputes to Directors of Agencies with nationally known attorney representatives.

The mediation model used by the ADR Consortium is a powerful, sophisticated tool, which is actually very structured, although it appears informal to the parties. It is especially effective with serious emotional disputes between parties who need to have a continuing relationship; however, the process is appropriate for all types of personnel disputes. It is also well suited for EEO complaints and collective bargaining unit grievances.

Some of the Benefits of an Inter-governmental Mediator Pool:

Use of mediators from agencies other than the disputant's home agency ensures the perception of neutrality and confidentiality. It minimizes perceived biases or inappropriate knowledge if the mediator was from the parties' home agency. In the situation where an in-house mediator is used, and that mediator is known by the parties, there may be some concern that the mediator could be friends with one side or the other or that information from the mediation could be disclosed to inappropriate parties outside of the mediation.

An inter-governmental pool of mediators provides for flexibility of resources. We are always able to find an available mediator, even on short notice.

An inter-governmental pool ensures that the expertise of our mediators is current. We are able to provide continuing education programs on cutting-edge issues in the ADR field. We are also able to develop mediators during their practicum and help them attain their certifications.

The bottom line is that we offer HIGH Quality mediation at no cost to public sector entities (other than transportation and per Diem, if applicable) - the same mediation that from an outside mediator would cost as much as \$3,000.

Please do not hesitate to contact Tom Melancon, SFEB ADR Program Manager, at (206) 757-6605 if you have any questions or would like to discuss whether ADR would be appropriate for your situation. You may also e-mail him at melancon.tom.l@dol.gov