

EEO Alternative Dispute Resolution Policy and Procedure for Employees of the FEC *(Reviewed annually by the EEOC)*

It is the policy of the Federal Election Commission (FEC or Commission) to ensure that Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) is available to all employees and utilized to the maximum extent that is practicable and appropriate to resolve Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) related employment disputes as quickly as possible and at the lowest possible level. The Commission is committed to ensuring that appropriate consideration is given to the use of ADR whenever it offers possibilities for reaching agreements which are fair, cost-effective, and supportive of the relationships needed for mission effectiveness.

The Commission is aware of the contributions which effective ADR programs can make to organizational efficiency and effectiveness. ADR will be implemented at the FEC using a mediation model. The collaborative resolutions created through this process often results in agreements and understandings which improve relationships and performance. The Commission's program is voluntary, efficient, expeditious, cost effective, while retaining the legal and administrative due process rights of the participants involved.

The Commission views mediation as a highly desirable alternative to the use of standard complaint procedures which may strain relationships and divert resources from the accomplishment of our important mission. The Commission has successfully implemented ADR techniques to informally resolve EEO disputes for many years. The effective use of ADR to resolve EEO disputes is seen as a major management goal for the FEC. This policy sets forth the authority, requirements, and procedures for the implementation of the Commission's ADR Program. All managers, supervisors and employees are encouraged to support the accomplishment of this goal and fully participate in the ADR program and process.

Section 1: Purpose and Authorities:

- A. This policy implements the provisions of the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Management Directive 715, Part II (E) which requires Federal agencies to establish and maintain ADR programs in a manner that will ensure appropriate use and obtain full participation of supervisors and managers in the ADR process.
- B. The policy sets forth specific goals/mission of the FEC EEO ADR program; the rights and responsibilities of the Commission and all participants of the ADR process; and the procedures for using the ADR process to resolve disputes involving allegations of discrimination subject to the EEO complaints procedures.
- C. This policy references the following regulatory authorities:

1. Public Law 104-320, Administrative Dispute Resolution Act of 1996 (110 Stat.3870).
2. Title 29, Code of Federal Regulations §1614.102 (b)(2), §1614.105 (f) and §1614.108 (b), EEOC Processing, current edition.
3. EEOC Management Directive 110, Chapter 3 (ADR) and Appendix H, (EEOC Notice- ADR) November 9, 1999.
4. EEOC Management Directive 715 Part II (E), October 1, 2003.

Section 2: Scope

The primary purpose of the FEC EEO ADR Program is to provide an alternative structure for resolving allegations/complaints of discrimination, employee and other employment related disputes and conflicts in a manner that is expedient, cost effective and collaborative. The focus of the process is upon resolution of the issues involved in the dispute as quickly as possible and at the lowest level in the organization at which the resolution can take place. The implementation of the ADR program which encourages the resolution of disputes and complaints is an FEC strategic management goal. The program makes ADR available at any and every stage of the EEO complaints procedure. (See **FEC EEO Complaints Policy**)

The goals of the program are to:

- a. Maximize possibilities for the collaborative informal resolution of disputes.
- b. Reduce the costs and timeframes associated with the standard procedures for processing allegations and complaints of discrimination.
- c. Prevent the escalation of disputes into multiple complaints of discrimination.
- d. Prevent the unnecessary escalation of disputes of entities outside of the FEC or to the courts.
- e. Create stronger relationships and enhance overall morale through the process of collaborative problem solving and decision making.
- f. Assist employees at all levels in developing the skills needed to prevent and manage disputes and conflicts in a constructive manner.
- g. Increase the confidence of employees and managers in the EEO process.

Section 3: Procedures

A. Selection of Dispute

The Commission's ADR Program will be managed by the EEO Director. The selection of disputes for processing under the ADR Program will be based primarily upon the extent to which the EEO Director believes that the dispute can be resolved through the ADR process and that it would be in the best interest of the agency to do so. The issues to be considered for ADR will be determined on a case-by-case basis taking into consideration such factors as

the nature of the case, the relationship of the participants, the size and complexity of the case and the relief sought. The following conditions are factors which weigh against acceptance of a dispute for ADR.

- (1) The employees or other individuals in the dispute are not willing to explore resolution possibilities, participate fully in the process or demonstrate a good faith effort in support of the resolution.
- (2) The FEC lacks the authority or the discretionary latitude to alter or expand upon decisions which have already been made.
- (3) It would not be in the best interest of the agency to explore additional resolution possibilities.
- (4) There is no reason to believe that ADR would be effective in bringing about resolution.
- (5) Class action complaints are involved.
- (6) ADR may not be appropriate for, and need not be accepted by the FEC, in every workplace dispute. Examples of instances in which ADR may not be appropriate include but are not limited to: if adjudication may be needed for precedential value; if the ADR process might not be safe for the parties (if the complainant alleges conduct that is violent in nature); or if the issues are subject to an ongoing criminal or similar investigation. However, an agency decision that ADR is not appropriate should be the exception, not the rule, and should be based on significant reason, such as in the examples above. A Commission decision not to engage in ADR, or not to make ADR available for a particular case, or failure to provide a neutral cannot be made the subject of an EEO complaint.

B. Participation

ADR is a voluntary process. The individuals who are participants to the dispute may opt in or out of participation of the process when offered the opportunity to do so by the EEO Office. When the offer is accepted, the managers and supervisors involved in the dispute will be held responsible for participating in the process in a manner that fully supports the accomplishments of the Commission's ADR program goals.

- (1) ADR can occur at any time and any stage in the EEO complaints process.
- (2) Employees and individuals who are participants to the dispute may refuse to participate in the process.
- (3) A participant may be represented by any person of his or her choosing throughout the process.
- (4) FEC managers, supervisors and officials involved in the disputes are required to participate in good faith once the dispute has been accepted for ADR.

- (5) The EEO Director may terminate the process if any of the employee participants to the dispute should fail to cooperate or demonstrate a good faith effort towards resolution of the dispute.
- (6) The employee participant(s) to the dispute may terminate the process at any time within the prescribed timeframes without a loss of rights.
- (7) Participants have 7 days to decide whether to select ADR after being advised of their rights during the initial EEO Counseling interview.

C. Selection of the Mediator

The EEO Director is responsible for the selection of the mediator. A range of considerations which include the complexity and sensitivity of the issues in the dispute, the impact of the dispute upon the organization and relationships among the individuals involved will be applied in making the selection. The mediator should possess knowledge of basic EEO and human resources concepts, as well as skills and abilities in mediation techniques. All mediators will be selected from among certified mediators participating in the federal government shared neutral program. All mediators will be selected from outside the agency to prevent any type of conflict of interest from occurring.

D. Confidentiality

- (1) Confidentiality in ADR sessions is intended to allow parties to candidly discuss their interests in order to reach the best possible resolution, without fear that statements made during ADR will later be used against them. Confidentiality provides protection from disclosure to individuals outside of an ADR session of information discussed or presented during an ADR session. Confidentiality also provides the assurance that the mediator will not disclose to one party of the ADR session, information shared in confidence by another participant, unless the disclosing participant specifically authorizes disclosure during the mediation.
- (2) Because of confidentiality in mediation, no documentation or record of deliberations during the proceedings will be maintained. Information, including resolution options, discussed during, or specifically prepared for ADR proceedings may not be introduced as evidence in subsequent hearings or other legal proceedings, except as permitted under the ADR Act. In no event will a mediator serve as a witness in subsequent administrative or court actions involving their assigned complaint. Prior to the beginning of any ADR proceedings, the parties will agree not to call the mediator as a witness.
- (3) Nothing said or done during the attempts to resolve the dispute through ADR can be made the subject of subsequent EEO complaints including the decision not to participate in or to withdraw from ADR. Exemptions to this confidentiality clause

- may apply in instances by either participant for threats or imminent physical harm or incidents of actual violence that may occur during the mediation.
- (4) There is no requirement that a settlement must be confidential.

E. Resolution

ADR supports the discrimination complaints process. Resolutions agreed to by the participants during the process are fully enforceable.

- (1) The Commission will make available a management official with settlement authority during the ADR process.
- (2) The terms of a resolution must be in writing and signed by both participants. The agreement must state the terms of the resolution and the procedures available if the agency fails to comply with the terms of the resolution.
- (3) Written agreements must comply with EEOC's Enforcement Guidance on non-waivable employee rights under the EEOC enforced statutes.
- (4) If either participant alleges breach of the agreement, the EEO Director will make appropriate inquiries and will determine whether opening of the EEO complaint is appropriate or if any administrative resolution of the alleged breach is feasible. The complainant must notify the EEO Director, in writing, of the alleged noncompliance with the settlement agreement or final decision within 30 days of when the complainant knows or should have known of the alleged noncompliance. The agency will then make a determination on the breach claim. If the agency fails to do so before the 35-day period has expired, then the complainant may appeal to the EEOC. 29 C.F.R. § 1614.504(b), if the complainant is not satisfied with the agency's attempt to resolve the matter, the complainant may appeal to the EEOC for a determination. The complainant may file an appeal 35 days after serving the agency with the allegations of noncompliance but must file an appeal within 30 days of receiving the agency's determination. Note: These procedures do not limit the right of either party to initiate a breach of contract action for violation of a signed settlement agreement that has been ratified by the Commission.
- (5) If the complaint is based upon age, then the settlement agreement must conform to the Older Workers Benefit Protection Act of 1990 (OWBPA). The agency reserves the right to ask an employee to waive his or her rights or claims under the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) in the settlement of an ADEA mediation. However, the ADEA, as amended by OWBPA, sets out specific minimum standards that must be met for a waiver to be considered knowing and voluntary and, therefore, valid. Among other requirements, a valid ADEA waiver must:
 - Be written and understandable.

- Specifically refer to ADEA rights or claims
- Not waive rights or claims that may arise in the future.
- Be made in exchange for valuable consideration.
- Advise the individual in writing to consult an attorney before signing the waiver, and
- Provide the individual at least 21 days to consider the agreement and at least seven days to revoke the agreement after signing it.

F. Responsibilities

(1) Commission

The FEC is committed to meeting the criteria for Model Agencies set forth in MD-715 which requires agencies to:

- a. Establish and encourage the widespread use of a fair ADR program that facilitates the early, effective, and efficient informal resolution of disputes.
- b. Appoint a senior level official to implement a comprehensive ADR program that will include an appropriate range of employment-related disputes.
- c. Ensure that managers and supervisors at all appropriate levels will participate in the ADR process.
- d. Evaluate managers and supervisors on their efforts to meet these requirements.
- e. Provide training and assistance needed to enable managers and supervisors to meet their responsibilities under these requirements.

(2) ADR Manager

The FEC designates the EEO Director as its ADR Manager, responsible for overseeing the process and ensuring that the requirements of the ADR program are met and that managers, supervisors and employees are provided with any needed training or assistance. The EEO Director is responsible for:

- a. Developing and issuing policy and FEC guidance on use of ADR and evaluating agency ADR efforts.
- b. Coordinating ADR activities, including maintaining a list of mediator resources.
- c. Ensuring that all employees are aware of, have access to, and are encouraged to use ADR programs; and
- d. Reporting annually on the ADR program and usage.

(3) The Management Designee

The Management Designee is the FEC management official appointed to participate on the Commission's behalf during the ADR proceedings. The Management Designee has the authority to resolve the dispute by entering into a settlement agreement. The Responsible Management Official (RMO) or the agency official directly involved in the case will not in any manner serve as the management official with settlement authority. The RMO may

negotiate on behalf of the agency at ADR proceedings, however, any settlement agreement reached at such proceedings are subject to approval by another agency official with final settlement authority.

(4) The EEO Counselor

The EEO Counselor has the responsibility to provide information and assistance in the EEO complaints process, including notifying aggrieved individuals of their rights and offering the choice between ADR and EEO counseling.

(5) The Mediator

The Mediator is the independent 3rd party who established ground rules for the ADR proceeding and conducts the process consistent with EEOC core principles and legal requirements. The Mediator prepares any settlement agreement and obtains the signatures of the parties.

(6) The Representative

Any party may have a Representative who serves their interests in the ADR process and cooperates in developing and presenting information relevant to the allegation, recommendations, and solutions. There is no requirement for representation.

G. Definitions

- (1) Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) is the process of bringing the participants in a dispute involving the FEC together under the guidance of a neutral “third party” who will use a combination of fact gathering, facilitation and mediation techniques to mediate a resolution of the dispute.
- (2) Dispute is a conflict between one or more individuals and the FEC involving issues which are within the decision-making authority of the FEC.
- (3) Participants are the individuals who are in conflict.
- (4) Conflict is any disagreement, discord, argument, complaint, or legal action, as well as the circumstances leading up to it.
- (5) Disputed issue is the specific decision, action, practice, policy, or interaction upon which the dispute is based.
- (6) Mediator is the neutral individual assigned by the FEC to mediate resolution of the dispute. The neutral has not personal interest in the outcome of the conflict and performs the neutral duties impartially and without bias.
- (7) Mediation is an interest-based ADR process in which a third party neutral (the mediator) meets with two or more participants who have a conflict, facilitates discussions, and assists the parties in reaching a mutual resolution of their differences. The mediator does not have decision-making authority, resolution rests with the parties.
- (8) Resolution is an enforceable agreement between the FEC and the individuals involved in the dispute which effectively resolves the matter in a manner that satisfies

all applicable legal and regulatory requirements. Resolution consists of the terms of which participants in conflict agree that results in the total or partial end or closure of a conflict, complaint, grievance, appeal, or litigation.

H. Processing Steps

The offer of ADR may come at any time and at any stage in the EEO discrimination complaints procedure. Either the individual or the Commission may request ADR. The EEO Director will review the request and determine whether ADR would be appropriate. If both parties agree to participate, a mediator is assigned, and the matter will be handled in general conformance with the following steps.

Step 1: Upon receiving the ADR request, the EEO Director will acknowledge receipt to the requestor, review the case for appropriateness, consult the other party regarding willingness to participate and determine whether to proceed with ADR.

Step 2: If appropriate and all participants agree to participate, the EEO Director will secure the services of a mediator to conduct the ADR effort.

Step 3: The mediator will review the file and plan an approach to conducting the mediation. Because each case is unique and may arrive at the mediation process at any time the history of the dispute, the mediator will individualize the process to provide the maximum opportunity for effective and timely resolution.

Step 4: The EEO Director will notify all parties to the dispute of the name of the mediator and the requirements for their good faith participation in the process. The EEO Director will coordinate with the parties and the mediator to schedule a time and place for the mediation.

Step 5: The mediator will conduct the ADR process. The EEO Director will provide support and assistance to the mediator with respect to scheduling, document production and the preparation and finalization of resolution agreements.

Step 6: When ADR is success and an agreement is reached, the terms of the agreement will be reduced to writing by the mediator and signed by the participants, including the Management Representative. If no agreement is reached, the individual will be notified in writing of their rights and responsibilities under EEO complaint process.

Section 4: ADR Rights and Responsibilities

- (a) Decisions to use ADR may be made at any point during the EEO complaints process. When such decisions are made, the complaints procedure will be suspended until the ADR process has been completed.
- (b) Resolution through the ADR process will satisfy the conditions for informal resolution under the discrimination complaints procedure.

- (c) A failure to achieve resolution through the ADR process allows the complaining party to return to that point in the discrimination complaints process where the complaint was suspended, in order to resume that process. Time expended during the ADR effort will not be applied to the mandatory time frames for processing EEO complaints.
- (d) Efforts at mediation should be completed within a 90-day time frame. An individual with authority to fully resolve the matter on behalf of the Commission should attend the mediation. If that is not possible, an individual with authority to negotiate on behalf of the agency should attend the ADR proceeding and should have access to an individual with authority to fully resolve the matter on behalf of the Commission.
- (e) Agreement to resolve a dispute will be voluntary for all participants of ADR. Participants involved with ADR are expected to participate in good faith. Once the EEO Director offers ADR, management officials are expected to approach the matter in a thoughtful manner and in a cooperative spirit as part of their management role and responsibilities.
- (f) Participants are entitled to be accompanied, represented, and advised by a personally chosen representative in ADR proceedings.
- (g) The use of ADR shall not adversely affect the rights of individuals to seek resolution of their issues through the established complaint, grievance, and appeal system, provided established time frames in each system are otherwise met.
- (h) No employee shall commit, authorize, or condone any retaliation against any employee or customer because of the pursuit of or participation in ADR.
- (i) The Commission will make available training and educational services designed to promote effective conflict management. These shall include explanations of available ADR services and employees' responsibilities relating to ADR participation.
- (j) Although the EEO ADR program is designed to address disputes arising under statutes enforced by the EEOC, the program has sufficient latitude for the parties to raise and address both EEO and non-EEO issues in the resolution of disputes. However, if the resolution of the matter is unsuccessful in ADR, non-EEO issues and issues not brought to the attention of the EEO Counselor cannot be included in the formal complaint unless the issue is like or related to issues discussed in EEO Counseling.

Section 5: Administration

- (a) Program Costs, The FEC is responsible for the ADR program costs. Mediators will be obtained through agency resources. The costs associated with conducting ADR proceedings and settlement agreements will be paid out of agency funds, subject to the limitations of law.
- (b) Record keeping, The EEO Director will collect Federal complaints processing data pursuant to the agency's obligation to report EEO activity to the EEOC. The

Commission will maintain a record of ADR activity for annual reporting to the EEOC on Form 462 no later than October 31st of each year.

- (c) Confidentiality, Mediators shall ensure confidentiality of all ADR proceedings, including destroying all written notes taken during the ADR proceedings or in preparation for the proceedings.
- (d) ADR files, written notification of rights and responsibilities, reports of the mediator and other records of the process will be stored in files separate from those in a formal complaint. No information obtained during the ADR proceedings will be available for use in formal complaint proceedings, except for information obtained through legitimate discovery procedures or other compulsory processes; the written resolution agreement, if any; a statement that ADR was attempted and failed, when appropriate, and a chronological record of the actions taken by the EEO Director.

Section 6: Program Training

The Commission will provide appropriate training and education on ADR to its employees, managers and supervisors, neutral and other persons protected under applicable laws. ADR training will include:

1. ADR Act and its amendments, with emphasis on the government's commitment to ADR.
2. EEOC regulations and policy guidance,
3. Commission's ADR policy and procedure,
4. ADR core principles, including methods and techniques of mediation; and
5. Drafting the settlement agreement.

Section 7: Program Evaluation

The evaluation component will assist in determining whether the ADR program has achieved its goals and will provide feedback on how the program might be made more efficient and achieve better results. The program shall be evaluated at least once per year to ensure that the agency is in compliance with MD-110, Chapter 3, Section VII(C).

The EEO Director will use appropriate data collection and analysis tools (e.g. interviews, questionnaires, survey feedback, focus groups, etc.) as well as ADR results, to determine the overall efficiency and effectiveness of ADR as a method of facilitating EEO complaint processing based upon:

1. Participation/Satisfaction
2. Employee and management awareness
3. Compliance with settlement agreements
4. Efficiency measures (speed, cost, reduced complaints inventory)

5. Improvements in post-complaints climate and employee morale

Questions regarding this policy should be directed to the FEC EEO Director at (202) 694-1228. Agency informal ADR (Conflict Management Coaching) in addition to any other attempt at resolution may not modify/replace applicable LMA/EEOC/MSPB complaints processes.