

Understanding Informal Mediation

Facilitated by the Office of the Ombuds

Conflicts can arise in any workplace setting. The Office of the Ombuds can help facilitate a conversation for parties in conflict in a confidential and impartial manner. Informal mediation differs from formal mediation in that any agreement reached using an informal process does not constitute a binding agreement that would be enforceable under law or by parties other than the participants.

What is informal mediation?

Informal mediation is a voluntary, confidential process by which a trained mediator helps participants build rapport, explore their conflict, and develop mutually beneficial solutions. Unlike formal processes, informal mediation emphasizes collaboration, understanding, and empowerment rather than formal adjudication or enforcement.

Why should I consider informal mediation?

Confidentiality: Discussions held in mediation are confidential and cannot be disclosed unless all parties agree. Empowerment: Participants – not the mediator – craft solutions that meet their unique needs and circumstances. Relationship Building: By fostering open communication and understanding, mediation helps participants build relationships that might otherwise be strained by conflict. A goal of informal mediation is often to avoid other more formal processes. Participants work together to foster solutions.

What is the mediator's role?

The mediator is an impartial, third party, whose role is to facilitate communication between the parties, not to impose solutions. Mediators do not advise, take sides, or render a judgment. The mediator is in charge of the process but not the outcome.

What is the participant's role?

Productive informal mediations rely on participants speaking openly and honestly, stating needs and interests plainly with respect and courtesy to other participants. Discuss the relevant problems or issues rather than blaming or attacking other participants. Listen to each other, be civil, and do not interrupt other participants.

When is informal mediation not the best option?

Informal mediation can be used at any point in a conflict. All interested parties must voluntarily and willingly request to participate in the process. If one or more parties have engaged in legal action or have pursued other formal processes, then the facilitated conversation is less useful. Because of its confidential nature, informal mediation is not appropriate for gathering evidence or building a case against another participant.

Still unsure?

Schedule an appointment with an Ombuds to discuss informal mediation as a possible option.