

Interagency Program on Sharing of Neutrals

- **What is a shared neutral?** The Sharing of Neutrals Program (SN) provides low cost, high quality mediators to federal agencies. The program uses a pool of trained and experienced mediators, from a variety of federal agencies who provide their services to other agencies on a collateral duty basis.
- **Who is involved?** Over 25 agencies currently participate in the SN. Although the program began in the Washington metropolitan area, it now serves participating agencies anywhere in the country (via its national mediator network). The program is administered by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).
- **Who are the mediators?** In order to mediate for SN, an individual must be employed by a participating agency and have considerable mediation experience. The minimum amount of experience a neutral must have is (1) 20 hours of basic mediation skills training, (2) three co-mediations with a qualified mediator or five independent mediations with positive evaluations from a qualified trainer/evaluator, and (3) two references from two qualified mediators or trainer/evaluators.
- **What is a co-mediator?** A co-mediator is a person who is trained in basic mediation skills but has not yet mediated three cases with a qualified mediator. SN maintains a registry of co-mediators and strives to provide them with mediation opportunities, thereby enhancing the mediator pool.
- **Who is the contact person for obtaining a mediator or joining the program?** An agency may request a neutral by sending a letter to: Peg Porter, Department Appeals Board, Department of Health and Human Services, Room 637D Humphrey Building, 200 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, D.C. 20201, fax (202) 690-5863 or phone (202) 401-2847. Generally mediators are selected randomly from a roster, but SN will attempt to accommodate special needs.
- **How does the process work?** The process begins when an agency requests a mediator. SN provides the name and telephone number of a mediator and the requesting agency contacts her/him. It is generally up to the mediator to contact the parties and schedule the mediation. This process typically takes place within a matter of weeks from the initial request. SN has a policy that no case will remain open longer than 45 days, unless the parties jointly request an extension of time. Mediators frequently rely on the requesting agency to provide a neutral location for the mediation conference.
- **Other commitments by participants.** Every individual and agency participating in the Sharing Neutrals program agrees to abide by principles of confidentiality, as outlined in section 574 of the Administrative Dispute Resolution Act as amended in 1996. Also mediators agree to engage in ethical practice as outlined in the Model Standards of Conduct for Mediators (developed by AAA, ABA and SPIDR).
- **What final action takes place at the close of a case?** Mediation agreements are generally reduced to writing and signed by the parties. If mediation ends without

agreement, the case is referred back to the requesting agency for the next steps in the agency's processes; mediation does not limit other formal rights. At the close of mediation, the mediator provides the parties with evaluation forms and asks the parties to return the forms to SN. For tracking purposes, SN asks mediators to report whether agreement was reached, however, to assure confidentiality, SN receives no substantive details of the mediation.

- Other questions? Contact Peg Porter at: Department Appeals Board, Department of Health and Human Services, Room 637D Humphrey Building, 200 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, D.C. 20201, fax (202) 690-5863 or phone (202) 401-2847.