

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION REPORT

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Community Mediation Centers and Campus Mediation

by Linda Baron

In this brief piece, Linda Baron presents some of the similarities between campus mediation work and that of community mediation centers and provides readers of the Report with more information on some of the potential benefits of membership in the National Association for Community Mediation (NAFCM)

What are the characteristics of community mediation centers?

Some of the major characteristics of community mediation centers are that they use trained community volunteers as the primary providers of mediation services and provide services to clients regardless of their ability to pay. Centers may be free-standing private non-profit organizations, programs within such non-profits, or programs within public agencies. Centers not only provide mediation services, but also provide training and engage in a wide variety of public awareness and educational activities about the values and practice of mediation. For most centers, their primary service is providing mediation for inter-personal disputes. Most disputants are referred to community mediation centers from courts or social service agencies, but many disputants are self-referred. In addition to mediation services, many centers also provide facilitation and organizational development assistance and may intervene in community-wide disputes. In addition to training their own volunteers, many centers provide a wide range of training in conflict management, mediation, and facilitation to the members of their community.

How are community mediation centers similar to campus centers and what are some models of campus-based centers?

Like campus programs, community mediation centers serve their community and rely primarily on trained volunteers to provide conflict resolution services. Community mediation centers, like campus centers, vary broadly in size, in the sizes of the geographic areas they serve, in the demographics of the communities they serve, in the kinds of cases they mediate, and in the other types of services offered.

There are several types of centers with different campus-community relationships. Some centers primarily serve the on-campus community and may only be involved in an off-campus dispute if it involves members of the campus community. Some centers are housed on campuses, but primarily serve the off-campus community. Some of these centers have funding from the host college or university and some have staff who are also employed by the host. Some centers serve both the off-campus and the on-campus community, while other centers are located off-campus and primarily serve the off-campus community, but may engage in special projects on-campus, use interns from the campus community, or provide training on-campus.

How can campus-based and community-based programs work together?

There are many ways for both campus-based and community-based programs to work together. In communities that are served both by campus programs and by community mediation centers, a variety of partnerships could be created. For example, if either organization is asked to intervene in a dispute that involves both communities, the dispute could be mediated by co-mediators, one from the community mediation center and one from the campus program. For example, a landlord-tenant dispute involving a student or a noise dispute regarding noise from the campus, might be mediated best by mediators from each program. A dispute about parking or perceived encroachment by the campus on the surrounding community could be co-mediated by mediators from each center. Another possible partnership could use the concept of shared neutrals. If the mediators in the campus program were considered too close to a particular conflict to be considered impartial, a mediator from the community program could be asked to intervene in the dispute.

What is the National Association for Community Mediation (NAFCM) and how can NAFCM membership benefit campus-based centers?

NAFCM is a membership organization for community mediation centers, staff, and volunteer mediators. As the only national organization of community mediation centers, NAFCM serves as a national voice and an advocate of community mediation in legislative, policy-making, professional and other arenas. NAFCM members are eligible to apply for minigrants to develop new programs, receive training and improve organizational effectiveness, promote diversity and social justice, and technology. Staff from member centers may attend regional training institutes to learn about how to improve the management and administration of their centers. NAFCM offers

professional liability and directors/officers insurance for community mediation centers. Professional liability insurance covers all mediations conducted by center staff AND volunteers, with premiums based on the center's budget rather than the number of mediators covered. NAFCM's 300 community mediation center members are connected electronically through a listserv where centers exchange ideas, opinions, experiences, and materials almost instantaneously. Using the list, centers have conducted informal research, taught each other how to establish new programs, and built a true virtual community.

Additional information about NAFCM is available at www.nafcm.org or by calling Erika Acerra, Membership and Program Manager, at (202) 667-9700 x224.

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