

**Workplace Resolutions
Personnel Cabinet
Office of Employee Relations
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Workplace Resolutions was established in May 2008. With the declining economy, no salary increases for several years, and retiring employees not being replaced, state employees were asking for some relief. Stress levels were at a peak, sometimes causing employees to get physically and emotionally sick and even to threaten violence. Mediation and employee assistance programs addressed part of the problem, but there was still a gap.

It was decided that selected mediators from the Kentucky Employee Mediation Program would go to worksites where the entire group of employees were in conflict or off-track. Each member of the group is encouraged to tell their perspective of the issues and offer solutions. At the end of the process, the mediators develop a list of concerns, observations, and recommendations.

We are not aware of any similar conflict resolution program in existence. The program is still evolving, but there has been positive response from the employees and managers who have used it. Through word of mouth and other advertising, more people are using this service. Workplace Resolutions is an inexpensive way to improve morale and reduce stress in an environment where resources are scarce and stress levels are high. Offering solutions to employees' problems allows them to be more satisfied and work more productively.

Workplace Resolutions

1. Provide a brief description of the program.

Workplace Resolutions is a service for a group of state employees who are in conflict.

During the resolution process, a team of mediators meets with each member of a conflicted group individually to listen to their concerns and develop recommendations for the group.

2. How long has the program been operational?

The first Workplace Resolutions session was conducted in May 2008.

3. Why was the program created?

The program was established after the Office of Employee Relations became aware that there was a gap in services. Our mediation and employee assistance programs addressed part of the problem, but employees and managers wanted more. Managers wanted recommendations and weren't getting them through our facilitative model of mediation.

Employees also wanted an alternative to one-on-one mediation when the entire group was affected by the conflict. It was decided that selected mediators would go to the worksite where our services were requested to help the group get back on track. Each member of the group is encouraged to tell his/her perspective and offer solutions. At the end of the process, the mediators develop a list of identified concerns, observations, and recommendations.

4. Why is the program new and creative?

The program is new and creative because only part of the problem was being addressed prior to this process. Some common characteristics of the groups in need are: Personality conflicts, power struggles, lack of teamwork, unclear or conflicting expectations, lack of trust, troubled employees, not enough staff, and need for additional training. Some of the suggested remedies have been: Illuminating agency liability, recommendations of classes offered by the Personnel Cabinet, sharing knowledge of available resources, and how to effectively correct behavior and get the best work from each employee. We also share information on available resources, such as when and how to refer to other agencies – to the employee assistance program or to the Office of Diversity, Equality and Training.

5. What was the start-up cost?

There were no start-up costs. The Kentucky Employee Mediation Program (KEMP) was already operational. The program manager identified mediators already in the pool who possessed the skill and judgment to provide this service. Training was provided by the mediation manager.

6. What are the operational costs?

The cost is minimal. The program is under an existing branch which already provides mediation. The mediation manager is the only paid employee. She trained the 27 part-time volunteer mediators who are Kentucky state government employees in various agencies. The Workplace Resolution process is conducted by selected volunteer mediators. The only cost is travel expenses when the sessions are conducted away from Frankfort.

7. How is the program funded?

The program is funded by general state operating funds.

8. Did this program originate in your state?

We have no knowledge of any similar program.

9. How do you measure the success of this program?

The success of the program is measured by the positive response from the participants who use it. The employees are pleased to have neutral people to listen to them and consider their suggestions. The managers are pleased to receive recommendations from knowledgeable mediators who can identify resources available to them and find solutions to problems. A two-month follow-up evaluation is sent to the participants.

While it is difficult to assess monetary gain of preventive services, we did get an estimate from the Personnel Board as to the average cost of an appeal that goes before the Board.

If conflict is not resolved prior to the hearing of an appeal, it can cost an average of \$6,500 dollars. This figure is based on average number of employees involved, average salary, average length of a hearing, travel expenses, and fee of the hearing officer.

Though it cannot be easily proven, we believe that resolving conflict at this level reduces employee turnover, and reduces the number of future formal complaints. The process gives each employee an opportunity to be heard and to be a part of the solution to their problems.

10. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

In the beginning, all participants were given a copy of the report. Later, it was determined that the report would go to the manager who requested the service. It can be distributed at their discretion.

The first year, four agencies used the service. Currently, at least twelve agencies use it. Some resolution sessions have had as many as forty participants.

The program is still evolving. Feedback is gathered from the mediators who conduct the workplace resolutions, and from the agencies who request the service. Forms have been developed. A regulation has been drafted. The program is being marketed to the state agencies through the website and presentations to various groups. Requests for the service continue to increase.