



UCSF OFFICE OF THE OMBUDS

Mediation Services

What is mediation?

Mediation is a confidential process in which two or more individuals who are part of the UCSF community voluntarily come together with an Ombuds to informally resolve a conflict or dispute, or to reach an understanding or agreement.

Why use mediation?

Generally, no one enjoys conflict – although it is a fact of life. The challenge for all of us is to find solutions to conflict and thus maintain a productive and satisfying workplace environment. Mediation helps address this challenge through a structured, off-the- record process that enables participants to discuss obstacles and improve patterns of communication.

The assistance of an impartial mediator also serves to relieve the burden and stress of conflict for those involved, which in turn is a first step in making it possible for the participants to develop their own self-determined solutions.

When should you consider mediation?

Consider mediation as early in the development of conflict as possible or even when conflict is longstanding. Mediation is an alternative to a formal resolution of a conflict or dispute. Everyone benefits when conflict can be resolved at the lowest level.

Situations which may benefit from mediation include:

- Two people in a reporting relationship who have different expectations for meeting the job requirements.
- A team member experiences a lack of respect or recognition for their contribution, including authorship, team-developed products, or input to the work environment.
- Two colleagues do everything differently, do not understand how the other way can work, and feel the tension escalating.
- An individual has concerns about how they are being treated by their manager or others.

How does mediation work?

Mediation involves two or more individuals (any member of the UCSF community or their work collaborators) who voluntarily come together with a neutral third-party to address a conflict or dispute by reaching an understanding or agreement. Mediation

participants sign a confidentiality agreement which protects all disclosures and communications related to the mediation.

- Mediation invites people to assess their opinions realistically and understand opposing perspectives. It provides an opportunity for productive communication and offers participants an excellent chance for reaching resolution on terms they determine and define.
- Ombuds are skilled in a structured process that helps people to listen and hear, and become active participants in finding acceptable outcomes.
- Mediation is not an adversarial process and does not focus on judgments of right and wrong. The mediator does not make a decision or offer an opinion on the merits of each person’s perspective, but ensures a fair process. The process relieves defensiveness and provides incentives for participants to find workable solutions.

Who has used mediation at UCSF and why?

Faculty, staff, students, administrators, and collaborators have used mediation with satisfying results, often changing a negative dynamic in one or two mediation sessions.

- Approximately one-third of mediations each involved: Staff; Managers and Supervisors; and Faculty. Mediation services have also been useful for Students and Trainees.
- Poor communication was a critical factor for most of those requesting mediation; perceived deficiencies in respect and treatment were the most cited visitor concerns.

How do you start mediation?

Any individual may confidentially call the Office of the Ombuds at any point in a conflict or difficult situation to discuss options. Individuals may call as an initial starting point when they are not sure what to do or may initiate a call on behalf of a group (e.g., a manager interested in a group facilitation or training). Setting an appointment does not commit you to any course of action or obligate you to engaging in mediation.

To make an appointment, please call us at (415) 502-9600 In order to protect confidentiality, the Office of the Ombuds prefers to conduct business in person, by Zoom, or by phone rather than e-mail, as electronic communications are not always private.

“The safety, rules and protection of mediation led to extremely useful disclosures that totally changed the misunderstanding.” (Staff member)

“I resolved most of the issues I was faced with. This is an extremely valuable service offered by UCSF.” (Faculty member)

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The University of California, San Francisco is committed to providing individuals with a safe, neutral process for the resolution of conflict. The Office of the Ombuds offers mediation and other services for conflict prevention and resolution.

For more information, please call the main line for the Office of the Ombuds at 415.502.9600