

**Workplace Resolutions
Personnel Cabinet
Office of Employee Relations
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Workplace Resolutions

With the declining economy, raises of only one percent for two years in a row, and retiring employees not being replaced, the Workplace Relations Branch of Kentucky Personnel Cabinet found that state employees were struggling. With stress at peak levels, some employees were physically, mentally and emotionally troubled; some to the point of threatening violence. Mediation and employee assistance addressed part of the problem, but still a gap existed.

Workplace Resolutions was created in May 2008 to fill this need, the result of thoughtful collaboration on the part of several managers in the Office of Employee Relations. It was decided that teams of specially selected mediators from the Kentucky Employee Mediation Program would visit worksites, at the request of a supervisor, where an entire group of employees were in conflict. Each person would be given the opportunity to share his/her perspective of the issues causing conflict, and offer solutions. At the end of this process, the mediation team would compile a list of concerns, observations, and recommendations for the conflicted work group.

Workplace Resolutions is still evolving, but there has been positive feedback from employees and managers who have utilized these services. This alternative offers an inexpensive opportunity to problem solve, improve morale, and reduce stress in an environment where resources are scarce and stress levels are high. Offering employees potential solutions to their problems allows for more engaged, more satisfied and more productive employees.

1. Provide a brief description of the program.

Workplace Resolutions is a service offered to a group of state employees who are in conflict. The process begins when a supervisor contacts Workplace Relations to request that a team of mediators visit their workplace to meet individually with each member of the troubled group. Each person is encouraged to share their perspective and offer solutions to the group's problems. The mediation team listens to their concerns and, at the end of the process, develops a list of identified concerns, observations and recommendations for the group. Presenting issues have included lack of teamwork, trust, and resources; personality conflicts; power struggles; unclear or conflicting expectations; excessive workload; and the need for additional training. Suggested remedies have consisted of illuminating agency liability, anti-harassment training, sharing knowledge of available resources, the use of progressive discipline, and knowing how and when to refer to the Kentucky Employee Assistance Program, the Office of Equality and Diversity, and Governmental Services Center.

2. How long has the program been operational?

The first Workplace Resolutions was conducted in May 2008.

3. Why was the program created?

The program was established after the Office of Employee Relations became aware that gaps existed in services being provided. Mediation and employee assistance provided some solutions, but employees and managers wanted more.

4. Why is the program new and creative?

Mediation addresses conflict between two employees. Kentucky Employee Assistance Program (KEAP) provides a variety of services to troubled employees including assessment, referral, follow-up, crisis intervention and grief response. In addition, managers may consult with KEAP professionals for guidance in dealing with difficult employees and workplace situations, and staff development training. This program is new and creative because prior to establishment of this service, only part of the problem was being addressed with existing programs.

5. What was the start-up cost?

There were no start-up costs. The Kentucky Employee Mediation Program (KEMP) was already operational. The Workplace Relations Branch 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. This program falls under an existing branch which includes mediation. The only paid employee, the branch manager, trained the 29 part-time volunteer mediators who are Kentucky state government employees in various Cabinets. The only cost to the program is mileage when the sessions are conducted away from Frankfort, and the cost of file folders. Paperwork, specific to this program, has been developed; this includes a Request for Workplace Visit and evaluation forms.

7. How is the program funded?

The program is funded through the Personnel Cabinet, general state operating funds.

8. Did this program originate in your state?

We are not aware any similar program elsewhere.

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

The success of this program is measured by the positive response from the participants who use it. Employees are receptive to the concept of having neutral people listen to them and consider their suggestions. Managers are receptive to recommendations from knowledgeable mediators who can identify available resources and help to find solutions to their problems. Participants are first asked to evaluate the process immediately following the session, and then again three-months later.

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

The program continues to evolve. Feed-back is gathered from the mediators who conduct the workplace resolutions, as well as from the agencies who request the service. The program is marketed to state agencies through the Office of Employee Relations website, advertising messages on paycheck stubs, presentations to various groups, and primarily, word of mouth. Demand for this service continues to increase.