

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF ORANGE

ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION (ADR)
INFORMATION PACKAGE

NOTICE TO PLAINTIFF(S) AND/OR CROSS-COMPLAINANT(S):

Rule 3.221(c) of the California Rules of Court requires you to serve a copy of the ADR Information Package along with the complaint and/or cross-complaint.

California Rules of Court – Rule 3.221
Information about Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

(a) Each court shall make available to the plaintiff, at the time of filing of the complaint, an ADR Information Package that includes, at a minimum, all of the following:

(1) General information about the potential advantages and disadvantages of ADR and descriptions of the principal ADR processes.

(2) Information about the ADR programs available in that court, including citations to any applicable local court rules and directions for contacting any court staff responsible for providing parties with assistance regarding ADR.

(3) Information about the availability of local dispute resolution programs funded under the Dispute Resolutions Program Act (DRPA), in counties that are participating in the DRPA. This information may take the form of a list of the applicable programs or directions for contacting the county's DRPA coordinator.

(4) An ADR stipulation form that parties may use to stipulate to the use of an ADR process.

(b) A court may make the ADR Information Package available on its website as long as paper copies are also made available in the clerk's office.

(c) The plaintiff must serve a copy of the ADR Information Package on each defendant along with the complaint. Cross-complainants must serve a copy of the ADR Information Package on any new parties to the action along with the cross-complaint.

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ADR Information

Introduction.

Most civil disputes are resolved without filing a lawsuit, and most civil lawsuits are resolved without a trial. The courts and others offer a variety of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) processes to help people resolve disputes without a trial. ADR is usually less formal, less expensive, and less time-consuming than a trial. ADR can also give people more opportunity to determine when and how their dispute will be resolved.

BENEFITS OF ADR.

Using ADR may have a variety of benefits, depending on the type of ADR process used and the circumstances of the particular case. Some potential benefits of ADR are summarized below.

Save Time. A dispute often can be settled or decided much sooner with ADR; often in a matter of months, even weeks, while bringing a lawsuit to trial can take a year or more.

Save Money. When cases are resolved earlier through ADR, the parties may save some of the money they would have spent on attorney fees, court costs, experts' fees, and other litigation expenses.

Increase Control Over the Process and the Outcome. In ADR, parties typically play a greater role in shaping both the process and its outcome. In most ADR processes, parties have more opportunity to tell their side of the story than they do at trial. Some ADR processes, such as mediation, allow the parties to fashion creative resolutions that are not available in a trial. Other ADR processes, such as arbitration, allow the parties to choose an expert in a particular field to decide the dispute.

Preserve Relationships. ADR can be a less adversarial and hostile way to resolve a dispute. For example, an experienced mediator can help the parties effectively communicate their needs and point of view to the other side. This can be an important advantage where the parties have a relationship to preserve.

Increase Satisfaction. In a trial, there is typically a winner and a loser. The loser is not likely to be happy, and even the winner may not be completely satisfied with the outcome. ADR can help the parties find win-win solutions and achieve their real goals. This, along with all of ADR's other potential advantages, may increase the parties' overall satisfaction with both the dispute resolution process and the outcome.

Improve Attorney-Client Relationships. Attorneys may also benefit from ADR by being seen as problem-solvers rather than combatants. Quick, cost-effective, and satisfying resolutions are likely to produce happier clients and thus generate repeat business from clients and referrals of their friends and associates.

DISADVANTAGES OF ADR.

ADR may not be suitable for every dispute.

Loss of protections. If ADR is binding, the parties normally give up most court protections, including a decision by a judge or jury under formal rules of evidence and procedure, and review for legal error by an appellate court.

Less discovery. There generally is less opportunity to find out about the other side's case with ADR than with litigation. ADR may not be effective if it takes place before the parties have sufficient information to resolve the dispute.

Additional costs. The neutral may charge a fee for his or her services. If a dispute is not resolved through ADR, the parties may have to put time and money into both ADR and a lawsuit.

Effect of delays if the dispute is not resolved. Lawsuits must be brought within specified periods of time, known as statutes of limitation. Parties must be careful not to let a statute of limitations run out while a dispute is in an ADR process.

TYPES OF ADR IN CIVIL CASES.

The most commonly used ADR processes are arbitration, mediation, neutral evaluation and settlement conferences.

Arbitration. In arbitration, a neutral person called an "arbitrator" hears arguments and evidence from each side and then decides the outcome of the dispute. Arbitration is less formal than a trial, and the rules of evidence are often relaxed. Arbitration may be either "binding" or "nonbinding." Binding arbitration means that the parties waive their right to a trial and agree to accept the arbitrator's decision as final. Generally, there is no right to appeal an arbitrator's decision. Nonbinding arbitration means that the parties are free to request a trial if they do not accept the arbitrator's decision.

Cases for Which Arbitration May Be Appropriate. Arbitration is best for cases where the parties want another person to decide the outcome of their dispute for them but would like to avoid the formality, time, and expense of a trial. It may also be appropriate for complex matters where the parties want a decision-maker who has training or experience in the subject matter of the dispute.

Cases for Which Arbitration May Not Be Appropriate. If parties want to retain control over how their dispute is resolved, arbitration, particularly binding arbitration, is not appropriate. In binding arbitration, the parties generally cannot appeal the arbitrator's award, even if it is not supported by the evidence or the law. Even in nonbinding arbitration, if a party requests a trial and does not receive a more favorable result at trial than in arbitration, there may be penalties.

Mediation. In mediation, an impartial person called a "mediator" helps the parties try to reach a mutually acceptable resolution of the dispute. The mediator does not decide the dispute but helps the parties communicate so they can try to settle the dispute themselves. Mediation leaves control of the outcome with the parties.

Cases for Which Mediation May Be Appropriate. Mediation may be particularly useful when parties have a relationship they want to preserve. So when family members, neighbors, or business partners have a dispute, mediation may be the ADR process to use. Mediation is also effective when emotions are getting in the way of resolution. An effective mediator can hear the parties out and help them communicate with each other in an effective and nondestructive manner.

Cases for Which Mediation May Not Be Appropriate. Mediation may not be effective if one of the parties is unwilling to cooperate or compromise. Mediation also may not be effective if one of the parties has a significant advantage in power over the other. Therefore, it may not be a good choice if the parties have a history of abuse or victimization.

Neutral Evaluation. In neutral evaluation, each party gets a chance to present the case to a neutral person called an "evaluator." The evaluator then gives an opinion on the strengths and weaknesses of each party's evidence and arguments and about how the dispute could be resolved. The evaluator is

often an expert in the subject matter of the dispute. Although the evaluator's opinion is not binding, the parties typically use it as a basis for trying to negotiate a resolution of the dispute.

Cases for Which Neutral Evaluation May Be Appropriate. Neutral evaluation may be most appropriate in cases in which there are technical issues that require special expertise to resolve or the only significant issue in the case is the amount of damages.

Cases for Which Neutral Evaluation May Not Be Appropriate. Neutral evaluation may not be appropriate when there are significant personal or emotional barriers to resolving the dispute.

Settlement Conferences. Settlement conferences may be either mandatory or voluntary. In both types of settlement conferences, the parties and their attorneys meet with a judge or a neutral person called a "settlement officer" to discuss possible settlement of their dispute. The judge or settlement officer does not make a decision in the case but assists the parties in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the case and in negotiating a settlement. Settlement conferences are appropriate in any case where settlement is an option. Mandatory settlement conferences are often held close to the date a case is set for trial.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION.

In addition to mediation, arbitration, neutral evaluation, and settlement conferences, there are other types of ADR, including conciliation, fact finding, mini-trials, and summary jury trials. Sometimes parties will try a combination of ADR types. The important thing is to try to find the type or types of ADR that are most likely to resolve your dispute.

To locate a dispute resolution program or neutral in your community:

- Contact the California Department of Consumer Affairs, Consumer Information Center, toll free, at 1-800-852-5210
- Contact the Orange County Bar Association at (949) 440-6700
- Look in the telephone directories under "Arbitrators" or "Mediators"

Low cost mediation services are provided under the Orange County Dispute Resolution Program Act (DRPA). For information regarding DRPA, contact:

- OC Human Relations (714) 480-6575, mediator@ochumanrelations.org
- Waymakers (949) 250-4058

For information on the Superior Court of California, County of Orange court ordered arbitration program, refer to Local Rule 360.

The Orange County Superior Court offers programs for Civil Mediation and Early Neutral Evaluation (ENE). For the Civil Mediation program, mediators on the Court's panel have agreed to accept a fee of \$300 for up to the first two hours of a mediation session. For the ENE program, members of the Court's panel have agreed to accept a fee of \$300 for up to three hours of an ENE session. Additional information on the Orange County Superior Court Civil Mediation and Early Neutral Evaluation (ENE) programs is available on the Court's website at www.occourts.org.

