

SEEDS

Community Resolution Center

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is SEEDS CRC?

SEEDS CRC is a non-profit, community-based mediation program created by the union of Berkeley Dispute Resolution Service, Conciliation Forums of Oakland and Mediation Services which have provided people access to mediation and other conflict resolution services since 1983.

What services specifically does SEEDS CRC offer?

Counseling on options and approaches to resolving a dispute, mediation, large-group conflict facilitation, conflict resolution skills workshops. SEEDS CRC cannot and does not offer legal advice nor can we advocate on anyone's behalf. We do make referrals to appropriate agencies and legal resources.

Who provides these services?

100+ volunteers from all walks of life in the community are extensively trained in mediation and conflict resolution skills and give their time to help others in conflict. Some of our volunteers work in our office counseling with clients and exploring whether people involved in a dispute are willing to participate in a mediation. When a mediation is scheduled, other volunteers work in teams of 2-3 to assist the disputants in communicating their needs and interests and engage them in problem-solving and development of agreements.

Who does SEEDS CRC serve?

SEEDS CRC generally serves anyone involved in a conflict who lives, works or goes to school in the communities of Oakland, Berkeley, Alameda, Albany Piedmont, Emeryville, Hayward, Castro Valley and Fremont. We also occasionally serve residents of El Cerrito, Kensington and San Leandro. There are programs similar to SEEDS CRC in other communities that serve those specific areas.

What types of conflicts does SEEDS CRC mediate?

SEEDS CRC handles a wide range of community conflicts including, but not limited to: neighbor issues such as noise, pets, parking, property lines, trees; landlord-tenant issues such as repairs, deposits, maintenance of the property; family/relationship issues such as custody, visitation, chores, money; small business and partnership dispute, roommates, workplace, and many more. SEEDS CRC does not handle domestic violence cases or cases involving significant levels of violent or criminal behavior.

How much do these services cost?

Standard Panel Mediation:

Initial counseling and consultation is free. If we schedule a mediation, we ask each "party" to contribute \$50 toward a 2-3 hour mediation session. A "party" can be one or more people with the same interest or perspective in the conflict. This \$50 fee is sliding scale – no one is turned away for inability to pay.

Tree-view Cases:

Initial phone consultation is free. We generally offer site visits for tree cases where we ask the initiating party to pay \$50 sliding scale for a site visit. If the case goes to mediation, we charge a \$100 sliding scale fee for the mediation, generally paid by the initiating party per Berkeley ordinance, unless there is an agreement otherwise.

Business/Real Estate:

Initial counseling and consultation is free. If we schedule a mediation, we ask each "party" to contribute \$100 sliding scale toward a 2-3 hour mediation session. A "party" can be one or more people with the same interest or perspective in the conflict.

Large, complex, multi-party, multi-issue Facilitation:

Certain kinds of conflicts require more intensive intervention. For this kind of case we would charge \$50-\$150 per hour sliding scale. Most non-profit and community groups would likely be charged the \$50/hr. rate sliding scale. We

do take on some of these more complex cases pro bono depending on the case, time commitment, and the interest and availability of our volunteers.

If I have a dispute, how do I initiate the mediation process?

Usually one person contacts SEEDS CRC to discuss their dispute with a volunteer case manager. Together they assess whether mediation is appropriate and if they want to move forward. SEEDS CRC is willing to make contact by phone or letter with the other people involved in the conflict to see if they are willing to mediate. If they agree, we schedule a mediation session – if they do not, our involvement ends because our process is entirely voluntary. However, we are still willing to help parties explore their other options.

How long does a mediation session last? How soon can they be scheduled? Where do they take place?

Most mediation sessions last 2-3 hours. Additional sessions can be scheduled if the parties feel that the process is helpful and they need more time to work through the dispute. Mediations can be scheduled 7-10 days from the time all the parties have agreed to mediate. We are generally unable to schedule mediation sessions in less than 7 days. Mediations are scheduled at a time when all the parties are available. Most mediation sessions take place in the evenings, weekends and sometimes daytime hours. A typical mediation would start at 7:00 pm and end at 9:30 pm on a weeknight. Most mediations take place at the SEEDS CRC offices in Berkeley or Oakland.

Do disputants have an option to choose the mediators who will work with them?

No, parties are not given a choice of mediators at SEEDS CRC. The mediation team is selected by the SEEDS CRC office staff based on a number of criteria including background, mediation style, level of experience, and availability. We often make a strong effort to have the mediation panel reflect the demographics of the disputants whenever possible. We do make sure that the mediators do not have any direct involvement with any of the parties to a dispute nor any stake in the outcome.

Other questions often asked about SEEDS CRC:

Where do SEEDS CRC referrals come from?

Clients are referred by agencies, city departments, police departments, word of mouth, people who have used SEEDS CRC services before, media coverage and other publicity, presentations and outreach events.

How is SEEDS CRC funded?

SEEDS CRC receives funding from the County of Alameda (% of court filing fees), City of Berkeley, County Probation Department, private foundations such as the East Bay Community Foundation and the Berkeley Community Fund, fees for services rendered, and private donations by individuals and businesses.

What is SEEDS CRC's structural organization?

SEEDS CRC is governed by a 12 member volunteer Board of Directors. We have seven paid staff members, 5-10 volunteer office staff who generally work in 3-4 hour shifts once each week, and 100+ volunteers who are on call to provide the core of SEEDS CRC's mediation, facilitation and training services.

Are there employment opportunities at SEEDS CRC?

Currently, the only paid position at SEEDS CRC is summer internships for teens of high school-age. Our core staff positions do become available from time to time; however, turnover at SEEDS CRC tends to be quite low. Other positions might be created for specific programs in the future depending on grant funding. However, a good number of our volunteers have secured paid positions elsewhere in the mediation field (and many other occupations) as a direct result of their volunteer work and experience with SEEDS CRC.

Training opportunities through SEEDS CRC:

Tips Workshops:

SEEDS CRC occasionally offers 3-hour workshops on fundamental communication and conflict resolution skills open to all community members free of cost.

Volunteer Mediation Training:

We also offer 30-hour intensive mediation workshops for people interested in volunteering as a mediator with SEEDS CRC. The workshops are offered very infrequently – usually less than once a year. These workshops are free to people making a volunteer commitment of one year or more to SEEDS CRC.

Customized Training:

SEEDS CRC also is available to provide communication, conflict resolution and mediation training to businesses; non-profits, and government agencies. These tailored workshops can be 1-4 days in length. Fees are competitive with market rates. Revenue from these workshops is used to support our ongoing programs.