

ABA Receives Court ADR Grant

Established by William and Flora Hewlett, along with their son Walter Hewlett, The Hewlett Foundation's broad purpose is to promote the well-being of humanity through support of organizations and institutions engaged in the areas such as conflict resolution and education. This year, the American Bar Association Dispute Resolution Section received a three-year grant from The Hewlett Foundation that will focus on improving court dispute resolution systems. The quality of communication among court dispute resolution systems will be enhanced through the implementation of user-friendly databases that will provide access to a variety of ADR materials and developments.

The projects highlighted in the grant proposal that will take center stage include a clearinghouse that will contain a catalog of ADR points of contacts and various ADR programs available within the court system. The clearinghouse, while housed on the Section's website, will contain links to other sources of information, such as the National Center for State Courts (www.ncsonline.org), the Policy Consensus Initiative (www.policyconsensus.org), and the Federal Judicial Center (www.fjc.gov), with a push for virtual connectivity which would ensure that links between the sites of different organizations, associations, and courts are rational and helpful to the user.

Also, in an effort to open the field of ADR, a Court ADR list-serve along with the Court ADR mini-conferences will allow court administrators and other neutrals an opportunity to communicate within the court ADR community and be apprised of upcoming events, new resources, and current issues. In addition, the establishment of a court mentor program will allow new court programs to develop a mentoring relationship with established court programs. By linking experienced court administrators within a locality to those seeking information, Mentor programs can help address questions/concerns such as how to deal with resource limitations, potential location of new programs, and ADR policy and procedural issues.

Other web-based tools that will be available to judges, lawyers, community mediators, and others interested in ADR will include sample informational booklets and brochures, a guide to ADR processes, summaries of model programs from court dispute resolution programs, funding models, and a template of uniform data for state and local courts. These resources will serve as an example for those wishing to create, modify, or collect information for their own programs. The Section is also working with national organizations to provide the dispute resolution community members the ability to consult publications and papers on issues such as qualifications, case management, and ethics through a web-based distribution of papers created for state and local programs. An example of such collaborations include pulling resources with the National Association for Community Mediation to create a catalog that will provide information on existing partnerships between court and community programs; such as their characteristics, types of cases handled, revenue sources, and mediators.

The Dispute Resolution Section has identified the need that education and support from professionals within the legal community such as judges, attorneys, and local bar associations is an essential component for success of court ADR programs. The section will also focus efforts

on seeking support and advice from judges who are proponents of court ADR and from those who are resistant to dispute resolution programs. It will support those who are seeking information and taking action towards connecting court staff and local members of bars with their community mediation programs to develop a system where disputes are brought to community mediation programs before they are filed as cases.

The grant projects will involve a range of committees including the Court-Annexed Committee, the Education Committee, and the new Board of the Section's Resource Center for Dispute Resolution. The goal of the projects will be to strengthen the partnerships between the court and community mediation programs, provide networking and increase resource and educational opportunities for court programs as well as court administrators, judges, neutrals, and the Bar.