

# Mississippi Gulf Coast Federal Mediation Coalition Business Plan

## Executive Summary

The Mississippi Gulf Coast Federal Mediation Coalition is currently composed of four federal agencies who agreed to joined forces in 1998 to make Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) available to employees to resolve workplace conflicts. The shared neutral process has proven to be beneficial by affording employees the option to select trained mediators outside of his/her agency to resolve disputes.

In 1997 several employees of the VA Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System attended training on mediation, an ADR technique. This group consisted of the Labor Relation Specialist, EEO Program Manager, and the two union presidents. Each of these individuals soon realized the benefit of having such a method available for all employees. It was known that federal agencies spent millions of dollars embattled in such disputes as grievances, EEO complaints, FLRA decisions, etc. and that disputes and controversies can become costly in terms of time, money, efficiency, and personnel conflicts, if they are left to run their course with little or no attempt at early resolutions. This trend worsened each year. As a result of this training, a vision was born to develop a program whereby all employees would be educated on mediation in an effort to decrease cost, shorten the dispute resolution process, and directly involve disputing employees in the resolution process.

To that end, a co-mediation process was adopted. Invitations were extended to several surrounding federal agencies to participate in mediation training in January 1998. Four federal agencies accepted the invitation, which included the Navy Construction Battalion Center, U. S. Forest Service, Naval Oceanographic Center, Keesler Air Force Base, and the VA Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System. Upon completion of the training, each participant received a VA certificate of completion and were then qualified to co-mediate disputes. The Mississippi Gulf Coast Federal Mediation Coalition was born as an outgrowth from the initial training. Since June 1998, the members have conducted mediations at all of the participating agencies.

## **Vision/Mission Statement**

The Mississippi Gulf Coast Federal Mediation Coalition is committed to promoting unity, integrity and fairness; maintaining a positive image of federal employees; and for the improvement of government service specifically to it employees. To achieve this goal, the Coalition is committed to assisting employees in resolving workplace disputes as soon as possible and at the lowest level.

The mission is to promote the general well being of all federal employees through early intervention in resolving differences through mediation by trained mediators. Participating agencies grant authorization to those employees trained in mediation to assist other facilities in mediation. The purpose of the inter-service mediation is to focus on issues through the use of unbiased intervention by trained mediators and, at the same time, maintain the anonymity, privacy and confidentiality of the employees involved. The coalition offers unbiased mediation under a prescribed method to be adhered to by the members. Members operate under a code of ethics that is not unlike the doctor/patient relationship. Confidentiality is paramount to perform the service intended through this medium.

## **Coalition Overview**

The Mississippi Gulf Coast Federal Mediation Coalition is comprised of 30 members who meet monthly. The Board of Officers consists of President, Vice President, and Secretary/Treasurer and members designated as Points-of-Contact. Despite limited operating funds, this coalition has been successful in mediating complaints that has resulted in potential savings for each agency.

## **Product/Service**

Mediation sessions that are conducted by the Mississippi Gulf Coast Federal Mediation Coalition affords unbiased interventions that have been successful in resolving some extremely complex disputes since its inception.

## **Market Analysis**

There are currently twenty-one (21) federal agencies on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Several of these agencies were invited to the initial ADR/mediation training, however, only six agencies accepted the invitation. Hence, there are other federal agencies that may benefit from participating in this coalition.

Since the Coalition was organized, Alternative Dispute Resolution is now mandated for all federal agencies and while, most agencies have some type of ADR, mediation has proven to be the most cost effective. The use of local shared neutrals has proven to be even more advantageous.

## **Marketing Plan**

It the goal of the coalition to increase the number of agencies. This would be accomplished through endorsement of the Mississippi Coast Association of Federal Administrators (MCAFA) in that it is comprised of federal agency administrators. In our efforts to increase the number of federal agencies, the coalition will meet with the agency leaders and make a presentation about the coalition. These leaders will be given an overview of the steps in the mediation process and the benefit of utilizing mediators within the coalition.

Additionally, the coalition has developed a mediation training program that will be available to educate employees among the participating agencies. The training material includes a Power Point presentation, transparencies, handouts, brochures, and storyboards. A video of a mock mediation is also being developed. Members of the coalition will be available to conduct this training upon request.

Prospective mediators from each agency will be trained regarding the co-mediation process. As a result of this joint venture, interagency loan of mediators will be available to employees of each participating agency.

## **Financial Plan**

It is expected that each agency will either sponsor mediation training or contribute funds to the training of their mediators. With each agency sharing the expense, a pool of well-trained mediators will be available.

## **Conclusion**

The Mississippi Gulf Coast Federal Mediation Coalition is a viable vehicle that will assist in reducing the cost of resolving disputes within participating agencies.

Tremendous savings through cost avoidance have been realized since the coalition was organized in 1998. Cost savings statistics as well as appraisals by the users of the process are available. The coalition can assist each agency in reaping similar rewards that agencies in the coalition and many agencies, both nationally and internationally, are now enjoying.

## PREAMBLE

For the purposes of promoting unity, integrity and fairness; maintaining a positive image of federal employees; and for the improvement of government service specifically to its employees, we as members of the Mississippi Gulf Coast Federal Mediation Coalition adopt this Constitution and By-laws.

## ARTICLE 1

### NAME AND LOCATION

1. The organization shall be known as the MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST FEDERAL MEDIATION COALITION. It will be composed of employees of participating federal agencies in South Mississippi and surrounding areas.
2. Headquarters will be located on the Mississippi Coast. Participating agencies will sponsor the Coalition and will cooperate and support the attendance of employees participating in mediation and Coalition meetings.

## ARTICLE 2

### MISSION AND GOAL

1. The mission will be to promote the general well being of all federal employees through early intervention in resolving differences through mediation by trained mediators. Participating agencies will authorize those employees trained in mediation to assist other facilities in mediation. The purpose of the inter-service mediation is to focus on issues through the use of unbiased intervention by trained mediators and at the same time maintain the anonymity, privacy and confidentiality of the employees involved.
2. It will offer unbiased mediation under a prescribed method to be adhered to by all members. Members will operate under a code of ethics that is not unlike the doctor/patient relationship. Confidentiality is paramount to perform the service intended through this medium.
3. The Coalition will support and promote, through cooperative efforts, the goals of similar/other groups such as Mississippi Coast Association of Federal Agencies (MCAFA), the integrity and image of federal employees.

## ARTICLE 3

### MEMBERSHIP

1. Membership will consist of those federal employees who have had structured training in mediation and are employed by participating federal agencies in South Mississippi and the surrounding areas where connected with agencies in covered area.
2. Any federal employee is authorized to be a member of the Coalition provided they have completed a prescribed course of training and is sponsored by participating agencies and labor organizations.
3. The Coalition will craft and adopt a plan for continuing education in the mediation process.

## CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS

### ARTICLE 1

#### OFFICERS

1. The Board of Officers will consist of a President, Vice President, Secretary/Treasurer, and members designated as Points-of-Contact (POCs) from participating agencies and labor organizations.
2. The Board, as a minimum, will meet at least once a month unless determined differently by the membership. Time and place may be determined by those attending the meeting.

### ARTICLE 2

#### TERM OF OFFICE

1. The officers will be elected to serve not less than four years to ensure continuity. Elections will be held when one or more agencies' representatives make a motion to replace one or all of the officers.

### ARTICLE 3

#### MEETINGS

1. All meetings will be open to members should they desire to attend with full voting privileges. Each agency will be entitled to one vote for adoption.

2. Business conducted in a called special meeting will be referred back to the full committee at next regular or called meeting for approval. The agenda will provide a guide to topics covered but will not be limited to the items listed.
3. Roberts rule of order will be adhered to in conducting a meeting. A quorum consisting of the coalition's officers (President and/or Vice President and Secretary/Treasurer), and at least one representative from each Federal agency (with the exception of agencies that are located in excess of 100 miles from the meeting place) will determine the method of accepting/approving for adoption of and business before the committee.

### OATH OF INTEGRITY

I, \_\_\_\_\_, of my own free will and accord, do hereby solemnly promise and pledge my honor and integrity that I will protect the confidentiality and anonymity of anyone involved in any mediation or similar exercise conducted by this Coalition. I understand that I am duty bound to report anything or anyone that presents a physical threat to an individual or group.