

Overview of CCR's Volunteer Equity Project

CCR's Mediator Mentorship Program (MMP) is an intensive training program for onboarding new volunteer mediators. Upon certification, participants are expected to mediate 1-2 times per month for 18 months, serving over 15,000 clients annually.

Over the last 15+ years, changes and tinkering with the formula have been implemented, but in recent years, it has become clear these efforts were not as effective as we would hope. While CCR's mediator roster has been diverse in many ways, it still does not fully represent the diversity of the communities that CCR serves.

To address this, in 2024 CCR engaged a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) partner – inQUEST Consulting – to conduct an equity audit of the MMP. The result revealed a few standout barriers within MMP that hindered effective building of a diverse mediator roster. They also offered a set of recommendations to address those barriers.

Barriers that were identified included:

- 1) Overall Mindset

- a. Centering "equality" rather than "equity." Equality means giving all candidates the same resources or opportunities, whereas equity recognizes structural barriers to accessing the program and thus aims to meet individuals' specific circumstances.

- 2) Time and Cost

- a. Meeting prerequisites to enter the program are expensive (approx. \$2500 in training cost) and time consuming (40hr. skills training, followed by 3 months of mentorship). While need-based scholarships and payment plans are available, the time and cost commitments involved with the program were found to be a significant hinderance to younger applicants and those with fewer resources.

- 3) Application Form

- a. Previously, admittance was heavily based on a written application which was found to be time-consuming both for applicants completing the forms and for screeners reviewing them. The consulting partners noted that use of a writing-intensive application may also be biased toward native English-speaking applicants. Additionally, using application essays creates the potential for bias toward those whose written communication styles match the preferences of individual application reviewers.

- 4) Screening Process

- a. Volunteers participating in the screening process reported a lack of clarity around interview protocol and evaluation rubric, which resulted in considerable variation

in scoring. Interviews previously were conducted one-on-one, meaning each screener was solely responsible for assessing, advocating for, or declining their individual applicants. This provided a significant chance for personal bias to be introduced. The consulting partner also noted that existing criteria were all given equal importance to produce an average score, which flattened applicants' experiences and prevented CCR from adequately gauging their distinct skillsets.

To address the above barriers to the program, CCR staff worked with inQUEST to implement major changes to the MMP. A three-phase approach was recommended that involved building alignment within CCR, revamping the MMP application and selection process, and training staff and volunteers on implementing the new process.

Building Alignment (Phase 1)

First, CCR leadership engaged staff and volunteers in a series of workshops and meetings co-facilitated by the auditors. Participants collaborated to define what each element of DEI means at CCR, identify the skills needed to become a successful CCR mediator and rank those skills in order of importance.

Revamping the MMP (Phase 2)

Next, CCR staff began rebuilding the recruiting and screening processes in two significant ways. First, the previous written application was replaced in favor of a simple volunteer submission form that asked for intentionally specific information like demographics, experience/skills and time availability. The new submission form takes approximately 10 minutes to complete and stays on file for 3 years, so that applicants do not have to resubmit application materials should they not be matched the first time they apply.

CCR staff and volunteers also determined the criteria most relevant to succeeding as a CCR mediator and broke down those criteria into a set of defined behavior-based skills. This became the basis for "Matching Events" which replaced the traditional interview. Applicants were invited to participate in a 90-minute Zoom event comprised of multiple "stations," in which two "Station Runners" used various activities and questions to assess applicants on the criteria mentioned above and provide this feedback to a diverse selection group comprised of CCR staff. This group could account for areas where CCR had specific needs for representation and prioritize those needs within the group that demonstrated the highest level of criteria match .

Training (Phase 3)

Finally, CCR and inQUEST trained a select group of staff members and volunteers on the new approaches they would implement. Participants were educated on and practiced assessing the

types of behaviors and responses that indicated positive alignment with criteria prior to running the Matching Event.

All of this work culminated in the first ever set of Matching Events, which took place during Spring 2025. Of 24 total applicants, 9 were selected including a mix of candidates with a cross section of age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, etc.

As of the date of publishing, all 9 candidates have certified and successfully begun volunteering as mediators.

While it is too early to have long-term conclusions drawn from the changes we've implemented, we have already received lots of positive and constructive feedback on the new process from both the staff and volunteers implementing the new process as well as the candidates going through the process. For a more detailed analysis of the short-term impacts of this project, please see the Resolution Systems Institute program guide and evaluation ([click here for full report](#)). CCR anticipates utilizing lessons learned from the first set of matching events to inform future events and looks forward continuing to improve efforts to build a truly representative community mediation center!