

Intermunicipal Dispute Resolution Initiative

Resolving Issues Together

Disputes are a municipal fact of life. For more than a decade, the Municipal Dispute Resolution Services *Let's Resolve* program has helped municipalities find a more collaborative way to build successful resolutions, even in situations that seemed impossible to move forward on.

The Intermunicipal Dispute Resolution Initiative is a voluntary program that encourages the use of mediation or other dispute resolution alternatives to resolve an issue without resorting to an outside authority. It can save time, energy and money, and can avoid unnecessary legal proceedings

The Initiative assists municipalities reach agreement with a neighbour or regional authority on these types of issues:

- annexation disputes
- land use planning issues
- cost sharing agreements
- provision of regional services

Municipal Dispute Resolution Services

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How can mediation help?

The Intermunicipal Dispute Resolution Initiative helps municipalities resolve disputes through the collaborative process of mediation.

Mediation relies on a neutral third party to help individuals or groups work out a solution they can both agree on. Mediation works best when municipalities agree to be flexible in looking at a range of options, and where there will be an ongoing relationship between the parties.

The mediator assists by keeping the discussions on track and guiding the process. This leaves the parties free to create ideas and evaluate solutions that work for everyone. Mediation creates a safe environment where issues can be dealt with in a way that is respectful and most conducive to consensus.

If honouring existing relationships and building better processes is important to you, then mediation can be a powerful process to help solve your conflicts.

What does the service provide?

The Municipal Dispute Resolution Services team works with municipalities to:

- Determine the best way to resolve a dispute
- Ensure prerequisites are met to begin the process
- Select a mediator from a list of qualified professionals
- Access funding to cover a portion of costs
- Design dispute resolution training programs

What are the benefits of mediation?

Local resolution for local issues: those most impacted by the agreement build the solution, so this reduces tension and improves harmony between neighbours.

Clarifying complicated issues: mediation sorts and prioritizes complicated concepts and breaks them into manageable pieces.

Impartial process manager: mediators understand what motivates people to come to resolution, and are skilled at managing emotions during negotiation.

Flexibility fosters creative solutions: the group reviews new issues that arise, and determine together whether to integrate them into the discussions; this opens the door to better innovation.

Building positive relationships: when people go beyond personalities to come up with a “win-win” solution, it establishes more trusting relationships.

Agreement durability: when solutions are built through consensus, there is better buy-in.

Improved workplace productivity: less conflict and better communication in the workplace promotes more effective interaction between people.

What should I know about mediation?

How much will mediation cost?

Rates charged by mediators vary according to training and experience, but are generally \$150 to \$200 per hour, plus expenses (location may impact costs). Some communities provide well-trained volunteer mediators. Generally, mediation is less expensive than traditional legal avenues.

Who pays for mediation?

Costs are normally shared equally among the parties involved. Under the Intermunicipal Dispute Resolution Initiative, grants are available to fund a portion of the cost associated with mediation.

How do I start the process?

The service can be used any time, not just when disputes become challenging or the Municipal Government Board requires mediation. To begin, one party contacts Alberta Municipal Affairs to see if the dispute is best resolved through mediation. If it is, a written request is submitted to the department for financial assistance to retain a mediator.

Where do I find a mediator?

Alberta Municipal Affairs maintains a roster of private sector mediators. It can be found at: <http://municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/1495.cfm>

MDRS has developed the roster with the assistance of representatives from the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, the Local Government Administration Association, the Alberta Rural Municipal Administrators' Association, and the Alberta Arbitration and Mediation Society.