

A Guide for Enhancing Mediator Roster Equity from Concept to Implementation



RSI





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Introduction

This guide provides community mediation centers (CMCs) with information and resources for enhancing the diversity of their volunteer mediator rosters. It is the product of the knowledge and experience of leadership, staff and volunteers at the Center for Conflict Resolution (CCR), who recently implemented an equity audit of their Mediator Mentorship Program (MMP) and received grant support from the American Arbitration Association–International Centre for Dispute Resolution (AAA-ICDR) Foundation to help them carry out recommendations from the audit. Our goal for this guide is to enable CMCs to learn from CCR’s experience in: identifying barriers to equity in their program; making changes to address those barriers, particularly in application and screening processes; and building alignment among staff about equity goals.

In early 2023, CCR engaged a diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) partner, inQUEST Consulting, to conduct an equity audit of the MMP to understand what was preventing the organization’s volunteer mediator pool from fully reflecting the diversity of the communities it serves. The consulting partners uncovered a number of barriers related to mindset, time and cost, and application materials and processes.¹ They also recommended a set of changes to the program to address these barriers.

At RSI, we recognize that CMCs have distinct needs based on the structure of their programs and the communities they serve. This guide contains a set of six overarching changes designed to be broad enough to take into account the array of processes CMCs have. We include examples of the approaches CCR staff and volunteers took and lessons they learned in the process, including: what was most effective, what was less effective and what they recommend others do.

Based on CCR’s efforts, we describe how to do the following to enhance your program’s ability to recruit a more diverse group of volunteer mediators:

- **Build alignment among program staff and current volunteers** about your organization’s equity goals and shift the mindset of your approaches
- **Add flexibility to program processes** to accommodate individuals from different backgrounds without sacrificing rigor

¹ The consulting partners reviewed CCR’s processes and materials and surveyed CCR staff, volunteers and applicants to the MMP.

- **Streamline the application process** for more efficient use of applicants' and screeners' time and easier access for applicants
- **Retool screening materials** to collect more accurate and relevant information about applicants
- **Create more effective and relevant screening processes** to gauge applicants' distinct skills and potential to be a mediator
- **Develop an outreach strategy** to communicate changes to new audiences

The recommendations contained in this guide are based on approaches taken by CCR in implementing an equity audit; insights from RSI's evaluation of CCR's implementation project, for which we reviewed audit materials and surveyed and interviewed CCR leadership; and feedback from staff and volunteers who worked on the project during its various phases. We cannot guarantee that each recommendation will be relevant to all CMCs. Thus, we also recommend working with an equity expert to identify barriers specific to your program and processes.



Conceptualize Your Equity Project

A project to enhance equity in your mediator selection process requires a lot of upfront planning. You need to know exactly what you are seeking to do and the resources and time required to meet your goals.

Determine your goals and who should be involved

Once you have decided that you want to improve the diversity of your mediator roster, the first step is to figure out your goals. Ask yourself: What type of diversity are you seeking? Why are you seeking that diversity? How will that benefit your organization and the community you serve? These questions can guide you in determining the next steps.

You also will want to determine who should be involved in the process, as well as who needs to be on board with the changes and the possible shifts in mindset. This may include staff, volunteers, board members and/or community members. They can be involved for the entire process or individual parts. Finally, consider what existing staff capacities you can integrate into the project, such as: outreach, assessment, research, DEI-related knowledge, staff facilitation and training.



CCR's Approach: Benefits of Working with a Consulting Partner

CCR leadership began the process by engaging a DEI partner, inQUEST Consulting, to conduct an equity audit of the MMP. The impetus for working with a provider was to obtain expert help, provide structure and carve out time for the project.

CCR considered a number of providers. Board members emphasized that it is important to thoroughly vet providers to determine whether they are aligned with your organization and its goals. This process will require you to build consensus around the notion that this is important work. And having a provider that understands the work you do and how to best apply their expertise to enhance that work is critical. A provider can also help you to uncover underlying assumptions that may be preventing you from reaching your goals. For CCR, it was also important that a provider share a vision to establish concrete action steps for CCR staff to take in order to give structure to the process and meaningfully drive it forward.



CCR's Approach: Finding a Consulting Partner and Questions to Ask

You may find a provider within your networks; the provider that CCR selected had staff members who had previously worked at CCR. CCR was also already working with the provider in a different capacity prior to this project. Having an established relationship saved CCR time, in that its staff did not have to provide as much explanation as they would have with a new provider. CCR also benefited from the participation of members of the audit team who did not have any experience with CCR or community mediation and therefore brought a fresh perspective to these issues.

When approaching providers about the type of audit you would like for them to conduct, it will help to have some overarching questions that you want answered. CCR's consulting partners helped them to answer these questions: What are the blind spots and biases in our processes? What assumptions are we making? What actions can we take to address these issues?

One of the benefits of working with an external provider is that they can facilitate surveys and focus groups to gather anonymized feedback from staff about current issues. Staff are more likely to be candid when responding to an external group than to assessments created internally.



Quick Takeaways

- A DEI partner is a helpful outside source for identifying biases and assumptions that may be barring your organization's progress toward diversity.
- A DEI partner can also collect anonymized feedback from staff and volunteers, allowing them to speak openly.
- You should select a DEI partner that aligns with your organization and your goals.
- You should consider finding a provider through your existing networks.
- Vet your provider thoroughly. Select one who aligns with your vision, understands your work and can provide a fresh perspective to push you forward.



CCR's Approach: Three-Phase Collaboration Among Program Staff, Volunteers and Board Members

Once the equity audit was completed, CCR and inQUEST organized a three-phase process to implement recommended solutions for issues uncovered. Each phase included the participation of individuals from different parts of the program working together on specific tasks. These included staff members, volunteers and board members. In taking this approach, CCR was able to ensure that each part of the program was represented by its various stakeholders. It also allowed participants to build trust in one another and confidence in the changes they were making to the program.

Phase 1 (Building Alignment)

CCR leadership engaged a mix of staff, volunteers and board members to participate in a series of workshops and meetings co-facilitated by the consulting partners.

- **Project tasks:** Explore barriers identified in the audit report; define each element of DEI at CCR; identify skills needed to be a successful CCR mediator; establish desired equity outcomes; reflect on the program process; and craft tools to introduce flexibility to program processes.
- **Project meetings:** Engage staff and volunteers with four strategy sessions facilitated by the consulting partners.
 - Strategy Session 1: Provide an overview of DEI, define DEI elements; share findings from the audit; break out into small groups to discuss the audit findings
 - Strategy Session 2: Draft a mission statement for DEI; clarify definitions of DEI elements; break out into small groups to discuss definitions
 - Strategy Session 3: Finalize the mission statement and definitions; discuss assumptions and barriers; break out into small groups to discuss potential outcomes
 - Strategy Session 4: Determine applicant criteria; break out into small groups to discuss the criteria; plan next steps
- **Staff updates:** Facilitate an informational session to share project information, gather input and answer questions from staff, whether or not they were able to participate in project tasks. Record the session to circulate to staff unable to attend live.

Phase 2 (Revamping the MMP)

CCR staff and volunteers began rebuilding the application and screening processes in a series of meetings.



- **Project tasks:** Develop a screening rubric based on the newly defined criteria; create tools to collect demographic data; establish a new interest form to replace written application; and craft a Matching Event format and activities.
- **Project meetings:** Hold internal CCR meetings to create new processes; conduct continuous work on shared Google Sheets and Forms.

Phase 3 (Training and Outreach)

CCR organized a set of training sessions to prepare staff and volunteers to use the new processes. They also tasked the Marketing and Outreach Committee to expand outreach to new community organizations about the revamped MMP.

- **Project tasks:** Train staff and volunteers on new DEI concepts and applicant screening criteria; hold Matching Event orientation to train facilitators to run the event; practice new assessment activities; increase capacity for outreach; and form new partnerships with community groups and individuals.
- **Project meetings:** Hold a training session (facilitated by consulting partners) and Matching Event orientation.
 - Training session: Review audit findings, definitions and criteria established during Phase 1's building alignment process; create new language and processes for screening applicants
 - Matching Event orientation: Prepare staff and volunteers to facilitate the new interview process; discuss activity components and questions; review the new rubric used to assess applicants

Quick Takeaways

Building alignment is essential to ensuring staff and volunteers are on the same page and can meaningfully contribute to your project goals.

- Change is hard, particularly if the issue is mindset. Preparing your staff and volunteers is essential. Engage them in activities; continuously communicate what you're doing and why.
- Foster collaboration. Involving staff, board members and volunteers throughout the process not only invites multiple viewpoints but promotes buy-in across your organization.
- Dividing a revamp into multiple phases can help you allocate resources and staff time more effectively.



Examine your current recruitment and candidate assessment process for barriers and determine how to address them

While you may have some understanding of the barriers to diversifying, it is good to get an outside view or multiple views to help you identify barriers. CCR did this by engaging a DEI consulting partner and by reflecting on their findings during Phase 1 (building alignment) outlined above.

Once you identify barriers, you will want to determine how to address them. This can include adjustments to the application, recruiting processes or mindsets at your organization. You may also want to address cost- and time-related barriers that applicants may unequally face. CCR did this during Phase 2 (revamping the MMP) outlined above.



CCR's Approach: Reflecting on Barriers and Making Change

The overall approach CCR took to the project balanced time for reflection and time to actualize change. Both of these components were grounded in the specific findings and recommendations provided by the consulting partners. Roughly, during Phase 1, staff focused on reflecting on the barriers and cultivating a shared understanding of equity goals at CCR. During Phase 2, staff and volunteers took the learnings of Phase 1 and implemented them into new processes and materials.

Below are some examples of overarching barriers uncovered in the audit report and what CCR staff and volunteers did to address them. We discuss the application and interview processes and materials in greater detail later in the guide.

Barriers to MMP Equity	Changes CCR Adopted
Mindset of "selection" with the goal of weeding out applicants	Mindset of "matching" with the goal of discovering ways of fitting promising applicants into the CCR community
Equality-based approach to meeting MMP requirements: Everyone goes through the same process	Equity-based approach to meeting MMP requirements: accounting for the unique circumstances of volunteers

Intensive written application and traditional one-on-one interviews with finalists	Simple interest form and dynamic “Matching Event” screening with skill-based activities
Outreach focused within existing networks and community connections	Outreach expanded beyond existing networks to cultivate bespoke partnerships

Design an outreach strategy

While you are figuring out how to address barriers, you should determine your outreach strategy. You will have an idea of who you want to bring on as volunteers (race/ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, gender, etc.). Now is when you figure out how to reach them.



CCR’s Approach: Engaging an Outreach Committee

CCR tasked its existing Marketing & Outreach Committee, composed of staff and board members, to support the project’s efforts to reach new, diverse community organizations and individuals. The committee approached this work by developing a list of potential organizations, identifying touchpoints between those organizations and CCR, and sharing information about the revamped MMP through flyers and other messaging.

This built on work the committee had already been doing to expand CCR’s outreach capacity, such as developing a sheet to track past outreach and level of interest based upon that outreach. The committee aimed to address a primary issue: that most of the applicants to the MMP were coming from existing CCR networks. Its approach was to expand the quantity of applicants from outside those networks as well as the diversity of those applicants. They determined these demographics based on the audit report: individuals ages 18–35, Spanish speakers, people of color, and those from less socioeconomically privileged backgrounds.



CCR’s Approach: Cultivating Bespoke Relationships with Community Groups

Among the most significant learning lessons for CCR’s staff was that a one-size-fits-all approach for participation in the MMP is not necessary to maintain the program’s quality and rigor. The consulting partners helped CCR to consider how they could personalize the program process and time commitments for individual volunteers.

One of the benefits of expanding the nature of volunteer mediation is that it creates opportunities to recruit volunteer mediators from a range of lived experiences. For example, through this new approach, CCR partnered with staff from a local gun violence prevention organization. As part of this partnership, CCR will train those staff members to mediate in CCR's youth programs. The staff have been previously justice-system involved; CCR's youth program clients may benefit from the shared knowledge and experience that these new volunteers will bring to mediation.

Quick Takeaways



- Design your outreach strategy very early. Staff must have sufficient time to plan and execute outreach tasks.
- Provide staff with ample information about your revamp goals and the demographics you are trying to reach.
- Determine what types of communication materials (for example, flyers, videos, email blasts) you need to create to execute your outreach strategy.
- Consider whether there are opportunities to establish more personalized community partnerships. Ask yourself if there are specific program needs that can be fulfilled.

Address concerns about changes to your program processes

When engaging your staff and existing volunteers to change your program processes or requirements, staff may raise concerns about what this will mean for your program. It is important to keep an open mind and use the concerns as an opportunity to maintain an open dialogue with staff. Below are two concerns raised by CCR staff and how CCR worked through them.

CCR Staff Concern: Loss of Program Rigor

Some CCR leadership, staff and existing volunteers expressed concerned that introducing flexibility to meeting MMP requirements could reduce the perceived rigor associated with the program. This is a concern common to equity work that may or may not be voiced; it reflects

organization members' investment in the program they helped to build. CCR leadership used this as a chance for volunteers and staff to engage with the organization's goals around equity-minded changes while centering critical skills and fit to the program's needs.

CCR Staff Concern: Need to Justify New Process

Some at CCR expressed concern that these changes could frustrate existing volunteers, who entered into the program under a potentially different set of processes or expectations than those being offered to new volunteers. In anticipation of this potential issue, CCR leadership communicated to current volunteers the rationale behind these changes in a recorded informational session. They also discussed how the changes related to CCR's longer-term equity-minded goals. This can involve creating a dialogue in which you discuss what was and was not working with previous processes, and why your organization wants to try something different.



Design Your Application and Assessment Process

You will want to design a process that helps you identify volunteers that fit with your organization, both in the skills they have and the values they hold. You may also want a process that includes staff and volunteers, who may have different perspectives.

Ensure Equity of Your Program Requirements

A major takeaway from CCR’s audit was that a one-size-fits-all approach — which is, in theory, designed to uphold equal requirements for all — may actually reduce the ability of your organization to diversify its roster pool. By adopting and enforcing a standardized process, you are unable to account for circumstances that may prevent individuals from some backgrounds from participating.

Below, we provide examples of how CCR implemented its consulting partners’ recommendation to add flexibility to meeting program requirements, including those related to fees, volunteer time and recertification.



Issue: Strict Time and Cost Requirements Disproportionately Affected Applicants

At CCR, participation in the MMP has involved the following requirements:

- Recent completion of a 40-hour Mediation Skills Training (MST) program²
 - The cost of the 40-hour MST at CCR ranges from \$1,650–\$1,750
- Attendance at one informational session
- Payment of an MMP program fee (\$900)
- Commitment to volunteering for CCR at least two times per month for 18 months after certification

Through a survey of CCR’s community, the consulting partners found that people of color, LGBTQ+ people, and younger individuals were more likely to identify the cost-related barriers to the program as barriers to participation. Respondents also noted that it was difficult to find the scholarships to help with these costs on CCR’s website. To address these barriers, the

² Applicants to the MMP must have completed a 40-hour Mediation Skills Training no more than two to three years prior to applying to the program. They may complete the training at CCR or an approved organization.

consulting partners recommended CCR explore more personalized ways for participants to participate in the program.



CCR's Fix: Introducing a Bartering Program

CCR leadership introduced a new Bartering Program to add some flexibility to how participants could meet time and cost requirements (see Figure 1). The Bartering Program goes beyond the existing scholarship and financial assistance opportunities already offered at CCR.

Through this program, MMP applicants have the option to propose a barter to offset the cost of their 40-hour MST training. The MST training is a prerequisite to the MMP. Applicants propose barter to the CCR Volunteer Director. The proposed barter is then reviewed by the training team and the Executive Director, who decides whether or not to approve them.

Additionally, as part of CCR's Core Values of Commitment to Serving the Community, Inclusivity, and Inspiring Growth and Success, individuals are also welcome to participate in our Bartering Program. In this program, individuals can exchange goods and/or services to discount up to \$1,395 of the program cost. All participants must pay the \$300 training deposit.

Some past examples of these exchanges include:

- Professional headshots for staff
- Graphic design services for our website
- Other types of training services
- Promotional video for CCR
- Items or experiences to feature in our Silent Auction (lessons, tickets, behind-the-scenes tours, etc.)

These are not the only options! If you have an idea for an exchange or want to discuss ideas and options, please email training@ccrchicago.org. We want to support you in joining our conflict resolution community!

Figure 1. Description of CCR's Bartering Program on its MMP website.

CCR has already successfully bartered with people interested in applying to the MMP. For example, they approved a proposal for an applicant to offer a training for CCR staff in an area in which the applicant has expertise. Moreover, the presence of the Bartering Program signals an inviting tone to potential applicants and demonstrates a willingness on the part of CCR staff to provide support from the start.



How to Build a Bartering Program

If you want to start a bartering system for your organization, follow these steps:

Calculate how much bartering your organization can support.

- Determine whether applicants can barter for time, cost or both.
- Identify which program-related fees or time commitments are available to barter.

Decide which staff member(s) would be involved with approving barters.

Communicate how this alternative program works on your website or application form.

Provide applicants examples of acceptable barters.



Issue: Required Live Information Sessions Are Inefficient and Inconvenient

As mentioned above, one of the requirements to applying to the MMP is attending one of CCR's one-hour information sessions about the program. CCR typically scheduled three sessions at set dates and times per application cycle.

Here is an example schedule from a previous cycle:

- Thursday, October 26, 2023, from 1–2 p.m. CST
- Wednesday, November 1, 2023, from 9:30–10:30 a.m. CST
- Friday, November 3, from 9:30–10:30 a.m. CST

This meant that if potential applicants could not attend any of the listed sessions, they would be unable to apply. This is a barrier that could prevent individuals with personal or professional commitments during the workday from being able to submit an application.

The sessions also were found to be time-consuming. Interested applicants had to attend a full-hour session at a potentially inconvenient time. CCR staff had to plan and facilitate three separate sessions to convey the same information.



CCR's Fix: Recording an Informational Session Video

To make meeting and facilitating this requirement more accessible and convenient, CCR replaced the hourlong information sessions with a 20-minute informational video ([linked here](#), for your reference). In the video, CCR's Volunteer Director discusses multiple topics, including: the most essential components of the MMP, the MMP's requirements, the process for applying to the MMP and CCR's approach to mediation. The video is housed on

CCR's MMP program website as the first step in the application process (see Figure 2). Interested applicants can easily access and watch the video at any time, and CCR can update the video on an as-needed basis, saving a substantial amount of time per application cycle.



Figure 2. CCR's MMP Informational Video embedded on its MMP website.



Issue: Frequent and Inconsistent Recertification Requirements

Because of the nature of long-term volunteering, at some point, mediators may have to take time away from their mediation duties to attend to other professional or personal matters. In the past, CCR required that mediators recertify after six months of inactivity at CCR. However, the consulting partners found that this requirement was unevenly enforced. Staff and volunteers also thought it was too soon. This is a barrier to diversifying volunteer mediator pools because it unevenly preferences those able to maintain consistent service over those who may face economic hardship and/or personal circumstances that could necessitate a pause in volunteering.



CCR's Fix: Mediator Safety Screening

To address the time-consuming nature of CCR's previous recertification process, CCR leadership introduced a mediator safety screening tool. Those interested in restarting volunteer mediation at CCR must pass the screening to demonstrate that they are able to provide mediation services in the model used by CCR in a way that does not harm the participants. As part of their reentry, returning mediators who pass the screening will then be placed in a co-mediation environment to rebuild other skills and prepare them to mediate individually again.



Quick Takeaways

- A rigid application process may limit diversity by making it hard for some to meet the time and cost requirements.
- Creativity in designing a more flexible process may provide openings for a more diverse group of individuals who were not previously available.
- A bartering system provides an opportunity for CMCs to learn more about applicants' skillsets and experience. It also creates an inviting atmosphere for those interested in joining your program.
- An informational video allows applicants to learn about your program at any time, avoiding applicants' scheduling limitations.



How to Review Your Program Requirements

We recommend taking the following steps to review your program requirements:

Calculate the time and cost requirements for applying to your program and for completing it.

Assess how these requirements affect the volunteers you want to attract and maintain.

Consider what you should do differently to attract these volunteers. Possible options could include:

- Adopting a barter system
- Changing to a different training schedule
- Determining whether anything can be done online or at a volunteer's pace

Reflect on what you can do differently to ensure volunteers can complete the program and become an engaged member of your community.

Discuss how these requirements affect your ability to retain volunteers.

Retool Your Application Materials

Two major takeaways from CCR’s audit were that: Written application forms are overly time-consuming, both for applicants completing the form and the CCR staff members reviewing it; and a “blind” application may hamper efforts at diversifying the roster pool.

A lengthy written application may favor applicants who have native-English-speaking backgrounds or whose communication styles match the preferences of reviewers. It may also give too much weight to written communication over other forms of communication relevant to mediation. Counterintuitively, the consulting partners also indicated that a “blind” application strategy might limit the ability of applicants to share experiences that were important to them.



Issue: A Written Application Form Privileges Native English Speakers

Previously, CCR asked all applicants to complete an Experience & Interest form, which involved applicants writing essay responses to a series of questions about their interest in mediation at CCR, experience and skills. Please see Appendix A for the previous CCR application form.

The consulting partners noted that the form was time-consuming for applicants to complete. Staff members described it as intimidating to potential applicants, particularly if English was their second language. In one anonymized example of a completed application form provided to us by CCR, the applicant’s responses totaled 1,200+ words, suggesting a great amount of time went into crafting responses. The amount of time required to submit applications also deterred people from reapplying. If applicants were not selected and wanted to reapply during a future round, they would have to write a new set of responses.



CCR’s Fix: Use a Simple Interest Form

CCR staff replaced their previous written application with a simpler interest form. Please see Appendix B for the new Submission of Interest form, which CCR created using Google Forms. Within the form, CCR asks participants to provide information on their demographics (to the extent they feel comfortable sharing), experience and skills, time availability and potential barriers. The form is always accessible on CCR’s MMP website and is listed as the second step after watching the MMP Informational Video.



Issue: Using a “Blind” Approach to Applications May Create Barriers

CCR previously used a “blind” application process. This meant that applicants were asked to remove any identifying information from their written responses in the application form. CCR adopted this approach to reduce the potential for bias in assessing candidates. However, the consulting partners noted that a blind approach limits the ability of applicants to describe their distinct perspectives and experiences vis-à-vis their social identities. We heard from previous screeners that excessive removal of identifying information could also limit their ability to assess whether an applicant would be a good potential fit.



CCR’s Fix: Solicit Applicant Demographics via Self-Reporting

On CCR’s new Submission of Interest form, there is a section providing the opportunity for applicants to self-identify. The section starts with a brief introduction describing why CCR is asking for demographic self-reporting and noting that responses are not mandatory, nor are they used for “matching” purposes. This sets clear expectations and signals a welcoming tone for applicants to share their backgrounds safely.

Quick Takeaways

- An application form requiring long written responses is inefficient, doesn’t provide adequate information and introduces biases toward those with native English proficiency or preferred communication styles.
- A blind application, in which an applicant’s background is purposely not known, can create different opportunities for bias than one in which demographics are known.
- A short interest form with voluntary provision of demographic information can be a no-cost, efficient and effective start to an application process.





How to Retool Your Application Materials

We recommend taking the following steps to review and address your program application materials:

Start by examining what characteristics you think are most important for your volunteers to have. Consider the following:

- Whether your current materials provide the information needed to know whether applicants have those characteristics. If not, determine what information you need.
- How your materials assess the characteristics needed to succeed as a mediator at your organization. Discuss which characteristics are missing and which are not relevant.
- Whether your materials weight these characteristics in any particular way. Determine if you should weight these differently.

Assess the time cost of submitting and reviewing applications. Consider the following:

- How you can streamline the application process
- How you can make it easier for applicants to take the first step
- What information applicants should provide at the beginning of the process and in what form

Enhance Your Screening Practices

After applicants submit an application form, some of them are selected to participate in the next stage of the screening process, which is usually an interview. At CCR, staff members graded the written applications and then invited candidates to participate in an interview. These were one-hour individual interviews conducted by a single CCR representative, whether a staff member or a volunteer mentor.

The consulting partners and CCR staff identified four main issues with this approach. The solution was a new screening process.



Issue 1: Equal Weighing of Criteria Prevents Relevant Assessment of Skills

Previously, written applications were reviewed by five CCR screeners. They used a rubric to rate applicants' written responses to the application questions on a scale of 1–5. Each response was weighed equally to produce an average score per candidate. The consulting partners found that there was significant variation in the scoring of candidates, which could indicate unclear criteria or potential bias. Further, they noted that assigning equal value to each response was not the most effective approach. For example, applicants' responses to a question about their capacity to adapt to new technology should not be as important as their responses to a question about why they wanted to become a mediator at CCR. More generally, we heard from staff that they did not see a significant correlation between being a good writer and being a good mediator.



Issue 2: Relying on One Interviewer Produces Unreliable Assessment of Applicants

One of the major issues with CCR's previous process was its reliance on a single interviewer per applicant. We heard from CCR staff that this meant that individual interviewers were responsible for advocating for their assigned applicants during group discussions, and other interviewers lacked the contextual information needed to offer their own assessment. This could "make or break" an applicant's entry into the program. In addition to the biases that this approach introduced, it also put a great deal of pressure on interviewers to make difficult decisions on their own.



Issue 3: Inconsistencies in How Interviews were Conducted

The consulting partners found that because some of the criteria used to evaluate applicants was unclear, interviewers struggled with facilitating consistent interviews. In the previous process, CCR permitted interviewers to use a set of available questions as they felt appropriate. However, in practice, interviewers felt they did not have clear enough direction about what they were looking for in candidates, which limited their ability to select questions effectively.



Issue 4: Screeners Not Spending Enough Time Face-to-Face with Applicants

Within the overall application process, the consulting partners noted that far less time was dedicated to getting to know the applicants, through interpersonal assessments such as interviews, than was spent reviewing their writing. This imbalance meant that CCR only had partial information about their applicants; it limited their ability to glean information about their ability to mediate that is best obtained from an interview. The assessment process was also time inefficient.³

³ The consulting partners estimated that the application screening for 25 applicants, which involved five screeners, took an average 30 minutes per applicant to complete, meaning 62.5 total hours of staff/volunteer time.



How to Enhance Your Screening Practices

We recommend taking the following steps to review and enhance your interview procedures:

Calculate how you are allocating time in your overall screening process.

- Determine how much time screeners are dedicating to reviewing applications vs. interviewing applicants.
- Assess whether this allocation of time should change.

Consider your interview procedures.

- Identify the skills you are trying to assess during the interview.
 - Determine whether your rubric captures those skills adequately.
- Consider how many staff members are screening each applicant.
 - Determine whether this format produces reliable data.
- Assess how you can make interviewing more engaging for applicants and interviewers.
 - Determine if there are activities you can use to replace or accompany interview questions.
 - Discuss what format those activities can take.



CCR's Fix: Matching Events

CCR's staff reimagined the screening process for applicants to the MMP, moving away from a traditional interview-style format to a Matching Event composed of different stations of activities for applicants to participate in. They designed the stations to assess applicants' capacities to meet specific criteria. For example, to demonstrate capacity for empathy and comfort with conflict, applicants were asked to watch a movie clip from *Inside Out* and then discuss the conflicting emotions that characters expressed.

The Matching Event addressed the above issues with the previous process by: including clearly defined and weighted assessment criteria; being facilitated by two CCR representatives at each station; and allotting ample face-to-face time with multiple candidates as they completed a variety of skill-based activities. CCR also planned a Matching Event orientation to ensure that Station Runners were prepared to facilitate the activities and assess candidates consistently.

The Matching Event allowed CCR to connect with applicants on a more personal level. An additional benefit to this approach is that they were able to identify opportunities for applicants who were not selected for the MMP to become involved at CCR in other capacities.

Matching Event Stations

The Matching Events were held on Zoom. Applicants individually participated in three stations in succession. Each station lasted 30 minutes and included an icebreaker and one to two activities. They were held in separate breakout rooms. Stations were co-facilitated by two CCR "Station Runners," who were CCR staff members or volunteer mentors. There were a couple iterations of the same station, and applicants started at different stations, so that CCR could interview multiple applicants simultaneously.

Below are summaries of each station (for a more detailed breakdown of station activities, their components and interview questions, see Appendix C):

Station One: Managing Self

- **Introductions and icebreaker:** Station Runners ask the applicant which film holds the most meaning for them. The goal was to understand why it was meaningful to them.
- **Simulation activity:** Station Runners role play as parties in a conflict between a landlord and a tenant. Station Runners give initial statements, acting like a landlord and a tenant in dispute. Applicants summarize initial statements, naming at least one

emotion. Then, applicants ask what brings parties to mediation; the Station Runners continue role playing, with one party being difficult. At the end of the simulation, everyone debriefs together.

- **Interview questions:** If time allows, Station Runners ask applicants how they would navigate facilitative mediation, deal with conflict and receive constructive feedback.

Station Two: Interactions with Others

- **Introductions and icebreaker:** Station Runners ask applicant what the greatest food-related invention of all time is, and why.
- **Video clip activity:** Station Runners ask applicant to watch a short clip from the movie *Inside Out*. Then, applicants are asked to name emotions that characters in the scene were feeling and the different approaches to dealing with difficult emotions depicted in the scene.
- **Cultural competence activity (Part 1):** Station Runners explain and model “social location,” which are the identities or experiences one embodies. Then, the Station Runners ask applicants to share their social location, naming identities they feel comfortable disclosing.
- **Cultural competence activity (Part 2):** Station Runners ask applicants how they would navigate neutrality in two mediation scenarios. The first scenario involves a party who does not share visible demographic similarities with the mediator and remarks on that fact, saying the mediator would not understand their perspective. In the second scenario, a party does share visible demographic similarities with the mediator and remarks on that fact, asking the mediator to make the other party understand their perspective.

Station Three: Commitment to Community

- **Introductions and icebreaker:** Station Runners ask applicants for a piece of advice or wise saying that has stuck with them.
- **Interview questions:** Station Runners ask applicants a series of interview questions as time allows. Questions concern CCR’s Core Values and how they resonate with applicants, the applicants’ schedule, prior volunteer experience the applicant has had, and any challenges the applicant foresees with volunteering at CCR.
- **Technology activity:** Station Runners ask applicants to share a document on their screen on Zoom. They also ask applicants to accept an invitation to join Slack and to

test sending messages back and forth. The activity gauges the applicants' capacity to conduct mediation virtually.

Matching Event Schedule

Here is the schedule of the Matching Event that RSI observed:

Matching Event #2 – April 3, 2025	
<i>First group of applicants</i> Station One: 1–1:30 p.m. Station Two: 1:30–2 p.m. Station Three: 2–2:30 p.m.	<i>Second group of applicants</i> Station One: 3–3:30 p.m. Station Two: 3:30–4 p.m. Station Three: 4–4:30 p.m.

Matching Event Scorecard

Station Runners used a standardized rubric to rate the extent to which applicants met three overarching criteria: managing self, commitment to community and interactions with others, as well as a bonus criterion, communication. CCR worked with the consulting partners to develop definitions for these criteria, which were broken down into a number of specific skills.

Here is the breakdown of criteria and skills:

Managing Self (Station 1)	Interactions with Others (Station 2)
• Explores biases and assumptions • Desires growth • Patient • Adaptable • Manages emotion	• Comfortable with conflict • Curious • Adaptable • Culturally aware • Maintains boundaries • Empathetic

Commitment to Community (Station 3)	Communication (all stations)
• Makes personal connection • Supportive • Collaborative • Reciprocal	• Listens actively • Demonstrates openness • Communicates with clarity • Communicates respectfully

Using the Matching Event Scorecard, Station Runners indicated how they felt the applicant met the four main criteria using the following grading: 0 = Doesn't meet, 1 = Needs work, 3 = Meets, 5 = Exceeds. There was also room for Station Runners to include a short note on their perceptions of the applicant. See Appendix D for the MMP Matching Event Scorecard.

Matching Event training

CCR held two sessions to prepare Station Runners to facilitate the Matching Events.

The First MMP Training session provided CCR staff and volunteers with information about barriers identified in the audit, an overview of the new application process and definitions of the new applicant assessment criteria. The consulting partners facilitated the session. During the training, they described the new role that staff and volunteers would play in assessing candidates. They used large- and small-group activities to help trainees understand and discuss the new criteria.

The Matching Event orientation built on the foundation of the first training session. It was facilitated by CCR program leadership, who provided staff and volunteers with information on the Matching Event format, the station activities and interview questions. In addition to discussing the specifics of these components, CCR provided time for participants to practice the activities and ask questions about the new scoring method used to assess applicants. The orientation was recorded and circulated for those unable to attend live.



Quick Takeaways

- A screening process benefits from having clearly defined skills for applicants to demonstrate and for screeners to assess. Weighing criteria based on what is most relevant and important for success at your organization can produce more reliable assessments of applicants to your program.
- Applicants and screeners benefit from having ample face-to-face time within the screening process; relying on assessments of written applications can limit your ability to understand the distinct experiences and perspectives applicants can bring to your organization.
- A collaborative approach to screening applicants (for example, having two interviewers or more per applicant) can make the process more time efficient and precise.
- Using a variety of skill-based screening activities, rather than only interview questions, can provide a more holistic assessment of whether applicants have the potential to succeed at your organization.



How to Conduct a Matching Event

If you want to use a Matching Event to screen applicants to your organization, the following steps should help you to implement it successfully:

Identify the skills most important to succeeding as a volunteer mediator at your organization.

- Decide whether and how to weigh that criteria.
- Develop a rubric based on the criteria and the way it is weighed.
- Group the skills into three overarching criteria.

Develop stations based on the three overarching criteria.

- Decide whether each station should include an icebreaker activity and what it involves.
- Create activities that assess the skills contained in each station.
- Consider using scenarios, multimedia content and/or traditional interview questions as needed.

Organize the Matching Event format.

- Determine how many staff members will facilitate each station.
- Consider how applicants flow through the stations.
- Include time for debriefing among staff.

Provide training to Station Runners.

- Create a map of the stations for facilitators to reference.
- Plan a Matching Event orientation to train staff to run the activities.

Provide time to practice the activities.

Final Takeaways

CCR enjoyed many major successes with this project. Participants were able to completely reimagine CCR's application and screening processes; they redefined their search criteria to better align with program needs, created new activities to assess candidates' skills and crafted a rubric to better score candidates.

Previous Process	New Process
Written application with multi-page, essay responses	Simple submission of interest form with fill-in-the-blank questions
"Blind" application in which candidates do not share demographic or identifying information	Application with option to self-report demographic information
Traditional one-on-one interviews	Matching Events with co-facilitators
Rubric with criteria equally weighted	Rubric with criteria weighted based on relevance to mediation

Based on what CCR learned through its implementation process, a successful equity project requires:

- **Flexibility:** Every volunteer mediator does not have to go through the exact same process in order to capably mediate for your organization.
- **Time:** Making changes to long-standing processes is time-intensive. Staff must have the time to review current processes and develop, implement and sustain changes effectively. Even if you work with a provider, significant internal work will be required.
- **Consistent communication:** Staff and volunteers need to be continually updated about project goals and progress. They need information about the work that preceded and will follow their involvement.
- **An open mind:** Providing wide latitude can enhance staff investment in the project and produce meaningful results. Staff and volunteers feel empowered when they are granted permission to make major changes to the program.

CCR discovered as well that this process doesn't require particular staff knowledge or sacrifice of rigor:

- Staff members and volunteers do not need to have a background in DEI in order to capably participate in equity-related processes.
- A more equity-based approach — such as making processes more flexible — does not mean that you have to sacrifice program rigor or discard strong expectations for volunteer commitment.

Appendix A: Previous CCR Application Form

Experience & Interest

Provide information about your background and why you are applying to the program. (NOTE: We use a "blind" application process in the application stage, so please do not include names of schools, employers, organizations, etc. that could potentially identify you to our selection committee.)

What inspired your **interest** in mediation?

Why would you like to become a **volunteer for CCR**?

Please describe the **unique factors** you feel you would bring to CCR and its clients if certified as a mediator.

Describe your **educational background**. (Please DO NOT list names of schools attended. Only provide the general subject matter focus of your studies and any degrees earned.)

CCR's clients represent extremely diverse backgrounds including parents, attorneys, incarcerated youth, small business owners, and unhoused people to name a few. Please describe how your own **personal or professional experiences** have prepared you to connect to the many cultures and communities we serve in Chicago.

Describe any prior volunteer experience you've had. (Please DO NOT list names of organizations. Only provide a description of the type of service, job titles, and length of engagement.)

Briefly provide an **example of a conflict** you have faced either personally, or as an advisor to someone else. (For example: What approaches did you use? How did you determine what was important? How did you handle the emotions involved?)

Provide a brief description of a recent time you **learned something new**. (For example: you made a surprising discovery, realized something that changed your approach to a task, or altered your thinking.)

CCR currently provides the majority of mediation services by using Zoom and other technology platforms. Please rate your comfort level with learning or adapting to **new technology** (scale of 1-5 where 1 is "not very comfortable" and 5 is "very comfortable.")

Are you interested in contributing to the mission of CCR in ways that **DON'T involve mediation**? (If yes, please describe your interest / expertise).

Explain your **availability to mediate**. Describe your current schedule: school, employment, and other commitments. Explain what adjustments, if any, you would make in order to mediate cases.

If you are currently able to fluently mediate in a **language other than English**, please describe proficiency, ability and experience using the other language(s).

Appendix B: New Submission of Interest Form

Rolling Submission of Interest to CCR's Mediator Mentorship Program (MMP)

We're thrilled you are interested in volunteering with CCR! Please make sure you have watched the [MMP Informational Video](#) linked here. Then, fill out this form to register your interest in participating in a future MMP cycle. This is the first stage of our process to select and onboard new volunteers, so we are only gathering basic information, necessary pre-qualifications, and providing a small amount of expectation setting. There will be more opportunity for getting to know each other during future stages of the process, provided minimum qualifications are met.

* Indicates required question

Enter your first and last name. *

Enter your email address. *

Have you applied to the MMP previously?*

- No, I have not.
- Yes, one time before.
- Yes, twice before.
- Yes, three or more times before.

Have you watched the [MMP informational video](#) on our website? *

- No
- Yes

Prerequisite 1

Have you completed a [Cook County approved](#) 40-hour Mediation Skills Training within the last 3 years? *

- No
- Yes

If you answered "Yes," please indicate the name of the training and the date of completion.

Prerequisite 2

Do you have private access to a laptop or desktop computer for up to 5 hours of uninterrupted time on which you could mediate via Zoom video conferencing? *

- No
- Yes

Prerequisite 3

CCR uses a performance-based certification standard to qualify our volunteers. This requires significant additional training beyond Cook County's 40-hr. training requirement.

Do you have adequate time in your weekly schedule to train with a dedicated mentor and other apprentice volunteers for an average of 3-6 hours per week over the course of a 3-month mentorship cycle?

(This time can usually be scheduled at mutually convenient times during the work week or on evenings and weekends with your assigned mentor and a practice partner. However, there are also a few pre-scheduled, required trainings that would take place during typical working hours of 9-5pm). *

- No
- Yes

Rolling Submission of Interest to CCR's Mediator Mentorship Program (MMP)

* Indicates required question

Personal Background Information

Briefly describe why you are interested in becoming a volunteer and supporting CCR's mission. *

List any education, work experience, and/or life experience that you feel would help inform your mediation practice. *

List any current or past volunteer experience and briefly describe the type of volunteering and how long you have done it.

Check the appropriate box if you have fluency in the following languages and would feel comfortable mediating in those languages.

- Arabic
- Chinese
- Polish
- Spanish
- Other:

Would you be requesting a need-based scholarship to offset some or all of the cost of training in the Mentorship Program? *

- No
- Yes

Rolling Submission of Interest to CCR's Mediator Mentorship Program (MMP)

Demographic Self-Reporting

CCR is a *community* mediation center, and as such, we seek to be an organization that reflects the diverse population we serve in the Chicagoland area. In order to do this, we encourage people who are of all ages, economic status, educational backgrounds, gender identities, orientation, races, etc. to apply. You can assist us in creating a vibrant and rich volunteer pool by self-reporting identities that make you who you are.

We never use this information to request anything from you, or to "match" you with mediation clients. Instead, we inform our recruitment by using it to address gaps or underrepresentation in various demographics so that we can be an organization that has voices and perspectives from all across the spectrum, thereby reducing blind spots and bias within our work.

If you do not wish to answer any of the demographic questions, check the box below and scroll to the end to click "Next."



- I do not wish to disclose my identities.

Age

- Under 35
- 35 to 54
- 55+
- Prefer not to disclose

Race/Ethnicity

- Black or African
- East Asian
- Indigenous Native
- Hispanic or Latino/a/x
- Middle Eastern
- Multi Racial (two or more races)
- Pacific Islander
- South Asian
- Southeast Asian
- White or Caucasian
- Prefer not to disclose
- Other:

Gender Identity

- Agender
- Genderqueer or gender fluid
- Man
- Non-binary
- Questioning or unsure
- Two-spirit
- Woman
- Prefer not to disclose
- Other:

Do you identify as part of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, + communities?

- No
- Yes
- Prefer not to disclose

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

- No
- Yes
- Prefer not to disclose

What is your highest level of education completed or achieved to date?

- Collegiate-level or undergraduate
- Post-collegiate or graduate
- Post-graduate
- Secondary or high school
- Trade/Technical/Vocational certification
- Prefer not to disclose
- Other:

Employment Status

- Employed
- Retired
- Self-employed
- Student
- Unemployed
- Prefer not to disclose
- Other:

CCR works with many individuals who qualify for public assistance programs and those who are unhoused or facing housing insecurity. Have you ever shared this lived experience, either now or in the past?

- No
- Yes
- Prefer not to disclose

CCR works with many people for whom involvement with law enforcement and/or the criminal justice system is a significant factor in their identity. Some examples of this include: having a child who has been arrested, trying criminal cases as an attorney, or working as a corrections officer. Please indicate if you share this type of lived experience.

- No
- Yes
- Prefer not to disclose
- Experience with the criminal justice system
- Experience as part of law enforcement

Submit Form

Thanks for registering your interest in becoming a volunteer with CCR! Please click the "Submit" button below and we will reach out when there is a new opportunity for joining an MMP cohort (this currently happens once or twice a year, typically in January or April).

Appendix C: Matching Event Station Maps

Station One – Managing Self

Criteria we're looking for:	
• Explores biases and assumptions	• Adaptable
• Desire for growth	• Manages emotion
• Patience	

Station Progression:

- Introductions & Ice Breaker – (5-10 min)
 - Station Runner goes first, then applicant, then other Station Runner if there is time
 - Names Only
 - No education or professional background
 - Don't talk about how long you've been at CCR, what your role is, etc.
 - What film means the most to you, not because of the movie itself, but because of the circumstances of watching it?
 - Who you were with, the age you saw it, etc.
- Activity – (10-15min)
 - Initial Statements (Sim O: Landlord / Tenant)
 - Station Runners role play as parties
 - Instructions for Applicant:
 - The goal is to summarize each party's initial statement focusing less on factual regurgitation and more on naming at least one emotion and what they think is important to the person
 - If they get stuck, they can ask for help
 - Applicant starts by asking each party "What brings you here and what do you hope to accomplish today?"
 - Landlord gives short opening statement with some emotion and stated position, but alluding to N/I
 - Tenant simply says, "I'm here because the Landlord is an ass."
 - Applicant should continue working with Tenant to get enough info so they can do the summary
 - Debrief together how it felt, what went right, what didn't, did you feel drawn toward one party or the other initially? If so, why? etc.

- This activity should give you insight on the applicant's:
 - Desire for growth
 - Adaptability
 - Management of emotion
- Interview Questions (5-10 min)
 - Ask as many of the following questions as time allows:
 - Our model of mediation is “facilitative” which means we don’t take sides or give parties our opinion of what WE think they should do. How do you think you’d navigate NOT being allowed to tell people what you think?
 - Describe a time when you were assisting someone else with a conflict and you were tempted to “solve it.” How did you handle the situation? How did it go?
 - When was the last time you learned something new? What was it? How did it go?
 - Describe a time when you were given constructive feedback. How did you respond? What happened after?

Station Two

 – Interactions with Others

Criteria we’re looking for:	
• Comfort w/ conflict	• Cultural awareness
• Curiosity	• Maintains boundaries
• Adaptability	• Empathy

Station Progression:

- Introductions & Ice Breaker – (5-10 min)
 - Station Runner goes first, then applicant, then other Station Runner if there is time
 - Names Only
 - No education or professional background
 - Don’t talk about how long you’ve been at CCR, what your role is, etc.
 - What’s the greatest food-related invention of all time and why?
 - could be an actual food or drink product, a tool or appliance related to the production / preservation of food, etc.
 - Activity – (5-10 min)
 - Watch Inside Out [video clip](#)
 - Ask the applicant:
 - Can you name 3 emotions you think Elephant was feeling in the scene?
 - **Try formulating a couple questions** to see if you can explore one of
-

those emotions. *(One of the Station Runners role plays)*

- What did you think about the different approaches of Joy and Sadness?
- Which approach would you use as a mediator with an emotional party? Why?
(Answer: "It depends.")

- This activity should give you insight on the applicant's
 - Empathy
 - Adaptability
 - Comfort w/ Conflict
- Activity – (5-10 min)
 - Cultural Competence / Curiosity
 - Part One: Interviewer explains and models "social location"
 - "I'm a middle-aged, white, cis man who didn't realize I grew up in privilege until later in life. I'm a parent, I'm divorced, and I'm religiously agnostic."
 - Ask applicant to try it for themselves, but **only naming identities they feel comfortable to disclose**
 - Ask for honest disclosure around identities they are less familiar with or may find challenging. Have them keep those characteristics in mind for the next part.
 - Part Two:
 - Ask applicant: Imagine you're in a mediation and one of your parties, with whom you DON'T share visible demographic similarities says, "You have no idea what it's like to be me in this situation!" How do you handle that?
 - *(a wide range of answers here, but things that demonstrate humility and curiosity is what we're looking for)*
 - Ask applicant: "Imagine you're in a mediation and one of your parties, with whom you DO share visible demographic similarities says, "Well of course YOU know what it's like... can't you make them (the other party) see what I mean?" How do you handle that?
 - *(a wide range of answers here, but we're looking for something that digs deeper on what the person means and maintains the boundary of neutrality)*
 - This activity should provide insight on the applicant's
 - Cultural awareness
 - Curiosity
 - Maintenance of boundaries
 - Comfort w/ conflict

Station Three – Commitment to Community

Criteria we're looking for:	
• Personal connection	• Collaborative
• Supportive	• Reciprocal

Station Progression:

- Introductions & Ice Breaker – (5 min)
 - Station Runner goes first, then applicant, then other Station Runner if there is time
 - Names Only
 - No education or professional background
 - Don't talk about how long you've been at CCR, what your role is, etc.
 - What's a piece of advice or wise saying that has always stuck with you?
- Interview Questions – (10-15 min)
 - Ask the following questions as time allows:
 - We have a set of Core Values that guides our work. Have you had a chance to look at those on our website? *(If not, show them or have them look)* What values resonate the most with you? Which do you think might come less naturally?
 - Tell me about any prior volunteer experience you've had. What did you like about it? What did you dislike?
 - What do you think you'd like about volunteering here? What do you think you might find challenging?
 - How much do you think you'd mediate in a given month? How would that fit into your existing schedule?
 - Are there other ways you'd be interested in volunteering besides mediating or skills you bring you think we could use?
 - What do you know about what we do?
 - How would previous experience or education prepare you for this kind of work?
 - Why do you want to do what we do?
 - Provide opportunity for them to ask questions
- Activity – (5-10 min)
 - Work with Zoom / Slack
 - Ask them to share a document on their screen on Zoom
 - Invite them to Slack, see if they can get on and send a couple test messages back and forth

Appendix D: CCR's Matching Event Scorecard

Matching Event Scorecard

Answer the questions below using the following rubric:

0 = Doesn't meet

1 = Needs work

3 = Meets

5 = Exceeds

Enter the name of the applicant being graded

Station One - Managing Self: Indicate how you felt the applicant meets the criteria we are looking for in the category.

- ☐ 0
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 5

Station Two - Interactions with Others: Indicate how you felt the applicant meets the criteria we are looking for in the category.

- ☐ 0
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 5

Station Three - Commitment to Community: Indicate how you felt the applicant meets the criteria we are looking for in the category.

- ☐ 0
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 5



Bonus Category - Communication Ability: Indicate how you felt the applicant meets the criteria we are looking for in the category.

- ☐ 0
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 5

If necessary, you may include a short note on your perceptions of the applicant.