

Program Description

Municipal Court Mediation

It is through the Municipal Courts that most citizens in the State interact with the judicial system, either as a complainant, a defendant, a victim, or a witness. The Municipal Court Mediation (MCM) program provides court users in nearly all municipalities with an alternative to having certain cases heard and decided by a judge (traditional litigation). Endorsed by the New Jersey Supreme Court, Municipal Courts refer cases involving "minor disputes" to be handled through the mediation process.

Mediation is a structured, non-adversarial process that allows a neutral third party to assist disputing parties in reaching a mutually acceptable solution. The mediation process can be a less expensive, informal, and a more meaningful alternative to the traditional trial process, largely because of the efforts of trained volunteers and the resolution being decided by the participants.

Community members are recruited, carefully screened, trained, and appointed as court volunteers to mediate cases of minor dispute. Basic mediation and conciliation training (an 18-hour course) is required of all volunteers prior to appointment. As a neutral party, a mediator helps court users discuss the issues of their case and explore options to resolve the dispute themselves. The typical types of cases handled through the intervention of a trained mediator include, but are not limited to: simple assaults that do not include personal injury, trespass, harassment, creating a disturbance, animal or pet complaints, annoying phone calls, and property disputes, non-payment of bills, bad checks, and criminal mischief. On average, volunteer mediators devote between two and six hours per month.

Municipal Division Customer Service Representative

This new program provides the opportunity to learn about the courts and at the same time provide a vital service to the community. Under the direction of a judge or other court staff, volunteers may assist with greeting customers, directing and escorting litigants, answering questions, making photocopies, presenting paperwork to judges or court users, and other tasks as assigned.

Volunteers will receive training and will serve during court sessions. Municipal court sessions may be held during day or evening hours, depending on the particular court. Prospective volunteers must be fingerprinted for a background check and **interviewed before appointment by the Assignment Judge.**

If you are interested in volunteering in these court programs, please contact the Morris/Sussex Municipal Division at 973-656-3979 for further details.

<http://www.judiciary.state.nj.us/volunteer/volunteer/index.htm>