

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA, COUNTY OF SHASTA ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION (ADR) INFORMATION PACKAGE

Most civil disputes are resolved without filing a lawsuit, and most civil lawsuits are resolved without a trial. Private providers offer a variety of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) processes to help people resolve disputes without a trial.

Below is some information about the potential advantages and disadvantages of ADR, the most common types of ADR, and how to find a local ADR program or neutral. You can read more information about these ADR processes and watch videos that demonstrate them at <http://www.courts.ca.gov/programs-adr.htm>. If the parties agree to an ADR program, the parties may file the agreement with the court for the purpose of assisting the court in determining how to proceed at the case management conference.

Potential Advantages and Disadvantages

ADR may have a variety of advantages and disadvantages over a trial, depending on the type of ADR process used and the particular case:

Potential Advantages

- Saves time
- Saves money
- Gives parties more control over the dispute resolution process and outcome
- Preserves or improves relationships.

Potential Disadvantages

- May take more time and money if ADR does not resolve the dispute
- Procedures to learn about the other side's case (discovery), jury trial, appeal, and other court protections may be limited or unavailable.

Most Common Types of ADR

Mediation – A neutral person called a “mediator” helps the parties communicate in an effective and constructive manner so they can try to settle their dispute. The mediator does not decide the outcome, but helps the parties to do so. Mediation is usually confidential, and may be particularly useful when parties want or need to have an ongoing relationship, such as in disputes between family members, neighbors, co-workers, or business partners.

Settlement Conferences – A judge helps the parties to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their case and to discuss settlement. The judge does not make a decision in the case but helps the parties to negotiate a settlement. Settlement conferences may be particularly helpful when the parties have very different ideas about the likely outcome of a trial and would like an experienced neutral to help guide them toward a resolution.

Neutral Evaluation – The parties briefly and informally present their facts and arguments to a neutral person called an “evaluator”, who is often an expert in the subject matter of the dispute. The evaluator does not decide the outcome of the dispute, but helps the parties to do so by giving them a non-binding opinion about the strengths, weaknesses, and likely outcome of their case. Depending on the neutral evaluation program and the parties' wishes, the evaluator may then help the parties try to negotiate a settlement. Neutral evaluation may be appropriate if the parties want a neutral person's opinion about how

the case might be resolved, if the primary dispute is the amount of damages, or if there are technical issues that the parties would like a neutral expert to help resolve.

Arbitration – The parties present evidence and arguments to a neutral person called an “arbitrator” who then decides the outcome of the dispute. Arbitration is less formal than a trial, and the rules of evidence are usually relaxed. If the parties agree to *binding arbitration*, they waive their right to a trial and agree to accept the arbitrator’s decision as final. With *nonbinding arbitration*, any party may reject the arbitrator’s decision and request a trial. Arbitration may be appropriate when the parties want another person to decide the outcome of their dispute but would like to avoid the formality, time and expense of a trial, or want an expert in the subject matter of the dispute to make the decision.

Selecting an ADR Program and Neutral

Selecting an ADR program and neutral are important decisions. Be sure to learn about the rules of any program and the qualifications of any neutral you are considering, and about their fees.

Shasta County Superior Court ADR Programs

When a civil case is set for trial the judge also will set a settlement conference date approximately six weeks before the trial date. The judge assigned to the case will assist the parties in attempting to arrive at a negotiated resolution.

Shasta County Superior Court does not offer mediation, neutral evaluations, or arbitrations.

Private ADR Providers – To find a private ADR program or neutral evaluator, search the Internet, your local telephone or business directory, or legal newspaper for dispute resolution, mediation, settlement, or arbitration services.

Legal Representation and Advice

To participate effectively in ADR, it is generally important to understand your legal rights and responsibilities and the likely outcomes if you went to trial. ADR neutrals are not allowed to represent or to give legal advice to the participants in the ADR process. If you do not already have an attorney, the California State Bar or the Shasta-Trinity Counties Bar Association may assist you in finding an attorney. Information about obtaining free and low cost legal assistance is also available on the California Courts website at <http://courts.ca.gov/selfhelp.htm> .