

Mediation Secretary

The Mediation Secretary, is an independent and impartial professional appointed by the President of the Bank. The Mediation Secretary is responsible for guiding or advising those involved in conflicts in all matters related to the process of Mediation and for coordinating the mediation sessions.

It is important to mention that The Mediation Secretary is not a reporting authority of the Bank.

Interview with Claudia de Colstoun, Mediation Secretary (April 2013- May 2018)

1. What has been your experience at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and how do you think it has prepared you to take on this new role?

I have been very fortunate to work in many different areas of the IDB. I began my career at the Bank on the Operational side (operations evaluation; microfinance; country programing; and advisor to the Operations Manager), and then moved to the Corporate side (Chief Advisor to the Vice President for Finance and Administration (VPF) and Talent Management Division Chief (HRD), before becoming interested in the field of Mediation. I feel that having a thorough knowledge of the Bank, its operations and corporate culture, as well as the Region it serves, gives me a good perspective in terms of assisting others with problem solving. Also, the creation of this new Mediation service presents an opportunity for all Bank employees to view conflict as a natural occurrence in the workplace, to address conflicts early and quickly, to identify the issues affecting them and the other parties, their interests, and to be open to creative solutions. This should contribute to a healthier and more productive work environment.

2. What is Mediation?

Mediation is a confidential conflict resolution process in which an impartial third party helps two or more participants better understand their issues, interests and needs, and empowers them to bridge their differences through a voluntary agreement.

3. What is your role as a Mediation Secretary?

I am responsible for guiding or advising those involved in conflicts in all matters related to the process of mediation and for coordinating the mediation sessions, which are meetings designed to give parties involved an opportunity to talk and resolve their differences

4. What are the advantages of mediation as compared with other tools to resolve conflicts in the workplace?

Mediators have no stake in the matter at hand. They don't make a decision or advocate for either party. They do help the parties communicate effectively and make decisions about how to resolve the matter. What differentiates mediation from other types of conflict resolution methods is that participants have ultimate control and decision-making power over the outcome of the mediation.

5. If an employee has a problem or concern related to work issues ... where should s/he can start, who can s/he talk to first?

An employee with a work-related concern can begin by contacting his/her direct supervisor, the HR department (HR Business Partners), the Office of the Ombudsperson, or the Mediation Secretary. Each of these parties will be able to guide the employee and/or refer them to the appropriate office. These areas are in place to support employees, and none are inappropriate for consultation. Employees should feel free to approach any of them.

6. Are these consultations confidential?

Mediation is confidential, both for the mediator and the participants. If some aspects of agreements need the approval of other parties (i.e. HRD) or include follow up actions which require the involvement of other parties, the information is shared on a need-to-know basis only, and always with the knowledge of the parties.

7. Why is it important for the Bank to have this new resource?

It was important to add Mediation to the conflict resolution tools the Bank offers because it provides for an additional mechanism to address conflict at its earliest stages, and to help resolve it in a more efficient and less costly way for all parties involved. Mediation requires dialogue and therefore can help improve the quality of communication among peers and between employees and their supervisors.

8. If anyone reading this interview has a concern about work-related issues but is hesitant about talking to you, what message do you have for them?

I would encourage them to have an initial meeting with me or someone from my office so we can explain what mediation consists of and its potential benefits. Since it's a voluntary process, they would then decide if they would like to pursue it and whether it would be helpful for the particular issue they are facing. Among the benefits of using mediation is that parties are generally more satisfied with solutions that have been mutually agreed-upon than those imposed by a third party decision-maker (judge, arbiter, or administrator). They also feel more empowered and that they have been heard. Moreover, a mediated agreement that addresses all parties' interests can often preserve a relationship in ways that would not be possible with a win/lose decision-making procedure. These agreements tend to hold better over time, and if a later dispute results, the parties are more likely to utilize a cooperative forum of problem-solving to resolve their differences than to pursue an adversarial approach. Because Mediation teaches people practical problem-solving techniques, I really highly recommend it.