

## Q and A with Ellen Connors, IDB Group's Mediation Secretary

### 1. What is Mediation?

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

### 2. What is your role as a Mediation Secretary?

I am responsible for guiding employees and management on all matters related to the process of mediation, conducting informal mediations, and coordinating mediations with external mediators. Mediation sessions are meetings designed to give parties involved in a labor dispute or conflict the opportunity to discuss, work through solutions and reach agreements to resolve their differences with the help of the mediator.

### 3. What has been your experience at the 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 Bank. I began my career at the Bank in the Legal Department, working on human resources and other institutional matters, to include employee grievances, then worked in Strategic and Development Effectiveness (SPD) and later in the Office of Ethics, where I worked for the 10 years prior to joining the Office of Mediation. I feel that having a thorough knowledge of the Bank, its employees and culture gives me the knowledge, experience and perspective to assist others with problem solving and help find solutions to workplace issues, thereby contributing to a healthier and more productive work environment.

### 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 decisions 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. Mediation also provides a safe and confidential space to seek creative approaches and solutions to problems based on mutual agreement.

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

An employee with a work-related concern can begin by contacting his/her direct supervisor, HR Business Partner, 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 are in place to support employees, and none are inappropriate for consultation. Employees should feel free to approach any of these resources. For more information about all the resources available for employees, they can also take a look at the Interactive Map on Labor Relations, Conflict Resolution, Ethics and Conduct Systems by clicking [here](#).

**6. Are these consultations confidential?**

Mediation is strictly 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. You have been talking about "mediators" and their role, who are the mediators at the Bank?**

This office manages a roster of external professional mediators that employees can choose for any given mediation, and in the language of their choice. For informal mediations, the Mediation Secretary can also serve as mediator, according to the preference of the parties.

**8. Why is it important for the Bank to have this resource?**

It was important to add Mediation to the array of 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.

**9. If anyone reading this 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 others. . 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.