

INTRODUCTION

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) practice consists of processes and techniques which promote collaborative problem solving to assist disagreeing parties in coming to agreement, ideally in a consensus seeking fashion. These processes and techniques widely include mediation, facilitation and negotiation between parties; frequently require convening practices; and practices that include public or community involvement or input. In recent years, ADR processes have taken such a prominent role in public policy resolution that federal agencies have devoted personnel and resources to engage specifically in ADR work.

With the growing use of ADR and collaborative problem solving, there is a growing need to study how basic ADR concepts are evolving and whether on-the-ground implementations are working. While practitioners and academics seek comprehensive approaches to ADR evaluation, field evaluation is progressing in fits and starts. There are few guidelines or agreed-upon criteria on how to evaluate ADR effort, nor on *why* ADR evaluation should be done. However, there seem to be two loose categories of evaluative need, whether or not their import is widely agreed upon.

First, there is need of evaluative evidence that ADR is *working*, though what *working* means is itself a controversy. People who fund or provide political support to ADR projects need proof of the value created ADR projects if they are to continue their support of ADR projects. Parties of interest to public controversies need proof of past success before they become willing to invest their time and patience in lengthy ADR processes. Each of these parties would likely desire slightly different information thus necessitating slightly different evaluative techniques and principles and inquiries.

Second, there is a need to evaluate ADR and collaborative consensus seeking processes in order to find out what the field (and individual projects) is getting right and what it is getting wrong. Because evaluating ADR processes as a whole is ambiguous, and because of the different levels of evaluative need, right and wrong are relative terms. However, they convey the real question regardless of individual feelings on what is right, what is wrong, or if we can be sure. How can we, as a field, improve? Practitioners within the field of ADR do not choose their professions idly.

The William D. Ruckelshaus Center (The Center) is a joint effort of Washington's two research universities and was developed in response to requests from community leaders. Building on the unique strengths of the two institutions, The Center is dedicated to assisting public, private, tribal, non-profit and other community leaders in their efforts to build consensus and resolve conflicts around difficult public policy issues. The mission of the William D. Ruckelshaus Center is to act as a neutral resource for collaborative problem solving in the region. The Center provides expertise to improve the quality and availability of voluntary collaborative approaches for policy development and multi-party dispute resolution.

This paper aims to create an evaluation instrument for the William D. Ruckelshaus Center that can be used on a project-by-project basis to capture lessons learned, foster best practices and continually create process improvements. This instrument is not created with the intention of satisfying funders or political authorizers, however The Center can employ instrument results as The Center sees fit.