



## Volunteering as a Community Mediator

*Updated 04/08/2021*

**Thank you so much for your interest in becoming a Volunteer Community Mediator with the Mediation Center. This document is intended to provide you with information that will answer the mostly commonly asked questions, and give you information about next steps.**

Volunteer mediators help people in our community move through difficult and stressful conflict by having productive conversations that put relationships first. Each year, Volunteer Community Mediators facilitate conversations between hundreds of people. When conflict is resolved peacefully, we all have a safer and more peaceful community.

The model of mediation we practice is radically non-judgmental. We value the self-determination of participants and believe that people know best how to move forward in their own conflicts. Mediators don't tell people what to do, decide who is right or wrong, give advice, share their own experiences, or push people towards agreements. They never make suggestions or make rules about how communication happens during mediation. Instead, they walk participants through a conflict resolution process so the participants can create their own solutions.

To become a Volunteer Community Mediator with the Mediation Center, you must first complete our 6-day training session which includes 40 hours of classroom time. The training is free to those who apply and are accepted to participate. **There are no exceptions to this training requirement, including if you have been previously trained as a mediator.** All our mediators practice in pairs using the same evidence-supported model.

We offer this training about once a year. We do not currently have the next training scheduled. In the meantime, we ask you to complete [this short online survey](#) to let us know that you'd like to be notified when we offer it again. While you may not hear back for several months, be assured that anyone who completes this survey will receive an e-mail when the next training is scheduled and the application process is open. In the meantime, you can sign up for our e-newsletter [here](#).

We generally receive more applications than we have available spots. When this happens, we make decisions based on both fit and the diversity of our current mediator roster. All mediators must live or work in Buncombe, Henderson, Transylvania, or Polk Counties. In general, we seek diversity in the following areas:

- People of color
- Young adults (under 45); minimum age is 16
- Low-income residents
- People without a college degree
- Those who live in public or section-8 housing
- People who are formerly incarcerated and those who have experience being involved in the justice system
- People who are originally from rural areas of Buncombe County.
- People who live in Henderson and Transylvania Counties
- Those who are fluent at a professional level in both English and Spanish.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the most recently training. We will decide about the format for future training when it is scheduled.



### What happens after training?

- After the classroom-based training, you'll start an apprenticeship process of mediating with more experienced volunteer mediators. We are currently doing all mediation on Zoom; we will resume in-person mediation when we are able.
- Volunteers attend in-service training at least every-other-month for as long as they continue to mediate.
- Each month, volunteers agree to hold two, 2-hour blocks on their calendar to mediate.

### Be aware:

- **In order to serve as a volunteer, training participants must be able to demonstrate key mediation skills by the conclusion of the training.** We are committed to providing quality, ethical, and effective mediation services. There are many opportunities to practice mediation skills during the training, and we will give you lots of feedback and support. By the end of the training you need to be able to demonstrate skills at the level of a beginner mediator in order to proceed with becoming a volunteer.
- **Volunteers are not able to select cases or types of cases that they will mediate.** Cases involve a wide variety of community issues including neighborhood conflicts, interpersonal issues between friends, family members, co-workers, misdemeanor criminal cases, and too many other types of conflict to list! You cannot mediate cases for people you know.
- **This is a training to become a volunteer within the community mediation program of the Mediation Center. You cannot represent yourself as a Mediation Center mediator and do your own mediations outside of our program.** There is no legal or confidentiality protection for community mediators operating on their own which creates ethical issues. Of course, you can informally use the skills you learn in many different settings – just not offering mediation as a neutral third party on your own. If you have questions about this, be sure to ask us upfront!

## Frequently Asked Questions

**What kind of mediation is this?** In line with the most current research on mediation of interpersonal conflicts, the style of mediation we use places high value on non-judgment and the self-determination of participants. This means that the mediator manages the mediation process but does not give advice or suggestions. We do not use ground rules in mediation (people are allowed to say whatever they want; however they want to say it). Mediators don't give advice, tell people what to do or decide who is right or wrong. Instead, mediation empowers participants to find solutions that work for them. Also, we always have two mediators mediating together cooperatively. This helps with quality control and gives both mediators support.

**What kinds of conflict will I learn to mediate?** We value mediation and conflict resolution because relationships matter, and that's the focus of our training. While the nature of the conflicts varies widely, the scenarios we use always involve relationships. Participants might be family members, neighbors, co-workers, friends, acquaintances, or even just members of the same community. Training does not focus on disputes that are purely transactional, such as insurance settlements or contract disputes between strangers. We also do not mediate divorces/parenting plans at this time.

**What's the training like?** Well, perhaps most importantly - not boring! Our style is engaging and experiential. Experiential learning - where you try out skills that you may not yet have a solid handle on and then reflect about your experience - can be exciting, interesting, and sometimes frustrating. We will build your mediation



skills step by step while you try them out and reflect along the way. We use discussion, handouts, games, role-plays, videos, music, and other approaches to keep things moving.

**What will we do during the training? What's the agenda?** The training starts on the first day with development of mediator-specific listening skills, exploring the values of mediation, discussion of the causes of conflicts, various approaches to conflict resolution, and the role of the mediator. In the afternoon, we start to role-play the first step of the mediation process which is when the mediator gives an introduction of sorts, explains the process, and answers questions. We spend a LOT of time practicing mediator-specific listening skills that enable you to work on understanding what's most important to the participants without judgment, advice, suggestions. The rest of the training involves continued skills development and many hours of role-play practice and feedback. Participants learn to analyze their own practice and adherence to the model, give feedback to peers, and receive feedback from the trainer. There is little lecture.

**Is there anything I should read beforehand? How do I prepare?** Our training is largely experiential, so we don't ask participants to come prepared with background information. There are many models of mediation that are used across the country and there are certainly books about how to mediate, but the variation in models may prove more confusing than helpful.

**Do I need to have a certain educational or professional background to participate?** Absolutely not. Training participants are diverse and come from a variety of backgrounds. Participants share a desire to make our community a safer and more peaceful place for everyone. Since mediators don't give advice or make decisions about how conflicts should be resolved, having subject-specific knowledge or expertise is not required - and can sometimes even get in the way. That said, solid listening skills, and open mind, a willingness to try out new skills, openness to being non-judgmental, and respect for others all give a useful foundation for mediation skills.

**How often do you offer the training?** Generally, once a year or every-other year.

**The training isn't coming up soon. Can I volunteer in a different way in the meantime?** Thank you for offering. Due to the additional demands of working in the COVID-19 environment and the constant need to adapt to change, we are focused on supporting our current volunteer mediators and are limited as far as other volunteer opportunities. However, feel free to let us know that you're open to other opportunities and we will keep you in mind if other opportunities arise.

**If I have prior mediator training, do I still have to do your training?** Yes. Mediation models vary and to ensure the highest quality services, we require that everyone complete our training.

**Still have questions?** E-mail [laurahj@mediatewnc.org](mailto:laurahj@mediatewnc.org) and we will get back to you ASAP.