

Effective Online Mediation Training for Public Policy and Large Group Mediators

Public Policy and Large Group Mediation Context

Before we answer questions about what is effective for online training of public policy and large group mediators, it is important to note a few unique aspects of our field; for example...

- The numbers of parties and issues (and degree of technicality),
 - Parallel public processes which might impact the conflict,
 - Culture is ALWAYS a piece of this work and the cross-cultural aspects need to be considered as we design/adapt our approach and processes,
 - Confidentiality and questions of open public vs closed private sessions (and if open, allowing different levels of participants to be engaged in a webinar-type format),
 - Nuances of group psychology,
 - Process tools and design, and
 - 'who else needs to be included' for agreement/plan ratification
-are issues that mediators in this field routinely must handle.

In addition, we help parties assess whether the conflict is formed enough to be a "mediation" or are we upstream of the conflict and, therefore, should be designing and facilitating a dialogue to avoid what might otherwise turn into a full blown dispute?

→ As such, these additional issues need to be addressed in PP/Large Group mediation trainings, whether in person OR online.

Those who attend our trainings tend to be people who:

- a) have already had an intro mediation training and need to learn more about the way public processes work (and, therefore, want to learn how to mediate disputes that come from or run parallel to those public processes); or
- b) are already working in the public sector environment and want to learn how better to manage public disputes, either as a mediator or with added mediator-like skills (and, want to learn additional skills to support that work, including how to be a good participant/public policy negotiator).

We use different phases for this work, as well:

1. Conflict Assessment and Process Design
2. Convening
3. Communication, Information Sharing & Negotiation
4. Agreement & Ratification
5. Implementation (yes, we help the parties to implement when needed!)

Other differences:

- Much of our work/time is spent designing, coaching, and preparing multiple groups for joint sessions with larger groups.
- We help parties name the PURPOSE of the effort so we can all head toward that goal.
- Who is present, what is discussed, and how we do this work are much less clear at the outset than in other mediation work.
- Equity shows up regularly and in challenging ways
 - As mediators, we must do all we can to assure that impacted voices have a seat at the table, have capacity to make decisions about the issues and questions in front of the entire group, and have/gain power to be meaningful participants at the table.

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- Public conflicts often have trauma at their stem and must be handled sensitively (for and with the parties AND for/with the mediators);
- More and more, we are seeing people in representative costumes, and sometimes bearing arms.

To what extent has Public Policy and large group mediation training moved online? How well has this worked? Benefits? Challenges?

- In the university setting, all classes have moved online or were created to be online.
 - A few EPP courses have been taught online for many years now and have lessons to TEACH us!
- PP ADR firms are revamping their training, taking their original 2-5 full-day, in person training sessions and breaking them into more days, with a shorter duration for each session. (see below about suggested effective practices regarding time/ needs)
- Benefits: online training can reach more diverse individuals and communities who are more able to attend due to access and time commitments of participation and no travel costs. This is enhanced when asynchronous modules are created and integrated for viewing 'out of class' time.
- Challenges: The more people there are to manage on the screen adds to an already complex process; as a result, our simulations require more time than the average mediation training...and that is challenging in the online environment, e.g.:
 - role play interest groups need additional time to negotiate how they will act/work together,
 - mediators need to juggle multiple caucus rooms,
 - providing enough role play opportunities for all trainees to have time in the mediator role,
 - helping participants be good negotiators for their interest group.

What are the most effective ways to train public policy/large group mediators online generally?

- Providing trainees with templates for online discussion protocols for large groups/public policy settings;
 - Some form of meeting etiquette guidance is critical in these cases and must be a clear part of the training;
- Making sure everyone is familiar with and comfortable in the platform in which we are training;
 - Use a graphics slide to be sure they SEE and HEAR the instructions (just as we do with our cases);
- Providing real-world examples and stories of the types of cases we do;
- SHOWING an example (by serving as the mediator in a simulation with all the trainees in role or using a video) of an effective large group mediation session
 - Do NOT rely on trainees teaching themselves in this arena—they may never have seen a public or large group conflict handled well!;
- Making time/space for all participants to serve and DO as mediators and stakeholders.
 - Debrief role plays asking to trainees to explore what they learned both as the mediator AND as stakeholders;
- Teaching students and clients how to place their camera to maximize engagement with each other and, thereby, their future parties.

What new issues exist in the online public policy mediation and training environment?

- Fluency in the platform being used (zoom, webex, GoTo etc.)

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- Camera positioning for trainer/mediator AND helping participants do the same so they are looking at each other, not at a separate screen away from the participants.
- Understanding the complexity of facilitating engaged and engaging discussions online amongst multi-parties, including use of graphics, digital whiteboards, and online group brainstorm.
 - Providing tips for how to use various online platforms for multiple participants that maximize engagement;
- The need to verbalize the steps you are taking to move parties through the online ecosystem of tools that help them to be/stay engaged (because they will need to do this themselves);
- Understanding the complexity of facilitating engaged and engaging discussions online amongst multi-parties, including use of graphics, digital whiteboards, and online group brainstorm;
- Effective use of breakout rooms for caucus AND “in the hallway/bathroom/breaks” discussions (where we all know so much gets accomplished!);
 - Explicit time for replicates of breaking bread together, hallway breaks/discussions, and time before and after for small talk are needed in these cases.
- Effective use of zoom for individual caucuses and developing agreements (ground rules, draft and final agreements) online...together;
- Enhanced capacity reading faces and micro-expressions...cuz that’s all we’ve got!
- Being able to help all participants get on the modality (e.g. three dots to rename)
- Ask all participants to add to their name ‘designators’ for the role they are serving or playing (e.g., F-facilitator, M-member, S-staff, O-observer, and CM-community member).

How do we best accomplish public policy/large group role play exercises online?

- Synchronous simulations are most effective for ‘training’ mediators how to do the work in real time (moving parties from room to room, using different tools such as whiteboard, etc.);
 - Extra time is needed for these training sessions to do realistic simulated activities and practice.
 - These cases take a long time, simulation time needs to be extended to get a realistic sense of how they might progress in real life.
- Use asynchronous lecturables to cover foundational issues
 - And longer synchronous sessions for simulations/application/demonstration
- Use different approaches/tools for allowing all trainees to ‘facilitate’ or be engaged. Combine micro and macro skills such as:
 - Fishbowl – allows all to watch/learn together;
 - Facilitate “challenging moments” (in fishbowl, triad or dyad) – use chat to send secret instructions which create a tougher dynamic for the facilitators;
 - Dyads: all sorts of active listening possibilities such as:
 - Actively listen to challenging moments one-on-one - one person shares a challenge in their life, other only asks questions to let them know they have been heard;
 - Pet Peeve Rant - one person rants, the other reframes to interests.
 - Yes, and...exercise which starts with ‘no, because’, moves to ‘yes, but...’, then yes, and... to let everyone really experience the difference of those three modes of thinking/experiencing.
 - Trainer - send Chat notes that support the mediator/facilitator when they do something well;
 - Use multiple or consider one role-play that extends through the entire training, in order to focus on different phases with different mediators for each; it is a puzzle to get everyone in front of the group without having to learn multiple new fact patterns.

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- Use one 4-hour role play of a group that is 'self-facilitating': rotate mediators for each stage of a single meeting agenda;
- Use every breakout room discussion as a practice session: remind them to assign a facilitator, scribe, timekeeper; and reporter;
- 'Public Policy Improv': give 3-4 sentences of the 'conflict'...send off to create a skit and bring back to do in the group;
- Different shorter sims (specific purpose of learning for each simulation), to support rotating mediators frequently;
- 'Process Analysis': here's the case, here are the parties, here's some background for consideration: what process would you advise your client to use? Why? (share and then group debrief)

How do we best accomplish interactivity in online mediation training? How can we best train new online mediation technical capacities?

- Use the tech capacities and say what and how you are using them as a 'skill teaching moment';
- Add more time to the training to specifically focus on the tools available for online PP/LG work
 - Whiteboard
 - Polls
 - Google docs
 - Breakout rooms
 - Chat
 - Moving the participants/spotlighting
 - Other apps noted below
- Use the breakout room prompts to give instructions instead of calling the group back.
- Bring the group back quickly for a whole group quick debrief, then send them back to rooms...

What are useful approaches and apps to use in online mediation training?

- See above AND...
- Session protocols/etiquette
- Close Caption
- MURAL
- MentiMeter
- Flipboard
- Mind Node
- Idea Flip
- Miro (sticky notes)
- Mapping: Google maps, Maptionnaire
- <https://procreate.art/>
- <https://www.interprefy.com/>

To what extent do you think that mastering online mediation will be needed even once the pandemic passes?

- We anticipate that moving between face-to-face to online will be needed for many years to come. As a result, the need to learn mastery in these skills will be vital...for trainers and mediators.
- Online training provides an opportunity to have more people attend these trainings than before, especially people who couldn't access face-to-face trainings for a variety of reasons (e.g. child care, distance, ability, diminished capacity to travel, etc.)

What changes have taken place for our sector's mediation services with the onset of the Covid-19 Pandemic?

- Creation of online tools and process protocols for those participating.

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- Finding new and creative ways to do our work so that all who need to participate may do so in an engaged and engaging way.
- Newer mediators have an opportunity to observe actual large group mediation sessions because of the online capabilities.
- Mediators can partner with others in different areas of the country at no added travel cost to the parties.
- *More to come!*

How can mediation trainees be best assisted to get mediation practice experience online?

- Establish a searchable list (such as the USIECR roster created many moons ago) for finding and setting up apprenticeship and mentorship opportunities with senior practitioners.
- Ask mediators, who are now working online, to allow you to attend an online session (and even ask to facilitate a small group breakout, if there is one!)

Given all that we have learned and now anticipate, what changes and developments do we recommend for future training of public policy and large group mediators?

- Ask Zoom (and others) to create a thumbs down and thumb sideways icon (not just thumbs up!).
 - Add color to make these easier to see and count quickly for consensus checks (e.g. green, yellow and red)
- Ask Zoom to add an 'auto save' of white board, to enhance its reliable use as a brainstorming tool.
- Hold an 'online tech expo' for PP mediators to learn and try a variety of different tools together that can be used in the large group setting.
- Note: this subgroup plans to compile a 'To achieve this in your session, try this tool/approach' for our report.
- *To be further developed as we continue to meet!*

NOTE: The Public Policy and Large Group Subgroup is convened and reported on by Donna Silverberg and the following mediators/trainers have been engaged in sharing ideas, approaches, and thoughtful discussion:

Alana Knaster, Annie Kilburg Smith, Betsy Daniels, Janet Chance, Ken Cloke, Kristen Wright, Laurel Singer, Tahnee Robertson, Toby Berkman, and Winter Wheeler.

In addition to posting at the Mediate.com Friday Forum and website, we also plan to share this initial draft with the University Network for Collaborative Governance, the Environment and Public Policy Section of ACR and LEO (Leaders of Environmental conflict resolution Organizations) for their input and ideas.