

How The Tennessee Vision for Mediation was Created

Economic downturns intensify pre-existing conflicts in families, businesses, organizations and even churches. The current troubles are no exception, and by the summer of 2009 Tennessee mediators were facing a crisis: demand for mediation services was growing rapidly, but money and resources were shrinking for both non-profit and private practice providers.

Perhaps because mediation is confidential it is invisible to many people. Civic, governmental and business leaders seemed unaware that they stood to lose services for thousands of Tennesseans each year. Services that help people deal with conflict in ways that encourage healing and prevent dangerous escalation while relieving pressure on overcrowded court dockets.

The mediation community chose to see this situation as an opportunity for reflection. They gathered across the state, over the web and in person, and challenged themselves to answer three tough questions:

WHY: *Why is it so important to make mediation and conflict management tools available to people in Tennessee?*

WHAT: *What is a Vision for Mediation that the whole state could get behind?*

HOW: *How could this Vision become a reality? How could the mediators themselves take action and inspire others to follow?*

This document is a report of their accomplishments after just four months: They have created The Tennessee Vision on Mediation, each word agreed to by consensus. They have identified eight Objectives; specified twenty-nine concrete Action Steps that will be needed to make the Vision a reality; and started work on most of the Action Steps.

A skeptic might wonder, "What motivates these people?" I asked that same question of each participant in our meetings; the answers they gave me, some of which are reprinted on the next page, spoke volumes. I also asked each person to think of a single phrase that best expressed why they care so deeply about this Vision; the words they chose make up the background on this and other pages of the report.

Tennessee already owes a debt of gratitude to its community of dedicated and skilled mediators. This report is a promise from them to do even more. But it is also an invitation to you. Will you help MAKE IT REAL?

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