

RECEIVED

Oct 02 2026

SC Court of Appeals

THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
In The Court of Appeals

APPEAL FROM CHARLESTON COUNTY
Court of Common Pleas

Deadra L. Jefferson, Circuit Court Judge

Appellate Case No. 2026-000058

Frank Perrelli, Jr., Appellant,

v.

Vacation Inspirations, Destination Travel, LLC, Joseph Shirley, Randy Gardner, and Jeffrey
Pumilia Respondents,

AND

Peter Skoler and Patricia Skoler, Appellants,

v.

Vacation Inspirations, Destination Travel, LLC, Joseph Shirley, Randy Gardner, and Jeffrey
Pumilia Respondents.

RECORD ON APPEAL – Volume III

s/David W. Wolf
David W. Wolf (S.C. Bar No. 17041)
DAVID W. WOLF, P.A.
748-D St. Andrews Boulevard
Charleston, South Carolina 29407
Tel. (843) 853-9000
Fax (843) 853-9002
Email: david@wolflaw.com

s/Abby Edwards Saunders

Abby Edwards Saunders (S.C. Bar No. 17234)
Law Office of Abigail Edwards Saunders, LLC
1021 Sea Mountain Highway, Suite B2
North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina 29582
Tel. (843) 491-9770
Fax (843) 491-9760
Email: abigail@abbysaunderslaw.com

Attorneys for Appellants

Other Counsel of Record:

John A. Massalon (SC Bar #10279)
Carris Steichen Land (SC Bar #104264)
Wills, Massalon & Allen LLC
Post Office Box 859
Charleston, South Carolina 29402
Tel. (843) 727-1144
jmassalon@wmalawfirm.net
cland@wmalawfirm.net

Jeffrey Wayne Buncher, Jr. (SC Bar #78890)
Uricchio Howe Krell Jacobson
Toporek Theos & Keith, PA
Post Office Box 399
Charleston, SC 29402
Tel. (843) 723-7491
jeff@uricchio.com

Attorneys for Respondents

Consumer Arbitration Rules



AMERICAN ARBITRATION ASSOCIATION®

Available online at adr.org/consumer

Rules Amended and Effective September 1, 2014

Cost of Arbitration Effective February 21, 2018

Table of Contents

Consumer Arbitration Rules 6

Introduction 6

 About the AAA 6

 The Arbitrator 7

 The AAA's Consumer Arbitration Rules 7

 Availability of Mediation through Mediation.org 7

 Administrative Fees 7

 Arbitrator's Fees 8

 Notification 8

Filing a Case and Initial AAA Administrative Steps 9

 R-1. Applicability (When the AAA Applies These Rules) 9

 R-2. Starting Arbitration under an Arbitration Agreement in a Contract 11

 R-3. Agreement to Arbitrate When There is No AAA Arbitration Clause 13

 R-4. AAA Administrative Fees 13

 R-5. Neutral Arbitrator's Compensation 14

 R-6. Depositing Neutral Arbitrator's Compensation with the AAA 14

 R-7. Expenses 14

 R-8. Changes of Claim 14

 R-9. Small Claims Option for the Parties 15

 R-10. Administrative Conference with the AAA 15

 R-11. Fixing of Locale (the city, county, state, territory and/or country where the arbitration will take place) 15

 R-12. Business Notification and Publicly-Accessible Consumer Clause Registry 16

 R-13. AAA and Delegation of Duties 17

 R-14. Jurisdiction 17

Appointing the Arbitrator 18

 R-15. National Roster of Arbitrators 18

 R-16. Appointment from National Roster 18

 R-17. Number of Arbitrators 18

 R-18. Disclosure 18

 R-19. Disqualification of Arbitrator 19

 R-20. Vacancies 19

Pre-Hearing Preparation 20

R-21. Preliminary Management Hearing with the Arbitrator 20

R-22. Exchange of Information between the Parties 20

R-23. Enforcement Powers of the Arbitrator 20

R-24. Written Motions (except for Dispositive Motions—see R-33) 21

R-25. Representation of a Party 21

R-26. Setting the Date, Time, and Place (the physical site of the hearing within the designated locale) of Hearing 22

R-27. Written Record of Hearing 22

R-28. Interpreters 22

R-29. Documents-Only Procedure 23

Hearing Procedures 24

R-30. Attendance at Hearings 24

R-31. Oaths 24

R-32. Conduct of Proceedings 24

R-33. Dispositive Motions 25

R-34. Evidence 25

R-35. Evidence by Affidavit and Post-Hearing Filing of Documents or Other Evidence 25

R-36. Inspection or Investigation 25

R-37. Interim Measures (a preliminary decision made by the arbitrator involving part or all of the issue(s) in dispute in the arbitration) 26

R-38. Postponements 26

R-39. Arbitration in the Absence of a Party or Representative 26

Conclusion of the Hearing 27

R-40. Closing of Hearing 27

R-41. Reopening of Hearing 27

R-42. Time of Award 27

R-43. Form of Award 27

R-44. Scope of Award 28

R-45. Award upon Settlement 28

R-46. Delivery of Award to Parties 28

R-47. Modification of Award for Clerical, Typographical, or Mathematical Errors 29

Post Hearing 30

 R-48. Release of Documents for Judicial Proceedings. 30

 R-49. Applications to Court and Exclusion of Liability. 30

General Procedural Rules 31

 R-50. Waiver of Rules. 31

 R-51. Extensions of Time 31

 R-52. Serving of Notice and AAA and Arbitrator Communications 31

 R-53. Interpretation and Application of Rules. 32

 R-54. Remedies for Nonpayment. 32

 R-55. Declining or Ceasing Arbitration 32

Costs of Arbitration 33

 (i) Filing Fees 33

 (ii) Neutral Arbitrator’s Compensation. 34

 (iii) AAA Filing Fees Refund Schedule and Arbitrator Compensation Cancellation
 Policy 34

 (iv) Hearing Fees 35

 (v) Hearing Room Rental 35

 (vi) Abeyance Fee 35

 (vii) Expenses 36

 (viii) Consumer Clause Review and Registry Fee 36

 (ix) Reallocation of Arbitrator Compensation, AAA Administrative Fees and Certain
 Expenses 36

Procedures for the Resolution of Disputes through Document Submission 37

 D-1. Applicability. 37

 D-2. Preliminary Management Hearing. 37

 D-3. Removal from the Procedures 37

 D-4. Time of Award 38

Glossary of Terms 39

Administrator 39

ADR Agreement 39

ADR Process. 39

ADR Program. 39

Arbitration 39

Arbitration Agreement 40

Arbitrator 40

Case Administrator 40

Claimant 40

Demand for Arbitration (also referred to as "Demand")..... 40

Documents-Only Arbitration 41

Independent ADR Institution 41

In-Person Hearing 41

Mediation 41

Neutral 41

Party 41

Parties..... 42

Opposing Party 42

Respondent 42

Telephone Hearing 42

Consumer Arbitration Rules



Introduction

Millions of consumer purchases take place each year. Occasionally, these transactions lead to disagreements between consumers and businesses. These disputes can be resolved by arbitration. Arbitration is usually faster and cheaper than going to court.

The American Arbitration Association® (“AAA®,” “the Association”) applies the *Consumer Arbitration Rules* (“Rules”) to arbitration clauses in agreements between individual consumers and businesses where the business has a standardized, systematic application of arbitration clauses with customers and where the terms and conditions of the purchase of standardized, consumable goods or services are non-negotiable or primarily non-negotiable in most or all of its terms, conditions, features, or choices. The product or service must be for personal or household use. The AAA has the discretion to apply or not to apply the *Consumer Arbitration Rule*, and the parties are able to bring any disputes concerning the application or non-application of the Rules to the attention of the arbitrator. Consumers and businesses are permitted to seek relief in a small claims court for disputes or claims within the scope of the small claims court’s jurisdiction. These Rules were drafted and designed to be consistent with the minimum due process principles of the *Consumer Due Process Protocol*.

About the AAA

The administrator’s role is to manage the administrative aspects of the arbitration, such as the appointment of the arbitrator, preliminary decisions about where hearings might take place, and handling the fees associated with the arbitration. As administrator, however, the AAA does not decide the merits of a case or make any rulings on issues such as what documents must be shared with each side. Because the AAA’s role is only administrative, the AAA cannot overrule or change an arbitrator’s decisions or rulings. The administrator will comply with any court orders issued from litigation involving the parties to the dispute.

The American Arbitration Association, founded in 1926, is a neutral, independent, and private not-for-profit organization. We offer a broad range of conflict management services to businesses, organizations, and individuals. We also provide education, training, and publications focused on methods for settling disputes out of court.

The Arbitrator

Except where the parties to a case reach their own settlement, the arbitrator will make the final, binding decision called the Award on the dispute and render it in writing. The Arbitrator makes all the procedural decisions on a case not made by the Administrator or not decided jointly by the parties. The arbitrator may grant any remedy, relief, or outcome that the parties could have received in court, including awards of attorney's fees and costs, in accordance with the law or laws that apply to the case.

Arbitrators are neutral and independent decision makers who are not employees of the AAA. Once appointed to a case, an arbitrator may not be removed by one party without the other party's consent or unless the Administrator determines an arbitrator should be removed and replaced by another arbitrator chosen by the Administrator in a manner described in these Rules.

The AAA's Consumer Arbitration Rules

The AAA has developed the *Consumer Arbitration Rules* for consumers and businesses that want to have their disagreements resolved through arbitration.

Availability of Mediation through Mediation.org

Mediation in consumer disputes is also available to help parties resolve their disputes. Parties interested in participating in mediation may find a mediator through **www.mediation.org**.

Administrative Fees

The Association charges a fee for its services under these Rules. A fee schedule is included at the end of these Rules in the Costs of Arbitration section.

Arbitrator's Fees

Arbitrators are paid for the time they spend resolving disputes. The business makes deposits as outlined in the fee schedule in the Costs of Arbitration section of these Rules. Unused deposits are refunded at the end of the case.

Notification

A business intending to incorporate these Rules or to refer to the dispute resolution services of the AAA in a consumer alternative dispute resolution ("ADR") plan should, at least 30 days prior to the planned effective date of the program,

- notify the Association of its intention to do so, and
- provide the Association with a copy of the consumer dispute resolution plan.

If a business does not comply with this requirement, the Association reserves the right to withhold its administrative services. For more information, please see R-12 below.

Filing a Case and Initial AAA Administrative Steps

R-1. Applicability (When the AAA Applies These Rules)

- (a) The parties shall have made these *Consumer Arbitration Rules* ("Rules") a part of their arbitration agreement whenever they have provided for arbitration by the American Arbitration Association ("AAA"), and
- 1) have specified that these *Consumer Arbitration Rules* shall apply;
 - 2) have specified that the *Supplementary Procedures for Consumer-Related Disputes* shall apply, which have been amended and renamed the *Consumer Arbitration Rules*;
 - 3) the arbitration agreement is contained within a consumer agreement, as defined below, that does not specify a particular set of rules; or
 - 4) the arbitration agreement is contained within a consumer agreement, as defined below, that specifies a particular set of rules other than the *Consumer Arbitration Rules*.

When parties have provided for the AAA's rules or AAA administration as part of their consumer agreement, they shall be deemed to have agreed that the application of the AAA's rules and AAA administration of the consumer arbitration shall be an essential term of their consumer agreement.

The AAA defines a consumer agreement as an agreement between an individual consumer and a business where the business has a standardized, systematic application of arbitration clauses with customers and where the terms and conditions of the purchase of standardized, consumable goods or services are non-negotiable or primarily non-negotiable in most or all of its terms, conditions, features, or choices. The product or service must be for personal or household use.

Examples of contracts that typically meet the criteria for application of these Rules, if the contract is for personal or household goods or services and has an arbitration provision, include, but are not limited to the following:

- Credit card agreements
- Telecommunications (cell phone, ISP, cable TV) agreements
- Leases (residential, automobile)
- Automobile and manufactured home purchase contracts
- Finance agreements (car loans, mortgages, bank accounts)
- Home inspection contracts
- Pest control services

- Moving and storage contracts
- Warranties (home, automobile, product)
- Legal funding
- Health and fitness club membership agreements
- Travel services
- Insurance policies
- Private school enrollment agreements

Examples of contracts that typically do not meet the criteria for application of these Rules, should the contract contain an arbitration provision, include, but are not limited to the following:

- Home construction and remodeling contracts
- Real estate purchase and sale agreements
- Condominium or homeowner association by-laws
- Business insurance policies (including crop insurance)
- Commercial loan and lease agreements
- Commercial guaranty agreements

- (b) When parties agree to arbitrate under these Rules, or when they provide for arbitration by the AAA and an arbitration is initiated under these Rules, they thereby authorize the AAA to administer the arbitration. The authority and duties of the AAA are prescribed in the agreement of the parties and in these Rules and may be carried out through such of the AAA's representatives as it may direct. The AAA may, in its discretion, assign the administration of an arbitration to any of its offices. Arbitrations administered under these Rules shall only be administered by the AAA or by an individual or organization authorized by the AAA to do so.
- (c) The consumer and the business may agree to change these Rules. If they agree to change the Rules, they must agree in writing. If the consumer and the business want to change these Rules after the appointment of the arbitrator, any changes may be made only with the approval of the arbitrator.
- (d) The AAA administers consumer disputes that meet the due process standards contained in the *Consumer Due Process Protocol* and the *Consumer Arbitration Rules*. The AAA will accept cases after the AAA reviews the parties' arbitration agreement and if the AAA determines the agreement substantially and materially complies with the due process standards of these Rules and the *Consumer Due Process Protocol*. Should the AAA decline to administer an arbitration, either party may choose to submit its dispute to the appropriate court for resolution.

- (e) The AAA has the initial authority to apply or not to apply the *Consumer Arbitration Rules*. If either the consumer or the business disagrees with the AAA's decision, the objecting party must submit the objection by the due date for filing an answer to the demand for arbitration. If an objection is filed, the arbitrator shall have the authority to make the final decision on which AAA rules will apply.
- (f) If, within 30 days after the AAA's commencement of administration, a party seeks judicial intervention with respect to a pending arbitration and provides the AAA with documentation that judicial intervention has been sought, the AAA will suspend administration for 30 days to permit the party to obtain a stay of arbitration from the court.
- (g) Where no disclosed claims or counterclaims exceed \$25,000, the dispute shall be resolved by the submission of documents only/desk arbitration (see R-29 and the *Procedures for the Resolution of Disputes through Document Submission* below). Any party, however, may ask for a hearing. The arbitrator also may decide that a hearing is necessary.

R-2. Starting Arbitration under an Arbitration Agreement in a Contract

- (a) Arbitration filed under an arbitration agreement naming the AAA shall be started in the following manner:
 - (1) The party who starts the arbitration (referred to as the "claimant" throughout the arbitration) must contact, in writing, the party that the case is filed against (referred to as the "respondent" throughout the arbitration) that it wishes to arbitrate a dispute. This written contact is referred to as the Demand for Arbitration ("Demand"). The Demand must do the following:
 - Briefly explain the dispute
 - List the names and addresses of the consumer and the business, and, if known, the names of any representatives of the consumer and the business
 - Specify the amount of money in dispute, if applicable
 - Identify the requested location for the hearing if an in-person hearing is requested
 - State what the claimant wants
 - (2) The claimant must also send one copy of the Demand to the AAA at the same time the demand is sent to the respondent. When sending a Demand to the AAA, the claimant must also send the following:
 - A copy of the arbitration agreement contained in the contract and/or agreement and/or purchase document
 - The proper filing fee; the amount of the filing fee can be found in the Costs of Arbitration section at the end of these Rules.

(3) If the arbitration is pursuant to a court order, the claimant must send one copy of the Demand to the AAA at the same time the Demand is sent to the respondent. When sending a demand to the AAA, the claimant must also send the following:

- A copy of the court order
- A copy of the arbitration agreement contained in the contract and/or agreement and/or purchase document
- The proper filing fee

The filing fee must be paid before a matter is considered properly filed. If the court order directs that a specific party is responsible for the filing fee, it is the responsibility of the filing party either to make such payment to the AAA and seek reimbursement as directed in the court order or to make other such arrangements so that the filing fee is submitted to the AAA with the Demand.

The claimant may file by mail. The mailing address of the AAA's Case Filing Services is:

American Arbitration Association
Case Filing Services
1101 Laurel Oak Road, Suite 100
Voorhees, NJ 08043

Or, the claimant may file online using AAA WebFile: <https://www.adr.org>

Or, the claimant may file at any of the AAA's offices.

- (b)** The AAA will send a written notice letting the consumer and the business know the Demand for Arbitration has been received.
- (c)** The respondent may submit a written response to the Demand, known as an "answer," which describes how the respondent responds to the claimant's claim. The answer must be sent to the AAA within 14 calendar days after the date the AAA notifies the parties that the Demand for Arbitration was received and all filing requirements were met. The answer must be
- in writing,
 - sent to the AAA, and
 - sent to the claimant at the same time.
- (d)** The respondent may also file a counterclaim, which is the respondent filing a Demand against the claimant. If the respondent has a counterclaim, the counterclaim must briefly explain the dispute, specify the amount of money involved, and state what the respondent wants.

- (e) If no answer is filed within 14 calendar days, the AAA will assume that the respondent does not agree with the claim filed by the claimant. The case will move forward after 14 days regardless of whether an answer is filed.
- (f) When sending a Demand or an answer, the consumer and the business are encouraged to provide enough details to make the dispute clear to the arbitrator.

R-3. Agreement to Arbitrate When There is No AAA Arbitration Clause

If the consumer and business do not have an arbitration agreement or their arbitration agreement does not name the AAA, the parties may agree to have the AAA arbitrate their dispute. To start the arbitration, the parties must send the AAA a submission agreement, which is an agreement to arbitrate their case with the AAA, signed by the consumer and the business (email communications between all parties to a dispute reflecting an agreement to arbitrate also is acceptable). The submission agreement must

- be in writing (electronic communication is acceptable);
- be signed by both parties;
- briefly explain the dispute;
- list the names and addresses of the consumer and the business;
- specify the amount of money involved;
- specify the requested location for the hearing if an in-person hearing is requested; and
- state the solution sought.

The parties should send one copy of the submission agreement to the AAA. They must also send the proper filing fees. A fee schedule can be found in the Costs of Arbitration section at the end of these Rules.

R-4. AAA Administrative Fees

As a not-for-profit organization, the AAA charges fees to compensate it for the cost of providing administrative services. The fee schedule in effect when the case is filed shall apply for all fees charged during the administration of the case. The AAA may, in the event of the consumer's extreme hardship, defer or reduce the consumer's administrative fees.

AAA fees shall be paid in accordance with the Costs of Arbitration section found at the end of these Rules.

R-5. Neutral Arbitrator's Compensation

- (a) Arbitrators serving under these Rules shall be compensated at a rate established by the AAA.
- (b) Any arrangement for the compensation of an arbitrator shall be made through the AAA and not directly between the parties and the arbitrator.
- (c) Arbitrator compensation shall be paid in accordance with the Costs of Arbitration section found at the end of these Rules.

R-6. Depositing Neutral Arbitrator's Compensation with the AAA

The AAA may require the parties to deposit in advance of any hearings such sums of money as it decides are necessary to cover the expense of the arbitration, including the arbitrator's fee, and shall render an accounting to the parties and return any unused money at the conclusion of the case.

R-7. Expenses

Unless otherwise agreed by the parties or as provided under applicable law, the expenses of witnesses for either side shall be borne by the party producing such witnesses.

All expenses of the arbitrator, including required travel and other expenses, and any AAA expenses, as well as the costs relating to proof and witnesses produced at the direction of the arbitrator, shall be borne in accordance with the Costs of Arbitration section found at the end of these Rules.

R-8. Changes of Claim

Once a Demand has been filed, any new claims or counterclaims, or changes to the claim or counterclaim, must be made in writing and sent to the AAA. The party making the new or different claim or counterclaim shall send a copy to the opposing party. As with the original Demand or counterclaim, a party shall have 14 calendar days from the date the AAA notifies the parties it received the new or different claim or counterclaim to file an answering statement with the AAA.

If an arbitrator has already been appointed, a new or different claim or counterclaim may only be considered if the arbitrator allows it.

R-9. Small Claims Option for the Parties

If a party's claim is within the jurisdiction of a small claims court, either party may choose to take the claim to that court instead of arbitration as follows:

- (a) The parties may take their claims to small claims court without first filing with the AAA.
- (b) After a case is filed with the AAA, but before the arbitrator is formally appointed to the case by the AAA, a party can send a written notice to the opposing party and the AAA that it wants the case decided by a small claims court. After receiving this notice, the AAA will administratively close the case.
- (c) After the arbitrator is appointed, if a party wants to take the case to small claims court and notifies the opposing party and the AAA, it is up to the arbitrator to determine if the case should be decided in arbitration or if the arbitration case should be closed and the dispute decided in small claims court.

R-10. Administrative Conference with the AAA

At the request of any party or if the AAA should so decide, the AAA may have a telephone conference with the parties and/or their representatives. The conference may address issues such as arbitrator selection, the possibility of a mediated settlement, exchange of information before the hearing, timing of the hearing, the type of hearing that will be held, and other administrative matters.

R-11. Fixing of Locale (the city, county, state, territory and/or country where the arbitration will take place)

If an in-person hearing is to be held and if the parties do not agree to the locale where the hearing is to be held, the AAA initially will determine the locale of the arbitration. If a party does not agree with the AAA's decision, that party can ask the arbitrator, once appointed, to make a final determination. The locale determination will be made after considering the positions of the parties, the circumstances of the parties and the dispute, and the *Consumer Due Process Protocol*.

R-12. Business Notification and Publicly-Accessible Consumer Clause Registry

Beginning September 1, 2014, a business that provides for or intends to provide for these Rules or another set of AAA Rules in a consumer contract (as defined in R-1) should

1. notify the AAA of the existence of such a consumer contract or of its intention to do so at least 30 days before the planned effective date of the contract.
2. provide the AAA a copy of the arbitration agreement.

Upon receiving the arbitration agreement, the AAA will review the agreement for material compliance with due process standards contained in the *Consumer Due Process Protocol* and the *Consumer Arbitration Rules* (see Rule 1(d)). There is a nonrefundable fee to conduct this initial review and maintain a publicly-available clause registry, which is detailed in the Costs of Arbitration section found at the end of these Rules. Any subsequent changes, additions, deletions, or amendments to a currently-registered arbitration agreement must be resubmitted for review and a review fee will be assessed at that time. The AAA will decline to administer consumer arbitrations arising out of that arbitration agreement where the business fails to pay the review fee.

If a business does not submit its arbitration agreement for review and a consumer arbitration then is filed with the AAA, the AAA will conduct an expedited review at that time. Along with any other filing fees that are owed for that case, the business also will be responsible for paying the nonrefundable review and Registry fee (including any fee for expedited review at the time of filing) for this initial review, which is detailed in the Costs of Arbitration section found at the end of these Rules. The AAA will decline to administer consumer arbitrations arising out of that arbitration agreement if the business declines to pay the review and Registry fee.

After the AAA reviews the submitted consumer clause, receives the annual consumer registry fee, and determines it will administer consumer-related disputes filed pursuant to the consumer clause, the business will be included on the publicly-accessible Consumer Clause Registry. This Consumer Clause Registry maintained by the AAA will contain the name of the business, the address, and the consumer arbitration clause, along with any related documents as deemed necessary by the AAA. The AAA's review of a consumer arbitration clause and determination whether or not to administer arbitrations pursuant to

that clause is only an administrative determination by the AAA and cannot be relied upon or construed as a legal opinion or advice regarding the enforceability of the arbitration clause. Consumer arbitration agreements may be registered at: **www.adr.org/consumerclauseregistry** or via email at **consumerreview@adr.org**.

For more information concerning the Consumer Clause Registry, please visit the AAA's website at **www.adr.org/consumerclauseregistry**.

The Registry fee to initially review a business's agreement and maintain the clause registry list is a yearly, non-refundable fee for the business's arbitration agreement. Any different arbitration agreements submitted by the same business or its subsidiaries must be submitted for review and are subject to the current review fee.

If the AAA declines to administer a case due to the business's non-compliance with this notification requirement, the parties may choose to submit their dispute to the appropriate court.

R-13. AAA and Delegation of Duties

When the consumer and the business agree to arbitrate under these Rules or other AAA rules, or when they provide for arbitration by the AAA and an arbitration is filed under these Rules, the parties also agree that the AAA will administer the arbitration. The AAA's administrative duties are set forth in the parties' arbitration agreement and in these Rules. The AAA will have the final decision on which office and which AAA staff members will administer the case. Arbitrations administered under these Rules shall only be administered by the AAA or by an individual or organization authorized by the AAA to do so.

R-14. Jurisdiction

- (a) The arbitrator shall have the power to rule on his or her own jurisdiction, including any objections with respect to the existence, scope, or validity of the arbitration agreement or to the arbitrability of any claim or counterclaim.
- (b) The arbitrator shall have the power to determine the existence or validity of a contract of which an arbitration clause forms a part. Such an arbitration clause shall be treated as an agreement independent of the other terms of the contract. A decision by the arbitrator that the contract is null and void shall not for that reason alone render invalid the arbitration clause.
- (c) A party must object to the jurisdiction of the arbitrator or to the arbitrability of a claim or counterclaim no later than the filing of the answering statement to the claim or counterclaim that gives rise to the objection. The arbitrator may rule on such objections as a preliminary matter or as part of the final award.

Appointing the Arbitrator

R-15. National Roster of Arbitrators

The AAA maintains a National Roster of Arbitrators (“National Roster”) and shall appoint arbitrators from this National Roster to resolve the parties’ dispute(s).

R-16. Appointment from National Roster

- (a) If the parties have not appointed an arbitrator and have not agreed to a process for appointing the arbitrator, immediately after the filing of the submission agreement or the answer, or after the deadline for filing the answer, the AAA will administratively appoint an arbitrator from the National Roster.
- (b) If the parties’ arbitration agreement provides for three or more arbitrators and they have not appointed the arbitrators and have not agreed to a process for appointing the arbitrators, immediately after the filing of the submission agreement or the answer, or after the deadline for filing the answer, the AAA will administratively appoint the arbitrators from the National Roster. The AAA will appoint the chairperson.
- (c) Arbitrator(s) serving under these Rules will be neutral and must meet the standards of R-19 with respect to being impartial and independent.

R-17. Number of Arbitrators

If the arbitration agreement does not specify the number of arbitrators and the parties do not agree on the number, the dispute shall be heard and decided by one arbitrator.

R-18. Disclosure

- (a) Any person appointed or to be appointed as an arbitrator, as well as the parties and their representatives, must provide information to the AAA of any circumstances likely to raise justifiable doubt as to whether the arbitrator can remain impartial or independent. This disclosure of information would include
 - (1) any bias;
 - (2) any financial interest in the result of the arbitration;
 - (3) any personal interest in the result of the arbitration; or
 - (4) any past or present relationship with the parties or their representatives.

Such obligation to provide disclosure information remains in effect throughout the arbitration. A failure on the part of a party or a representative to comply with the

requirements of this rule may result in the waiver of the right to object to an arbitrator in accordance with Rule R-50.

- (b) If the AAA receives such information from the arbitrator or another source, the AAA will communicate the information to the parties. If the AAA decides it is appropriate, it will also communicate the information to the arbitrator and others.
- (c) In order to encourage disclosure by arbitrators, disclosing such information does not mean that the arbitrator considers the disclosed information will likely affect his or her ability to be impartial or independent.

R-19. Disqualification of Arbitrator

- (a) Any arbitrator shall be impartial and independent and shall perform his or her duties carefully and in good faith. The AAA may disqualify an arbitrator who shows
 - (1) partiality or lack of independence;
 - (2) inability or refusal to perform his or her duties with diligence and in good faith; or
 - (3) any grounds for disqualification provided by applicable law.
- (b) If a party objects to the continued service of an arbitrator, or if the AAA should so decide to raise the issue of whether the arbitrator should continue on the case, the AAA will decide if the arbitrator should be disqualified. After gathering the opinions of the parties, the AAA will decide and that decision shall be final and conclusive.

R-20. Vacancies

If for any reason an arbitrator cannot or is unwilling to perform the duties of the office, the AAA may declare the office vacant. Any vacancies shall be filled based on the original procedures used to appoint the arbitrator. If a substitute arbitrator is appointed, the substitute arbitrator will decide if it is necessary to repeat all or part of any prior ruling or hearing.

Pre-Hearing Preparation

R-21. Preliminary Management Hearing with the Arbitrator

- (a) If any party asks for, or if the AAA or the arbitrator decides to hold one, the arbitrator will schedule a preliminary management hearing with the parties and/or their representatives as soon as possible. The preliminary management hearing will be conducted by telephone unless the arbitrator decides an in-person preliminary management hearing is necessary.
- (b) During the preliminary management hearing, the parties and the arbitrator should discuss the future conduct of the case, including clarification of issues and claims, scheduling of the hearings, and any other preliminary matters.
- (c) The arbitrator shall promptly issue written orders that state the arbitrator's decisions made during or as a result of the preliminary management hearing. The arbitrator may also conduct additional preliminary management hearings if the need arises.

R-22. Exchange of Information between the Parties

- (a) If any party asks or if the arbitrator decides on his or her own, keeping in mind that arbitration must remain a fast and economical process, the arbitrator may direct
 - 1) specific documents and other information to be shared between the consumer and business, and
 - 2) that the consumer and business identify the witnesses, if any, they plan to have testify at the hearing.
- (b) Any exhibits the parties plan to submit at the hearing need to be shared between the parties at least five business days before the hearing, unless the arbitrator sets a different exchange date.
- (c) No other exchange of information beyond what is provided for in section (a) above is contemplated under these Rules, unless an arbitrator determines further information exchange is needed to provide for a fundamentally fair process.
- (d) The arbitrator has authority to resolve any disputes between the parties about exchanging information.

R-23. Enforcement Powers of the Arbitrator

The arbitrator may issue any orders necessary to enforce the provisions of rules R-21 and R-22 and to otherwise achieve a fair, efficient, and economical resolution of the case, including, but not limited to:

- (a) an order setting the conditions for any exchange or production of confidential documents and information, and the admission of confidential evidence at the hearing in order to preserve such confidentiality;

- (b) to the extent the exchange of information takes place pursuant to R-22, imposing reasonable search limitations for electronic and other documents if the parties are unable to agree;
- (c) allocating costs of producing documentation, including electronically-stored documentation;
- (d) in the case of willful non-compliance with any order issued by the arbitrator, drawing adverse inferences, excluding evidence and other submissions, and/or making special allocations of costs or an interim award of costs arising from such non-compliance; and
- (e) issuing any other enforcement orders that the arbitrator is empowered to issue under applicable law.

R-24. Written Motions (except for Dispositive Motions—see R-33)

The arbitrator may consider a party's request to file a written motion (except for Dispositive Motions— see R-33) only after the parties and the arbitrator conduct a conference call to attempt to resolve the issue that gives rise to the proposed motion. Only after the parties and the arbitrator hold the call may the arbitrator consider a party's request to file a written motion. The arbitrator has the sole discretion to allow or deny the filing of a written motion and his or her decision is final.

R-25. Representation of a Party

Any party may participate in the arbitration without representation, or may be represented by counsel or other authorized representative, unless such choice is prohibited by applicable law. A party intending to be represented shall give the opposing party and the AAA the name, address, and contact information of the representative at least three business days before the hearing where that representative will first appear in the case. It will be considered proper notice if a representative files the arbitration demand or answer or responds for a party during the course of the arbitration.

While parties do not need an attorney to participate in arbitration, arbitration is a final, legally-binding process that may impact a party's rights. As such, parties may want to consider consulting an attorney.

R-26. Setting the Date, Time, and Place (the physical site of the hearing within the designated locale) of Hearing

The arbitrator will set the date, time, and place for each hearing within the locale as determined in R-11. A hearing may be by telephone or in person. For their part, the parties commit to

- (1) respond promptly to the arbitrator when he or she asks what dates the parties are available to have the hearings;
- (2) cooperate in the scheduling of the hearing on the earliest possible date; and
- (3) follow the hearing schedule set up by the arbitrator.

The AAA will send a notice of the hearing to the parties at least 10 days before the hearing date, unless the parties agree to a different time frame.

R-27. Written Record of Hearing

- (a) If a party wants a written record of the hearing, that party must make such arrangement directly with a stenographer (court reporter) and notify the opposing parties, the AAA, and the arbitrator of these arrangements at least three business days before the hearing. The party or parties who request the written record shall pay the cost of the service.
- (b) No other type of recording will be allowed unless the parties agree or the arbitrator directs a different form of recording.
- (c) The arbitrator may resolve disputes between the parties over who will pay the costs of the written record or other type of recording.
- (d) The parties can agree or the arbitrator may decide that the transcript (written record) is the official record of the hearing. If it is the official record of the hearing, the transcript must be given to the arbitrator and made available to all the parties so that it can be reviewed. The date, time, and place of the inspection will be decided by the arbitrator.

R-28. Interpreters

If a party wants an interpreter present for any part of the process, that party must make arrangements directly with the interpreter and shall pay for the costs of the service.

R-29. Documents-Only Procedure

Disputes may be resolved by submission of documents and without in-person or telephonic hearings. For cases being decided by the submission of documents only, the *Procedures for the Resolution of Disputes through Document Submission* (found at the end of these Rules) shall supplement these Rules. These Procedures will apply where no disclosed claims or counterclaims exceed \$25,000 (see R-1(g)), unless any party requests an in-person or telephonic hearing or the arbitrator decides that a hearing is necessary.

Hearing Procedures

R-30. Attendance at Hearings

The arbitrator and the AAA will keep information about the arbitration private except to the extent that a law provides that such information shall be shared or made public. The parties and their representatives in the arbitration are entitled to attend the hearings. The arbitrator will determine any disputes over whether a non-party may attend the hearing.

R-31. Oaths

Before starting the hearing, each arbitrator may take an oath of office and, if required by law, shall do so. If the arbitrator determines that witnesses shall testify under oath, then the arbitrator will direct the oath be given by a duly-qualified person.

R-32. Conduct of Proceedings

- (a)** The claimant must present evidence to support its claim. The respondent must then present evidence to support its defense. Witnesses for each party also must answer questions from the arbitrator and the opposing party. The arbitrator may change this procedure, as long as each party has the right to be heard and is given a fair opportunity to present its case.
- (b)** When the arbitrator decides it is appropriate, the arbitrator may also allow the parties to present evidence in alternative ways, including web conferencing, Internet communication, and telephonic conferences. All procedures must provide the parties with a full and equal opportunity to present any evidence that the arbitrator decides is material and relevant to deciding the dispute. If the alternative ways to present evidence involve witnesses, those ways may include that the witness submit to direct and cross-examination questioning.
- (c)** The arbitrator will use his or her discretion to resolve the dispute as quickly as possible and may direct the parties to present the evidence in a certain order, or may split the proceedings into multiple parts and direct the parties in the presentation of evidence.
- (d)** The hearing generally will not exceed one day. However, if a party shows good cause, the arbitrator may schedule additional hearings within seven calendar days after the initial day of hearing.
- (e)** The parties may agree in writing to waive oral hearings.

R-33. Dispositive Motions

The arbitrator may allow the filing of a dispositive motion if the arbitrator determines that the moving party has shown substantial cause that the motion is likely to succeed and dispose of or narrow the issues in the case.

R-34. Evidence

- (a) The parties may offer relevant and material evidence and must produce any evidence the arbitrator decides is necessary to understand and decide the dispute. Following the legal rules of evidence shall not be necessary. All evidence should be taken in the presence of the arbitrator and all of the parties, unless any of the parties is absent, in default, or has waived the right to be present.
- (b) The arbitrator shall determine what evidence will be admitted, what evidence is relevant, and what evidence is material to the case. The arbitrator may also exclude evidence that the arbitrator decides is cumulative or not relevant.
- (c) The arbitrator shall consider applicable principles of legal privilege, such as those that involve the confidentiality of communications between a lawyer and a client.
- (d) An arbitrator or other person authorized by law to subpoena witnesses or documents may do so on the request of any party or on the arbitrator's own determination. If a party requests the arbitrator sign a subpoena, that party shall copy the request to the other parties in the arbitration at the same time it is provided to the arbitrator.

R-35. Evidence by Affidavit and Post-Hearing Filing of Documents or Other Evidence

- (a) The arbitrator may receive and consider the evidence of witnesses by declaration or affidavit rather than in-person testimony but will give this evidence only such credence as the arbitrator decides is appropriate. The arbitrator will consider any objection to such evidence made by the opposing party.
- (b) If the parties agree or the arbitrator decides that documents or other evidence need to be submitted to the arbitrator after the hearing, those documents or other evidence will be filed with the AAA so that they can be sent to the arbitrator. All parties will be given the opportunity to review and respond to these documents or other evidence.

R-36. Inspection or Investigation

An arbitrator finding it necessary to inspect property or conduct an investigation in connection with the arbitration will request that the AAA inform the parties. The arbitrator will set the date and time of the inspection and investigation, and

the AAA will notify the parties. Any party who would like to be present at the inspection or investigation may attend. If one or all parties are not present at the inspection or investigation, the arbitrator will make an oral or written report to the parties and allow them an opportunity to comment.

R-37. Interim Measures (a preliminary decision made by the arbitrator involving part or all of the issue(s) in dispute in the arbitration)

- (a)** The arbitrator may grant whatever interim measures he or she decides are necessary, including granting an injunction and ordering that property be protected.
- (b)** Such interim measures may take the form of an interim award, and the arbitrator may require a security payment for the costs of such measures.
- (c)** When making a decision on an interim measure, the arbitrator may grant any remedy, relief, or outcome that the parties could have received in court.
- (d)** A party to an arbitration agreement under these Rules may instead file in state or federal court for interim relief. Applying to the court for this type of relief, including temporary restraining orders, is consistent with the agreement to arbitrate and will not be considered a waiver of the right to arbitrate.

R-38. Postponements

The arbitrator may postpone any hearing

- (a)** if requested by a party, and the party shows good cause for the postponement;
- (b)** if all parties agree to a postponement;
- (c)** on his or her own decision.

R-39. Arbitration in the Absence of a Party or Representative

The arbitration may proceed even if any party or representative is absent, so long as proper notice was given and that party or representative fails to appear or obtain a postponement from the arbitrator. An award cannot be made only because of the default of a party. The arbitrator shall require the party who participates in the hearing to submit the evidence needed by the arbitrator to make an award.

Conclusion of the Hearing

R-40. Closing of Hearing

The arbitrator must specifically ask all parties whether they have any further proofs to offer or witnesses to be heard. When the arbitrator receives negative replies or he or she is satisfied that the record is complete, the arbitrator will declare the hearing closed.

If briefs or other written documentation are to be filed by the parties, the hearing shall be declared closed as of the final date set by the arbitrator. Absent agreement of the parties, the time that the arbitrator has to make the award begins upon the closing of the hearing. The AAA may extend the time limit for the rendering of the award only in unusual and extreme circumstances.

R-41. Reopening of Hearing

If a party requests, or if the arbitrator decides to do so, the hearing may be reopened at any time before the award is made. If reopening the hearing would prevent the making of the award within the specific time agreed on by the parties in the contract(s) out of which the controversy has arisen, the matter may not be reopened unless the parties agree on an extension of time. If the arbitrator reopens the hearing, he or she shall have 30 days from the closing of the reopened hearing within which to make an award.

R-42. Time of Award

The award shall be issued promptly by the arbitrator and, unless the parties agree differently or the law indicates a different time frame, no later than 30 calendar days from the date the hearing is closed, or, if the case is a documents-only procedure, 14 calendar days from the date the arbitrator set for his or her receipt of the final statements and proofs. The AAA may extend the time limit for the rendering of the award only in unusual and extreme circumstances.

R-43. Form of Award

- (a)** Any award shall be in writing and executed in the form and manner required by law.
- (b)** The award shall provide the concise written reasons for the decision unless the parties all agree otherwise. Any disagreements over the form of the award shall be decided by the arbitrator.

- (c) The AAA may choose to publish an award rendered under these Rules; however, the names of the parties and witnesses will be removed from awards that are published, unless a party agrees in writing to have its name included in the award.

R-44. Scope of Award

- (a) The arbitrator may grant any remedy, relief, or outcome that the parties could have received in court, including awards of attorney's fees and costs, in accordance with the law(s) that applies to the case.
- (b) In addition to a final award, the arbitrator may make other decisions, including interim, interlocutory, or partial rulings, orders, and awards. In any interim, interlocutory, or partial award, the arbitrator may assess and divide up the fees, expenses, and compensation related to such award as the arbitrator decides is appropriate, subject to the provisions and limitations contained in the Costs of Arbitration section.
- (c) The arbitrator may also allocate compensation, expenses as defined in sections (v) and (vii) of the Costs of Arbitration section, and administrative fees (which include Filing and Hearing Fees) to any party upon the arbitrator's determination that the party's claim or counterclaim was filed for purposes of harassment or is patently frivolous.
- (d) In the final award, the arbitrator shall assess the fees, expenses, and compensation provided in Sections R-4, R-5, and R-7 in favor of any party, subject to the provisions and limitations contained in the Costs of Arbitration section.

R-45. Award upon Settlement

If the parties settle their dispute at any point during the arbitration and at the parties' request, the arbitrator may lay out the terms of the settlement in a "consent award" (an award drafted and signed by the arbitrator that reflects the settlement terms of the parties). A consent award must include a division of the arbitration costs, including administrative fees and expenses as well as arbitrator fees and expenses. Consent awards will not be made available to the public per Rule 43(c) unless the parties agree otherwise.

R-46. Delivery of Award to Parties

Parties shall accept as notice and delivery of the award the placing of the award or a true copy thereof in the mail addressed to the parties or their representatives at the last known addresses, personal or electronic service of the award, or the filing of the award in any other manner that is permitted by law.

R-47. Modification of Award for Clerical, Typographical, or Mathematical Errors

- (a)** Within 20 days after the award is transmitted, any party, upon notice to the opposing parties, may contact the AAA and request that the arbitrator correct any clerical, typographical, or mathematical errors in the award. The arbitrator has no power to re-determine the merits of any claim already decided.
- (b)** The opposing parties shall be given 10 days to respond to the request. The arbitrator shall make a decision on the request within 20 days after the AAA transmits the request and any responses to the arbitrator.
- (c)** If applicable law provides a different procedural time frame, that procedure shall be followed.

Post Hearing

R-48. Release of Documents for Judicial Proceedings

The AAA shall give a party certified copies of any records in the AAA's possession that may be required in judicial proceedings relating to the arbitration, except for records determined by the AAA to be privileged or confidential. The party will have to pay a fee for this service.

R-49. Applications to Court and Exclusion of Liability

- (a) No court or judicial proceeding by a party relating to the subject matter of the arbitration shall be deemed a waiver of the party's right to arbitrate.
- (b) Neither the AAA nor any arbitrator in a proceeding under these Rules is a necessary or proper party in judicial proceedings relating to the arbitration.
- (c) Parties to an arbitration under these Rules shall be deemed to have consented that judgment upon the arbitration award may be entered in any federal or state court having jurisdiction thereof.
- (d) Parties to an arbitration under these Rules shall be deemed to have consented that neither the AAA, AAA employees, nor any arbitrator shall be liable to any party in any action for damages or injunctive relief for any act or omission in connection with any arbitration under these rules.
- (e) Parties to an arbitration under these Rules may not call the arbitrator, the AAA, or any AAA employee as a witness in litigation or any other proceeding relating to the arbitration. The arbitrator, the AAA, and AAA employees are not competent to and may not testify as witnesses in any such proceeding.

General Procedural Rules

R-50. Waiver of Rules

If a party knows that any of these Rules have not been followed, it must object in writing before proceeding with arbitration or it will lose its right to object that the rule has not been followed.

R-51. Extensions of Time

The parties may agree to change any period of time provided for in the Rules, except that any such modification that negatively affects the efficient resolution of the dispute is subject to review and approval by the arbitrator. The AAA or the arbitrator may for good cause extend any period of time in these Rules, except as set forth in R-42. The AAA will notify the parties of any extension.

R-52. Serving of Notice and AAA and Arbitrator Communications

- (a) Any papers or notices necessary for the initiation or continuation of an arbitration under these Rules, or for the entry of judgment on any award made under these Rules, may be served on a party by mail or email addressed to the party or its representative at the last-known address or by personal service, in or outside the state where the arbitration is to be held, provided that reasonable opportunity to be heard with regard to the dispute is or has been granted to the party.
- (b) The AAA, the arbitrator, and the parties also may use overnight delivery, electronic facsimile transmission (fax), or electronic mail (email) to give the notices required by these rules. Where all parties and the arbitrator agree, notices may be sent by other methods of communication.
- (c) Unless directed differently by the AAA or by the arbitrator, any documents and all written communications submitted by any party to the AAA or to the arbitrator also shall be sent at the same time to all parties to the arbitration.
- (d) A failure to provide the other parties with copies of communications made to the AAA or to the arbitrator may prevent the AAA or the arbitrator from acting on any requests or objections contained within those communications.
- (e) A party and/or someone acting on behalf of a party cannot have any communications with an arbitrator or a potential arbitrator about the arbitration outside of the presence of the opposing party. All such communications shall be conducted through the AAA.
- (f) The AAA may direct that any oral or written communications that are sent by a party or their representative shall be sent in a particular manner. The failure of a party or its representative to do so may result in the AAA's refusal to consider the issue raised in the communication.

R-53. Interpretation and Application of Rules

The arbitrator shall interpret and apply these Rules as they relate to the arbitrator's powers and duties. When there is more than one arbitrator and a difference arises among them concerning the meaning or application of these Rules, it shall be decided by a majority vote. If that is not possible, either an arbitrator or a party may refer the question to the AAA for final decision. All other Rules shall be interpreted and applied by the AAA.

R-54. Remedies for Nonpayment

- (a) If arbitrator compensation or administrative charges have not been paid in full, the AAA may inform the parties so that one of them may forward the required payment.
- (b) Once the AAA informs the parties that payments have not been received, a party may request an order from the arbitrator directing what measures might be taken in light of a party's nonpayment.

Such measures may include limiting a party's ability to assert or pursue its claim. However, a party shall never be precluded from defending a claim or counterclaim. The arbitrator must provide the party opposing a request for relief with the opportunity to respond prior to making any determination. In the event that the arbitrator grants any request for relief that limits any party's participation in the arbitration, the arbitrator will require the party who is making a claim and who has made appropriate payments to submit the evidence required to make an award.

- (c) Upon receipt of information from the AAA that full payments have not been received, the arbitrator, on the arbitrator's own initiative, may order the suspension of the arbitration. If no arbitrator has yet been appointed, the AAA may suspend the proceedings.
- (d) If arbitrator compensation or AAA administrative fees remain unpaid after a determination to suspend an arbitration due to nonpayment, the arbitrator has the authority to terminate the proceedings. Such an order shall be in writing and signed by the arbitrator. The impact of the termination for nonpayment of the Consumer Clause Registry fee is the removal from the "Registered" section of the Registry.

R-55. Declining or Ceasing Arbitration

The AAA in its sole discretion may decline to accept a Demand for Arbitration or stop the administration of an ongoing arbitration due to a party's improper conduct, including threatening or harassing behavior towards any AAA staff, an arbitrator, or a party or party's representative.

Costs of Arbitration

Arbitrator compensation, expenses as defined in sections (v) and (vii) below, and Administrative Fees (which includes Filing Fees and Hearing Fees) are not subject to reallocation by the arbitrator(s) except as may be required by applicable law or upon the arbitrator's determination that a claim or counterclaim was filed for purposes of harassment or is patently frivolous.

(i) Filing Fees*

In cases before a single arbitrator where the consumer is the Claimant, a nonrefundable filing fee, capped in the amount of \$200, is payable in full by the consumer when a case is filed unless the parties' agreement provides that the consumer pay less. A partially refundable filing fee in the amount of \$1,700 is payable in full by the business, unless the parties' agreement provides that the business pay more. This fee is due from the business once the consumer has met their filing requirements.

In cases before three or more arbitrators, where the consumer is the Claimant, a nonrefundable filing fee capped in the amount of \$200 is payable in full by the consumer when a case is filed, unless the parties' agreement provides that the consumer pay less. A partially refundable filing fee in the amount of \$2,200 is payable in full by the business, unless the parties' agreement provides that the business pay more. This fee is due from the business once the consumer has met the filing requirements.

In cases where the business is the Claimant, the business shall be responsible for all filing fees.

There shall be no filing fee charged for a counterclaim.

The AAA reserves the right to assess additional administrative fees for services performed by the AAA beyond those provided for in these Rules and which may be required by the parties' agreement or stipulation.

**Pursuant to Section 1284.3 of the California Code of Civil Procedure, consumers with a gross monthly income of less than 300% of the federal poverty guidelines are entitled to a waiver of arbitration fees and costs, exclusive of arbitrator fees. This law applies to all consumer agreements subject to the California Arbitration Act, and to all consumer arbitrations conducted in California. If you believe that you meet these requirements, you must submit to the AAA a declaration under oath regarding your monthly income and the number of persons in your household. Please contact the AAA at 1-800-778-7879, if you have any questions regarding the waiver of administrative fees. (Effective January 1, 2003)*

(ii) Neutral Arbitrator's Compensation

The business shall pay the arbitrator's compensation unless the consumer, post dispute, voluntarily elects to pay a portion of the arbitrator's compensation.

- **Desk/Documents-Only Arbitration** - Arbitrators serving on a desk/documents-only arbitration will receive compensation at a rate of \$1,500 per case. A desk/documents-only arbitration will not exceed document submissions of more than 100 pages in total and 7 total hours of time for the arbitrator to review the submissions and render the Award. Beyond 100 pages and 7 hours of time, the business will be responsible for additional arbitrator compensation at a rate of \$300 per hour.
- **In-Person or Telephonic Hearing Arbitration** – Arbitrators serving on an in-person or telephonic hearing arbitration case will receive compensation at a rate of \$2,500 per day of hearing per arbitrator. The arbitrator compensation encompasses one preliminary conference, one day of in-person or telephonic hearing, and one final award. For cases with additional procedures, such as multiple telephone conferences, motion practice, post-hearing briefing, interim or partial awards, awards containing findings of fact and conclusions of law, or other processes not provided in the Rules, the business will be responsible for additional arbitrator compensation.

Once a Preliminary Management Hearing is held by the arbitrator, the arbitrator is entitled to one-half of the arbitrator compensation rate. Once evidentiary hearings are held or all parties' documents are submitted for a desk/documents-only arbitration, the arbitrator is entitled to the full amount of the arbitrator compensation rate.

Any determination by the AAA on whether the business will be responsible for additional arbitrator compensation is in the sole discretion of the AAA and such decision is final and binding.

(iii) AAA Filing Fees Refund Schedule and Arbitrator Compensation Cancellation Policy

Once the Claimant has met the filing requirements, refunds of AAA Filing Fees to the business will be calculated as follows:

- if the case is closed as settled or withdrawn prior to the AAA's correspondence communicating the "answer" due date, 75% of the business's portion of the filing fee will be refunded to the business.
- if the case is closed as settled or withdrawn after the AAA's correspondence but before an arbitrator is appointed, 50% of the business's portion of the filing fee will be refunded to the business.

However, no refund of the filing fee will be made once an arbitrator has been appointed. The date the Claimant's filing requirements are met is the date the business is responsible for paying its filing fee. If the matter is settled or withdrawn prior to receipt of filing fees from the business, the AAA will bill the business in accordance with this refund schedule. The \$200 portion of the filing fee normally attributable to the consumer is non-refundable and is not part of this refund schedule.

For in-person or telephonic hearing arbitrations, if an evidentiary hearing is cancelled fewer than 2 business days before the hearing, the arbitrator is entitled to receive compensation at the first day of hearing rate.

(iv) Hearing Fees

For telephonic hearings or in-person hearings held, a Hearing Fee of \$500 is payable by the business. If a case is settled or withdrawn prior to the hearing taking place, the Hearing Fee will be refunded, or cancelled if not yet paid. However, if the AAA is not notified of a cancellation at least two business days before a scheduled hearing, the Hearing Fee will remain due and will not be refunded.

There is no AAA hearing fee for an Administrative Conference (see R-10).

(v) Hearing Room Rental

The hearing fees described above do not cover the rental of hearing rooms. The AAA maintains rental hearing rooms in most offices for the convenience of the parties. Check with the administrator for availability and rates. Hearing room rental fees will be borne by the business.

(vi) Abeyance Fee

Parties on cases held as inactive for one year will be assessed an annual abeyance fee of \$500. If a party refuses to pay the assessed fee, the opposing party or parties may pay the entire fee on behalf of all parties, otherwise the matter will be administratively closed. All filing requirements, including payment of filing and other administrative fees, must be met before a matter may be placed in abeyance.

(vii) Expenses

All expenses of the arbitrator, including required travel and other expenses, and any AAA expenses, as well as the costs relating to proof and witnesses produced at the direction of the arbitrator, shall be borne by the business.

(viii) Consumer Clause Review and Registry Fee

Please note that all fees described below are **nonrefundable**.

For businesses submitting a clause, the cost of reviewing the clause and maintaining that clause on the Registry is \$500. A yearly Registry fee of \$500 will be charged to maintain each clause on the Registry for each calendar year thereafter.

If the AAA receives a demand for consumer arbitration from an arbitration clause that was not previously submitted to the AAA for review and placement on the Registry, the business will incur an additional \$250 fee for the AAA to conduct an immediate review of the clause.

Any subsequent changes, additions, deletions, or amendments to a currently registered arbitration agreement must be submitted for review and a review fee of \$500 will be assessed at that time.

(ix) Reallocation of Arbitrator Compensation, AAA Administrative Fees and Certain Expenses

Arbitrator compensation, expenses as defined in sections (v) and (vii) in Costs of Arbitration section of the Rules and administrative fees (which include Filing and Hearing Fees) are not subject to reallocation by the arbitrator(s) except as may be required by applicable law or upon the arbitrator's determination that a claim or counterclaim was filed for purposes of harassment or is patently frivolous.

Procedures for the Resolution of Disputes through Document Submission

D-1. Applicability

- (a) In any case, regardless of claim size, the parties may agree to waive in-person/ telephonic hearings and resolve the dispute through submission of documents to one arbitrator. Such agreement should be confirmed in writing no later than the deadline for the filing of an answer.
- (b) Where no disclosed claims or counterclaims exceed \$25,000, the dispute shall be resolved by these Procedures, unless a party asks for a hearing or the arbitrator decides that a hearing is necessary.
- (c) If one party makes a request to use the *Procedures for the Resolution of Disputes through Document Submission* (Procedures) and the opposing party is unresponsive, the arbitrator shall have the power to determine whether to proceed under the Procedures. If both parties seek to use the Procedures after the appointment of an arbitrator, the arbitrator must also consent to the process.
- (d) When parties agree to these Procedures, the procedures in Sections D-1 through D-4 of these Rules shall supplement other portions of these rules which are not in conflict with the Procedures.

D-2. Preliminary Management Hearing

Within 14 calendar days of confirmation of the arbitrator's appointment, the arbitrator shall convene a preliminary management hearing, via conference call, video conference, or internet, to establish a fair and equitable procedure for the submission of documents, and, if the arbitrator deems appropriate, a schedule for one or more telephonic or electronic conferences.

D-3. Removal from the Procedures

- (a) The arbitrator has the discretion to remove the case from the Procedures if the arbitrator determines that an in-person or telephonic hearing is necessary.
- (b) If the parties agree to in-person or telephonic hearings after a previous agreement to proceed under the Procedures, the arbitrator shall conduct such hearings. If a party seeks to have in-person or telephonic hearings after agreeing to the Procedures, but there is not agreement among the parties to proceed with in-person or telephonic hearings, the arbitrator shall resolve the issue after the parties have been given the opportunity to provide their respective positions on the issue.

D-4. Time of Award

- (a) The arbitrator shall establish the date for either final written submissions or a final telephonic or electronic conference. Such date shall operate to close the hearing, and the time for the rendering of the award shall commence on that day as well.
- (b) The arbitrator shall render the award within 14 calendar days from the date the hearing is closed.
- (c) The award is subject to all other provisions of these Rules that pertain to awards.

Glossary of Terms

Administrator

The Administrator's role is to manage the administrative aspects of the arbitration, such as the appointment of the arbitrator, to make preliminary decisions about where hearings might take place, and to handle the fees associated with the arbitration. As Administrator, however, the Administrator does not decide the merits of a case or make any rulings on issues such as what documents must be shared with each side. Because the Administrator's role is only administrative, the Administrator cannot overrule or change an arbitrator's decisions or rulings. The Administrator will comply with any court orders issued from litigation involving the parties to the dispute.

ADR Agreement

An ADR Agreement is an agreement between a business and a consumer to submit disputes to mediation, arbitration, or other ADR processes.

ADR Process

An ADR (Alternative Dispute Resolution) Process is a method of resolving a dispute other than by court litigation. Mediation and Arbitration are the most widely used ADR processes.

ADR Program

An ADR Program is any program or service set up or used by a business to resolve disputes out of court.

Arbitration

In arbitration, the parties submit disputes to an impartial person (the arbitrator) for a decision. Each party can present evidence to the arbitrator. Arbitrators do not have to follow the Rules of Evidence used in court.

Arbitrators decide cases with written decisions or "awards." An award is usually binding on the parties. A court may enforce an arbitration award and the court's review of arbitration awards is limited.

Arbitration Agreement

An arbitration agreement is a contract between parties to settle their disputes by binding arbitration. It is typically found in the parties' contract in a section entitled "Arbitration" or "Dispute Resolution." It gives the parties information about how they are choosing to settle any disputes that they might have.

Arbitrator

Arbitrators are neutral and independent decision makers who are not employees of the administrator. Except where the parties to a case reach their own settlement, the Arbitrator will make the final, binding decision on the dispute and render it in writing, called the Award. The Arbitrator makes all the procedural decisions on a case not made by the administrator or not decided jointly by the parties. The Arbitrator may grant any remedy, relief, or outcome that the parties could have received in court, including awards of attorney's fees and costs, in accordance with the law(s) that applies to the case.

Once appointed to a case, an Arbitrator may not be removed by one party without the other party's consent or unless the administrator determines an Arbitrator should be removed and replaced by another Arbitrator chosen by the administrator in a manner described in these Rules.

Case Administrator

The Case Administrator is the AAA's employee assigned to handle the administrative aspects of the case. He or she does not decide the case. He or she manages the case's administrative steps, such as exchanging documents, matching schedules, and setting up hearings. The Case Administrator is the parties' contact point for almost all aspects of the case outside of any hearings.

Claimant

A Claimant is the party who files the claim or starts the arbitration. Either the consumer or the business may be the Claimant.

Demand for Arbitration (also referred to as "Demand")

The written document created by the claimant that informs the respondent that it wishes to arbitrate a dispute. This document provides basic information about the dispute, the parties involved and what the claimant wants as a result of the arbitration.

Documents-Only Arbitration

In a Documents-Only Arbitration, the parties submit their arguments and evidence to the arbitrator in writing. The arbitrator then makes an award based only on the documents. No in-person or telephone hearing is held.

Independent ADR Institution

An Independent ADR Institution is an organization that provides independent and impartial administration of ADR programs for consumers and businesses. The American Arbitration Association is an Independent ADR Institution.

In-Person Hearing

During an In-Person Hearing, the parties and the arbitrator meet in a conference room or office and the parties present their evidence in a process that is similar to going to court. However, an In-Person Hearing is not as formal as going to court.

Mediation

In Mediation, an impartial person (the mediator) helps the parties try to settle their dispute by reaching an agreement together. A mediator's role is to help the parties come to an agreement. A mediator does not arbitrate or decide the outcome.

Neutral

A "Neutral" is a mediator, arbitrator, or other independent, impartial person selected to serve as the independent third party in an ADR process.

Party

The party is the person(s) or business that is involved in the dispute in the arbitration process. Usually, these are the people or businesses that have an arbitration agreement between them that specifies that a dispute should be resolved by arbitration.

Parties

Parties are all the separate individuals, businesses, or organizations involved in the arbitration.

Opposing Party

The opposing party is the other party that is on the opposite side of the arbitration from you. If you are the claimant, the Opposing Party is the respondent. If you are the respondent, the Opposing Party is the claimant. If you are the consumer, the Opposing Party is the business. If you are the business, the Opposing Party is the consumer.

Respondent

The respondent is the party against whom the claim is filed. If a Respondent states a claim in arbitration, it is called a counterclaim. Either the consumer or the business may be the Respondent.

Telephone Hearing

In a Telephone Hearing, the parties have the opportunity to tell the arbitrator about their case during a conference call. They also present their evidence to the arbitrator during the call. Often this is done after the parties have sent in documents for the arbitrator to review.



AMERICAN ARBITRATION ASSOCIATION®



AMERICAN ARBITRATION ASSOCIATION®

800.778.7879 | websitemail@adr.org | adr.org



Consumer Due Process Protocol Statement of Principles

National Consumer Disputes Advisory Committee

Statement Of Principles

Principle 1. Fundamentally-Fair Process

All parties are entitled to a fundamentally-fair ADR process. As embodiments of fundamental fairness, these Principles should be observed in structuring ADR Programs.

Principle 2. Access to Information Regarding ADR Program

Providers of goods or services should undertake reasonable measures to provide Consumers with full and accurate information regarding Consumer ADR Programs. At the time the Consumer contracts for goods or services, such measures should include (1) clear and adequate notice regarding the ADR provisions, including a statement indicating whether participation in the ADR Program is mandatory or optional, and (2) reasonable means by which Consumers may obtain additional information regarding the ADR Program. After a dispute arises, Consumers should have access to all information necessary for effective participation in ADR.

Principle 3. Independent and Impartial Neutral; Independent Administration

1. *Independent and Impartial Neutral.* All parties are entitled to a Neutral who is independent and impartial.
2. *Independent Administration.* If participation in mediation or arbitration is mandatory, the procedure should be administered by an Independent ADR Institution. Administrative services should include the maintenance of a panel of prospective Neutrals, facilitation of Neutral selection, collection and distribution of Neutral's fees and expenses, oversight and implementation of ADR rules and procedures, and monitoring of Neutral qualifications, performance, and adherence to pertinent rules, procedures and ethical standards.
3. *Standards for Neutrals.* The Independent ADR Institution should make reasonable efforts to ensure that Neutrals understand and conform to pertinent ADR rules, procedures and ethical standards.
4. *Selection of Neutrals.* The Consumer and Provider should have an equal voice in the selection of Neutrals in connection with a specific dispute.
5. *Disclosure and Disqualification.* Beginning at the time of appointment, Neutrals should be required to disclose to the Independent ADR Institution any circumstance likely to affect impartiality, including any bias or financial or personal interest which might affect the result of the ADR proceeding, or any past or present relationship or experience with the parties or their representatives, including past ADR experiences. The Independent ADR Institution should communicate any such information to the parties and other Neutrals, if any. Upon objection of a party to continued service of the Neutral, the Independent ADR Institution should determine whether the Neutral should be disqualified and should inform the parties of its decision. The disclosure obligation of the Neutral and procedure for disqualification should continue throughout the period of appointment.



Principle 4. Quality and Competence of Neutrals

All parties are entitled to competent, qualified Neutrals. Independent ADR Institutions are responsible for establishing and maintaining standards for Neutrals in ADR Programs they administer.

Principle 5. Small Claims

Consumer ADR Agreements should make it clear that all parties retain the right to seek relief in a small claims court for disputes or claims within the scope of its jurisdiction.

Principle 6. Reasonable Cost

1. *Reasonable Cost.* Providers of goods and services should develop ADR programs which entail reasonable cost to Consumers based on the circumstances of the dispute, including, among other things, the size and nature of the claim, the nature of goods or services provided, and the ability of the Consumer to pay. In some cases, this may require the Provider to subsidize the process.
2. *Handling of Payment.* In the interest of ensuring fair and independent Neutrals, the making of fee arrangements and the payment of fees should be administered on a rational, equitable and consistent basis by the Independent ADR Institution.

Principle 7. Reasonably Convenient Location

In the case of face-to-face proceedings, the proceedings should be conducted at a location which is reasonably convenient to both parties with due consideration of their ability to travel and other pertinent circumstances. If the parties are unable to agree on a location, the determination should be made by the Independent ADR Institution or by the Neutral.

Principle 8. Reasonable Time Limits

ADR proceedings should occur within a reasonable time, without undue delay. The rules governing ADR should establish specific reasonable time periods for each step in the ADR process and, where necessary, set forth default procedures in the event a party fails to participate in the process after reasonable notice.

Principle 9. Right to Representation

All parties participating in processes in ADR Programs have the right, at their own expense, to be represented by a spokesperson of their own choosing. The ADR rules and procedures should so specify.

Principle 10. Mediation

The use of mediation is strongly encouraged as an informal means of assisting parties in resolving their own disputes.



Principle 11. Agreements to Arbitrate

Consumers should be given:

- a. clear and adequate notice of the arbitration provision and its consequences, including a statement of its mandatory or optional character;
- b. reasonable access to information regarding the arbitration process, including basic distinctions between arbitration and court proceedings, related costs, and advice as to where they may obtain more complete information regarding arbitration procedures and arbitrator rosters;
- c. notice of the option to make use of applicable small claims court procedures as an alternative to binding arbitration in appropriate cases; and,
- d. a clear statement of the means by which the Consumer may exercise the option (if any) to submit disputes to arbitration or to court process.

Principle 12. Arbitration Hearings

1. *Fundamentally-Fair Hearing.* All parties are entitled to a fundamentally-fair arbitration hearing. This requires adequate notice of hearings and an opportunity to be heard and to present relevant evidence to impartial decision-makers. In some cases, such as some small claims, the requirement of fundamental fairness may be met by hearings conducted by electronic or telephonic means or by a submission of documents. However, the Neutral should have discretionary authority to require a face-to-face hearing upon the request of a party.
2. *Confidentiality in Arbitration.* Consistent with general expectations of privacy in arbitration hearings, the arbitrator should make reasonable efforts to maintain the privacy of the hearing to the extent permitted by applicable law. The arbitrator should also carefully consider claims of privilege and confidentiality when addressing evidentiary issues.

Principle 13. Access to Information

No party should ever be denied the right to a fundamentally-fair process due to an inability to obtain information material to a dispute. Consumer ADR agreements which provide for binding arbitration should establish procedures for arbitrator-supervised exchange of information prior to arbitration, bearing in mind the expedited nature of arbitration.

Principle 14. Arbitral Remedies

The arbitrator should be empowered to grant whatever relief would be available in court under law or in equity.

Principle 15. Arbitration Awards

1. *Final and Binding Award; Limited Scope of Review.* If provided in the agreement to arbitrate, the arbitrator's award should be final and binding, but subject to review in accordance with applicable statutes governing arbitration awards.
2. *Standards to Guide Arbitrator Decision-Making.* In making the award, the arbitrator should apply any identified, pertinent contract terms, statutes and legal precedents.
3. *Explanation of Award.* At the timely request of either party, the arbitrator should provide a brief written explanation of the basis for the award. To facilitate such requests, the arbitrator should discuss the matter with the parties prior to the arbitration hearing.



Introduction: Genesis of the Advisory Committee

Recent years have seen a pronounced trend toward incorporation of out-of-court conflict resolution processes in standardized agreements presented to consumers of goods and services. Some of these processes (such as mediation and non-binding evaluation) involve third party intervention in settlement negotiations; others involve adjudication (binding arbitration). Such processes have the potential to be of significant value in making dispute resolution quicker, less costly, and more satisfying.¹

Yet because consumer contracts often do not involve arm's length negotiation of terms, and frequently consist of boilerplate language presented on a take-it-or-leave-it basis by suppliers of goods or services, there are legitimate concerns regarding the fairness of consumer conflict resolution mechanisms required by suppliers. This is particularly true in the realm of binding arbitration, where the courts are displaced by private adjudication systems. In such cases, consumers are often unaware of their procedural rights and obligations until the realities of out-of-court arbitration are revealed to them after disputes have arisen.² While the results may be entirely satisfactory, they may also fall short of consumers' reasonable expectations of fairness³ and have a significant impact on consumers' substantive rights and remedies.⁴

The use of mediation and other forms of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) by various state and federal courts has also raised concerns regarding quality, effectiveness and fairness. The response has been a number of national, state and local initiatives to establish standards for the guidance and information of courts. Until now, however, there has been no comparable national effort in the private consumer sphere.

In the spring of 1997, the American Arbitration Association® (AAA®) announced the establishment of a National Consumer Disputes Advisory Committee. The stated mission of the Advisory Committee is:

To bring together a broad, diverse, representative national advisory committee to advise the American Arbitration Association in the development of standards and procedures for the equitable resolution of consumer disputes.

1 See, e.g., CPR Institute for Dispute Resolution, *ADR Cost Savings & Benefit Studies* (Catherine Cronin-Harris, ed. 1994) (summarizing some of the research findings on the relative advantages ADR may offer). See also, e.g., *Madden v. Kaiser Foundation Hosp.*, 17 Cal. 3d 699, 711, 552 P.2d 1178, 1186 (1976) ("The speed and economy of arbitration, in contrast to the expense and delay of a jury trial, could prove helpful to all parties....")

2 The arbitration agreement may be included in the "fine print" in a brochure of terms and conditions inside a box of goods. See, e.g., *Hill v. Gateway 2000, Inc.*, 105 F.3d 1147 (7th Cir. 1997) (Customers agreed to computer company's contract terms, including arbitration agreement, by failing to return merchandise within 30 days). See *Age of Compelled Arbitration*, 1997, Wis. L. Rev. 33, 40-53 (Offering a "cautionary tale" regarding employment arbitration agreement.)

3 See Mark E. Budnitz, *Arbitration of Disputes Between Consumers and Financial Institutions: A Serious Threat to Consumer Protection*, 10 Ohio St. J. On Disp. Res. 267 (1995) (discussing procedural limitations of arbitration in treating consumer disputes with banks and lenders); Schwartz, *supra* note 2 (discussing issues relating to adhesion contracts involving employees and consumers); Jean R. Sternlight, *Rethinking the Constitutionality of the Supreme Court's Preference for Binding Arbitration: A Fresh Assessment of Jury Trial, Separation of Powers, and Due Process Concerns*, 72 Tulane L. Rev. 1 (1997) (discussing due process concerns with binding arbitration under employment and consumer contracts). See, e.g., *Engalla V. Permanente Med. Grp.*, 938 P.2d 903 (Cal. 1997) (medical group may not compel arbitration where it administers own arbitration program, fraudulently misrepresents speed of arbitrator selection process, and the forces delays); *Broemmer V. Abortion Serv. of Phoenix*, 840 P.2d 1013 (Az. 1992) (refusing to enforce agreement in "adhesion contract" where drafter inserted potentially self-serving term requiring sole arbitrator of medical malpractice claims to be licensed medical doctor).

4 See Schwartz, *supra* note 2, at 60-61 (discussing perceptions regarding relative damages awards in court and in arbitration), 64-66 (summarizing some statistics on arbitration awards). See also William W. Park, *When and Why Arbitration Matters*, in *The Commercial Way to Justice* 73, 75 (G.M. Beresfort Hartwell ed., 1997) ("Who interprets an...agreement will frequently be more significant than what the applicable law says about the agreement....").



In light of its stated mission, the Advisory Committee's recommendations are likely to have a direct impact on the development of rules, procedures and policies for the resolution of consumer disputes under the auspices of the AAA.

The Advisory Committee's recommendations may also have a significant impact in the broader realm of consumer ADR. A Statement of Principles which is perceived as a broadly-based consensus regarding minimum requirements for mediation and arbitration programs for consumers of goods and services may influence the evolution of consumer rules generally and the development of state and federal laws governing consumer arbitration agreements. The standards may affect the drafting of statutes and influence judicial opinions addressing the enforceability of arbitration agreements pursuant to existing state or federal law.⁵

Scope of the Consumer Due Process Protocol

The *Consumer Due Process Protocol (Protocol)* was developed to address the wide range of consumer transactions those involving the purchase or lease of goods or services for personal, family or household use. These include, among other things, transactions involving: banking, credit cards, home loans and other financial services; health care services; brokerage services; home construction and improvements; insurance; communications; and the purchase and lease of motor vehicles and other personal property.

Across this broad spectrum of consumer transactions, the Protocol applies to all possible conflicts from small claims to complex disputes. In light of these realities, the Advisory Committee sought to develop principles which would establish clear benchmarks for conflict resolution processes involving consumers, while recognizing that a process appropriate in one context may be inappropriate in another. Therefore, the Protocol embodies flexible standards which permit consideration of specific circumstances.

In some cases, the AAA is developing or has developed special dispute resolution policies and procedures governing particular transactional systems. A recent example is its current initiative with respect to ADR in contracts for health care services. Where the general principles set forth in this Protocol conflict with more specific standards developed under the auspices of the AAA or some other independent organization with relatively broad participation by affected parties, the latter should govern.

There are other transactions that share many of the features of consumer transactions, such as those involving small businesses and individual employment contracts. While the Protocol was not developed for specific application to such other transactions, there may be circumstances in which the Protocol might be applied by analogy to ADR in those venues. The Principles articulated here are likely to have an impact on minimum standards of due process for other ADR systems involving persons of disparate bargaining power.

Each section of this document is devoted to treatment of a discrete topic concerning consumer ADR. It begins with a basic Principle that embodies the fundamental reasonable expectation of consumers as defined by the Advisory

⁵ See, e.g., *Cole v. Burns International Security Services*, 105 F.3d 1465 (D.C.Cir. 1997) (Citing Due Process Protocol for Employment Disputes). The consensus-based approach of the broadly constituted group reflects the "public interest" model espoused by Professor Speidel. See Richard E. Speidel, *Contract Theory and Securities Arbitration: Whither Consent?*, 62 Brook. L. Rev. 1335 (1996).



Committee. Each Principle is accompanied by Reporter's Comments that explain the rationale of the Advisory Committee in the context of other emerging standards. In addition, some Principles are supplemented by Practical Suggestions for putting the Principles into practice.

The specific mention of mediation and binding arbitration reflects the current emphasis on these processes in consumer conflict resolution. The Advisory Committee recognizes that a number of other approaches are being employed to resolve commercial and consumer disputes, and encourages their use in accordance with the spirit of the Protocol.

The signatories to this Protocol were designated by their respective organizations, but the Protocol reflects their personal views and should not be construed as representing the policy of the designating organizations. Although the following Principles reflect a remarkable degree of consensus, achieved during the course of several meetings of the entire Advisory Committee, subcommittee deliberations, exchanges of numerous memoranda and of five drafts of the Protocol, Advisory Committee members at times accepted compromise in the interest of arriving at a common ground. As was the case with the task force which developed the *Employment Due Process Protocol*, opinions regarding the appropriateness of binding pre-dispute arbitration agreements in consumer contracts were never fully reconciled. Like that group, however, the Advisory Committee was able to address standards for ADR processes within the given context.

Glossary of Terms

Consumer

Consumer refers to an individual who purchases or leases goods or services, or contracts to purchase or lease goods or services, intended primarily for personal, family or household use.

Provider

Provider refers to a seller or lessor of goods or services to Consumers for personal, family or household use.

ADR Process

An ADR (Alternative Dispute Resolution) Process is a method for out-of-court resolution of conflict through the intervention of third parties. Mediation and arbitration are two widely used ADR processes.

Mediation

Mediation refers to a range of processes in which an impartial person helps parties to a dispute to communicate and to make voluntary, informed choices in an effort to resolve their dispute. A mediator, unlike an arbitrator, does not issue a decision regarding the merits of the dispute, but instead facilitates a dialogue between the parties with the view of helping them arrive at a mutually agreeable settlement.



Arbitration

Arbitration is a process in which parties submit disputes to a neutral third person or persons for a decision on the merits. Each party has an opportunity to present evidence to the arbitrator(s) in writing or through witnesses. Arbitration proceedings tend to be more informal than court proceedings and adherence to judicial rules of evidence is not usually required. Arbitrators decide cases by issuing written decisions or “awards.” An award may or may not be binding on the parties, depending on the agreement to arbitrate. A “binding” arbitration award may be enforced as a court judgment under the terms of federal or state statutes, but judicial review of arbitration awards is limited.

Neutral

A Neutral is a mediator, arbitrator, or other independent, impartial third party selected to intervene in a Consumer-Provider dispute.

ADR Agreement

An ADR Agreement is an agreement between a Provider and a Consumer to submit disputes to mediation, arbitration, or other ADR Processes. As used in this Statement, the term includes provisions (sometimes incorporated by reference) in standard contracts furnished by Providers which signify the assent of the Consumer and Provider to such processes (although the assent may only be the “generalized assent” typically given by Consumers to standard terms).

ADR Program

An ADR Program is any program or service established by or utilized by a Provider of goods and services for out-of-court resolution of Consumer disputes. The term includes ADR rules and procedures and implementation of administrative structures.

Independent ADR Institution

An Independent ADR Institution is an organization that provides independent and impartial administration of ADR Programs for Consumers and Providers, including, but not limited to, development and administration of ADR policies and procedures and the training and appointment of Neutrals.

Major Standards and Sources

The Reporter’s Comments accompanying these Principles cite a number of existing standards and sources relied upon by the Advisory Committee. The more frequently cited standards and sources are set forth below by their full title as well as the abbreviated title that appears in the Comments.

American Arbitration Association, *Commercial Arbitration Rules*, July 1, 1996 (AAA Commercial Rules)

American Arbitration Association, *Construction Industry Dispute Resolution Procedures*, Oct. 15, 1997 (AAA Construction Procedures)



American Arbitration Association, *Wireless Industry Arbitration Rules*, July 15, 1997 (AAA Wireless Rules)

American Arbitration Association & American Bar Association, *Code of Ethics for Arbitrators in Commercial Disputes* (1977) (Code of Ethics for Arbitrators)

Center for Dispute Settlement, Institute of Judicial Admin., *Standards for Court-Connected Mediation Programs* (Standards for Court-Connected Programs)

Council of Better Business Bureaus, Inc., *Arbitration (Binding)* (BBB Arbitration Rules)

CPR-Georgetown Commission on Ethics and Standards in ADR Working Group on Provider Organizations, *Principles for ADR Provider Organizations* (Draft of April 4, 1998) (Principles for ADR Provider Organizations)

Federal Arbitration Act, 9 U.S.C. "1-16 (as amended and in effect July 1, 1992) (Federal Arbitration Act)

Blue-Ribbon Advisory Panel on Kaiser Permanente Arbitration, *The Kaiser Permanente Arbitration System: A Review and Recommendations for Improvement 1* (1998) (Kaiser Permanente Review and Recommendations)

Joint Committee (American Arbitration Association, American Bar Association and Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution) on Standards of Conduct, *Standards of Conduct for Mediators* (1994) (Joint Standards for Mediators)

Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution (SPIDR) Commission on Qualifications, *Ensuring Competence and Quality in Dispute Resolution Practice* (Draft Report 1994) (SPIDR Report on Qualifications)

Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution (SPIDR) Law and Public Policy Committee, *Mandated Participation and Settlement Coercion: Dispute Resolution as It Relates to the Courts* (1991) (SPIDR Report on Court-Mandated ADR)

Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution (SPIDR) Commission on Qualifications, *Principles Concerning Qualifications* (1989) (SPIDR Principles)

Task Force on Alternative Dispute Resolution in Employment, *A Due Process Protocol for Mediation and Arbitration of Statutory Disputes Arising Out of the Employment Relationship* (1995) (Employment Due Process Protocol)

Uniform Arbitration Act, 7 U.A.A. 1 (1997) (Uniform Arbitration Act)



Principle 1. Fundamentally-Fair Process

All parties are entitled to a fundamentally-fair ADR process. As embodiments of fundamental fairness, these Principles should be observed in structuring ADR Programs.

Reporter's Comments

Users of ADR are entitled to a process that is fundamentally fair. Emerging standards governing consensual and court-connected ADR programs reflect pervasive concerns with fair process. See, e.g., Ill Ian R. Macneil, Richard E. Speidel, & Thomas J. Stipanowich, *Federal Arbitration Law: Agreements, Awards & Remedies Under the Federal Arbitration Act* '32.2.1 (1994) [hereinafter *Federal Arbitration Law*] (noting "universal agreement" that arbitrators must provide parties with fundamentally-fair hearing). See also *Kaiser Permanente Review and Recommendations 1* ("As the sponsor of a mandatory system of arbitration, Kaiser Permanente must assure a fair system to their members, physicians and staff.")

Where conflict resolution processes are defined by a written contract, that writing is often viewed by courts as the primary indicator of the "procedural fairness" for which the parties bargained. As the Advisory Committee recognized, however, ADR agreements in most Consumer contracts are "take-it-or-leave-it" contracts which are not products of negotiation by Consumers. See David S. Schwartz, *Enforcing Small Print to Protect Big Business: Employee and Consumer Rights Claims in an Age of Compelled Arbitration*, 1997 Wis. L. Rev. 33, 55-60 (discussing adhesion dimension of pre-dispute arbitration agreements in standardized contracts); *Kaiser Permanente Review and Recommendations 28* (noting that many members of a major HMO have no realistic alternative for medical care). It is possible, therefore, that contracts to which they have generally assented contain ADR Agreements which fall so far short of Consumers' reasonable expectations that they would not have entered into the agreement had they been aware of the provisions. Thus, although these Principles attempt to enhance the likelihood that Consumers will have specific knowledge of ADR provisions at the time of contracting, the Advisory Committee also believed it necessary to describe a baseline of reasonable expectations for ADR in Consumer transactions. These Principles identify specific minimum due process standards which embody the concept of fundamental fairness, including: informed consent; impartial and unbiased Neutrals; independent administration of ADR; qualified Neutrals; access to small claims court; reasonable costs (including, where appropriate, subsidized Provider-mandated procedures); convenient hearing locations; reasonable time limits; adequate representation; fair hearing procedures; access to sufficient information; confidentiality; availability of court remedies; application of legal principle and precedent by arbitrators; and the option to receive a statement of reasons for arbitration awards.

Where provisions in a standardized pre-dispute arbitration agreement fail to meet Consumers' reasonable expectations, there is authority for the principle that courts may properly refuse to enforce the arbitration agreement in whole or in part. See *Restatement (Second) of Contracts* ' 211 (1981); *Broemmer v. Abortion Services of Phoenix, Ltd.*, 173 Ariz. 148, 840 P.2d 1013 (1992) (standardized arbitration agreement was unenforceable where its terms fell beyond patient's reasonable expectations); *Graham v. Scissor-Tail, Inc.*, 623 P.2d 165 (Cal. 1981) (arbitration clauses in adhesion contracts are unenforceable if they are contrary to the reasonable expectations of parties or unconscionable). Cf. *Cole v. Burns International Security Services*, 105 F.3d 1465 (D.C. Cir. 1997) (setting forth minimum due process standards for judicial enforcement of arbitration agreement in the context of a statutory employment discrimination claim where the employee was required to enter into the agreement as a condition of employment). Procedural fairness in Consumer arbitration



agreements may also be policed under other principles. *See, e.g., Stirlen v. Supercuts*, 51 Cal. App. 4th Supp. 1519, 60 Cal. Rptr.2d 138 (1997) (finding remedial limits in “adhesive” employment agreement unconscionable); *Engalla v. Permanente Med. Grp.*, 938 P.2d 903 (Cal. 1997) (arbitration agreement was unenforceable if there was substantial delay in arbitrator selection contrary to consumer’s reasonable, fraudulently induced, contractual expectations).

Because the Principles in this Protocol represent a fundamental standard of fairness, waiver of any of these Principles in a pre-dispute agreement will naturally be subject to scrutiny as to conformity with the reasonable expectations of the parties and other judicial standards governing the enforceability of such contracts. Assuming they have sufficient specific knowledge and understanding of the rights they are waiving, however, Consumers may waive compliance with these Principles after a dispute has arisen.

Principle 2. Access to Information Regarding ADR Program

Providers of goods or services should undertake reasonable measures to provide Consumers with full and accurate information regarding Consumer ADR Programs. At the time the Consumer contracts for goods or services, such measures should include (1) clear and adequate notice regarding the ADR provisions, including a statement indicating whether participation in the ADR Program is mandatory or optional, and (2) reasonable means by which Consumers may obtain additional information regarding the ADR Program. After a dispute arises, Consumers should have access to all information necessary for effective participation in ADR.

Reporter’s Comments

See SPIDR Report on Qualifications at 9 (“Consumers are entitled to know what tasks the neutral...may perform and what tasks they are expected to perform in the course of a particular dispute resolution service.”) *Cf. SPIDR Principles* at 6-7 (“It is the responsibility of...private programs offering dispute resolution services to define clearly the services they provide...[and provide information about the program and Neutrals to the parties.]”); *Kaiser Permanente Review and Recommendations* 28 (provider of medical services has duty to provide users with “enough information and facts to allow them to understand the actual operation of the arbitration system”); *Principles for ADR Provider Organizations* 2. At a minimum, Consumers should be provided with (or have prompt access to) written information to explain the process. This should include general information describing each ADR process used and its distinctive features, including:

- * the nature and purpose of the process, including the scope of ADR provisions;
- * an indication of whether or not the Consumer has a choice regarding use of the process;
- * the role of parties and attorneys, if any;
- * procedures for selection of Neutrals;
- * rules of conduct for Neutrals, and complaint procedures;
- * fees and expenses;
- * information regarding ADR Program operation, including locations, times of operation, and case processing procedures;
- * the availability of special services for non-English speakers, and persons with disabilities; and,
- * the availability of alternatives to ADR, including small claims court.



See, e.g., *BBB Arbitration Rules* (defining arbitration and the roles of various participants; providing “checklist” for Consumers preparing for arbitration; setting forth procedural rules). Cf. *Standards for Court-Connected Programs* ‘ 3.2.b. (listing information which courts sponsoring mediation should provide to program users). See also *SPIDR Principles* at 6-7 (listing information which private programs should offer to parties regarding the program and participating Neutrals). Consumers should also be able to obtain a copy of pertinent rules and procedures. In the case of binding arbitration provisions, there should also be a straightforward explanation of the differences between arbitration and court process. See Principle 11 “Agreements to Arbitrate.” Although the Provider of goods or services is charged with the responsibility for making certain that Consumers have access to appropriate information regarding ADR, the Independent ADR Institution has an important role in this area. The Independent ADR Institution must be prepared to communicate to the parties all information necessary for effective use of the ADR process(es), particularly after a dispute arises.

All materials should be prepared in plain straightforward language. As a rule, such information should be in the same language as the principal contract for goods or services. See, e.g., *N.Y. Pers. Prop. Law* ‘ 427 (McKinney 1997). See also *Standards for Court-Connected Programs* ‘ 3.2.b., Commentary, at 3-4 (If a significant percentage of the population served is monolingual in a particular language, the material should be available in that language.)

Practical Suggestions

An example of a creative approach to providing information about Consumer ADR is provided by a major university medical center’s Health Care Dispute Resolution Program. The medical center provides prospective patients with a written explanation of mediation and arbitration procedures for resolution of health care-related disputes one month before they visit the center to complete the remaining paperwork. As the written materials explain, the program is voluntary; patients are not required to opt for the procedures as a condition to receiving treatment. Patients may contact the center for additional information regarding the processes.

For purposes of allowing Consumers access to information about dispute resolution programs, the AAA makes available an 800 customer service telephone number. In addition, the AAA, like some other Independent ADR Institutions, also has a World Wide Web site; it posts its rules and an explanation of its mediation and arbitration procedures on the Web site. A panel proposing reforms to a major HMO-sponsored arbitration system recommended the creation of an “ombudsperson program to assist members in navigating the system of dispute resolution.” Kaiser Permanente Review and Recommendations 2.43.

Principle 3. Independent and Impartial Neutral; Independent Administration

1. *Independent and Impartial Neutral.* All parties are entitled to a Neutral who is independent and impartial.
2. *Independent Administration.* If participation in mediation or arbitration is mandatory, the procedure should be administered by an Independent ADR Institution. Administrative services should include the maintenance of a panel of prospective Neutrals, facilitation of Neutral selection, collection and distribution of Neutral’s fees and expenses, oversight and implementation of ADR rules and procedures, and monitoring of Neutral qualifications, performance, and adherence to pertinent rules, procedures and ethical standards.
3. *Standards for Neutrals.* The Independent ADR Institution should make reasonable efforts to ensure that Neutrals understand and conform to pertinent ADR rules, procedures and ethical standards.



4. *Selection of Neutrals.* The Consumer and Provider should have an equal voice in the selection of Neutrals in connection with a specific dispute.
5. *Disclosure and Disqualification.* Beginning at the time of appointment, Neutrals should be required to disclose to the Independent ADR Institution any circumstance likely to affect impartiality, including any bias or financial or personal interest which might affect the result of the ADR proceeding, or any past or present relationship or experience with the parties or their representatives, including past ADR experiences. The Independent ADR Institution should communicate any such information to the parties and other Neutrals, if any. Upon objection of a party to continued service of the Neutral, the Independent ADR Institution should determine whether the Neutral should be disqualified and should inform the parties of its decision. The disclosure obligation of the Neutral and procedure for disqualification should continue throughout the period of appointment.

Reporter's Comments

The concept of a fair, independent and impartial Neutral (or Neutral Panel) is enshrined in leading standards governing arbitration and mediation. See *Federal Arbitration Act* ' 10(a) (2); *Uniform Arbitration Act* ' 12(a) (2); *AAA Commercial Rules* 12, 13, 14, 19; *BBB Arbitration Rules* 6, 8. The *Joint Standards for Mediators* describe mediator impartiality as "central" to the mediation process and require mediators to conduct mediation in an impartial manner. *Joint Standards for Mediators*, Art. II; *Standards for Court-Connected Programs* ' 8.1.a. Similar policies animate standards requiring mediators to disclose conflicts of interest and to conduct the mediation in a fair manner. *Joint Standards for Mediators*, Arts. III, VI; *SPIDR Principles*, Principles 4.b., c., f.; 6.d., e., i.; *Standards for Court-Connected Programs* ' 8.1.b.

When Neutrals are appointed by a court or other organization, the appointing entity has an important obligation to ensure their impartiality. This obligation entails a reasonable level of oversight of Neutral performance. Comments to the *Joint Standards for Mediators* indicate that "[w]hen mediators are appointed by a court or institution, the appointing agency shall make reasonable efforts to ensure that mediators serve impartially." *Joint Standards for Mediators*, Art. II. The *Standards for Court-Connected Programs* therefore require courts to "adopt a code of ethical standards for mediators [covering, among other things, impartiality and conflict of interest], together with procedures to handle violations of the code." *Standards for Court-Connected Programs* ' 8.1. For these and other reasons, the integrity and impartiality of the administrative organization is also important; the growing use of arbitration and mediation in the Consumer context has also raised issues regarding the administration of such processes. See, e.g., *Engalla v. Permanente Med. Grp.*, 928 P.2d 903 (Cal. 1997). See generally Edward Dauer, *Engalla's Legacy to Arbitration*, ADR Currents, Summer 1997, at 1; *Principles for ADR Provider Organizations* (setting forth general principles of responsible practice for ADR Provider Organizations, "entities which hold themselves out as offering, brokering or administering dispute resolution services").

In addition to appointing Neutrals, administering institutions often perform many functions which have a direct impact on the conduct of the dispute resolution process, including functions sometimes performed by Neutrals. The consensus of the Advisory Committee was that the reality and perception of impartiality and fairness was as essential in the case of Independent ADR Institutions as it was in the case of individual Neutrals. Thus, the Advisory Committee concluded that when an ADR Agreement mandates that parties resort to mediation or arbitration, the administering Independent ADR Institution should be independent of either party and impartial. See, e.g., *Kaiser Permanente Review and Recommendations* 31 (recommending, first and foremost, the "creation of an independent, accountable administrator" for the Kaiser Permanente arbitration system to counter "perception of bias" raised by "self-administration"). See also *Principles for ADR Provider Organizations* (draft standards for organizations providing ADR services). For this and other



reasons, this Principle may be the single most significant contribution of the Protocol. In the long term, moreover, the independence of administering institutions may be the greatest challenge of Consumer ADR.

Broad disclosure of actual or potential conflicts of interest on the part of prospective Neutrals is critical to the real and perceived fairness of ADR. Although consenting parties have considerable freedom to choose Neutrals, including those with experience in a particular industry or profession, the key to informed consent is broad disclosure by prospective Neutrals. Therefore, a long line of authority under federal and state arbitration statutes establishes the principle that an arbitrator's failure to disclose certain relationships or other facts which raise issues of partiality may result in reversal of an arbitration award. See generally *III Federal Arbitration Law* Ch. 28 (discussing legal and ethical rules governing arbitrator impartiality). The principle of disclosure is embodied in leading arbitration rules and ethical standards. See AAA *Commercial Rule 19*, NASD *Code ' 10312*; BBB *Arbitration Rules 6, 8*.

The Joint Standards for Mediators mandate disclosure of "all actual and potential conflicts of interest reasonably known to the mediator" including any "dealing or relationship that might create an impression of possible bias." *Joint Standards for Mediators*, Art. III. Thereafter, the mediator must await the parties' agreement to proceed with mediation. The same concerns require mediators to identify and avoid conflicts during (and even after) mediation. *Id.* Cf. *Employment Due Process Protocol ' C.4*. (mediators and arbitrators have a duty to disclose any relationship which might reasonably constitute or be perceived as a conflict of interest); *SPIDR Principles*, Principles 4.b., c., f.; 6.d., e., i.; *Standards for Court-Connected Programs ' 8.1.b*.

Although they did not establish it as a requirement under these Principles, most members of the Advisory Committee endorsed the concept of a "list selection" process similar to that employed by the AAA. See AAA *Commercial Rule 14*. Under this process, the Independent ADR Institution provides each of the parties with lists of prospective Neutrals and invites the parties to identify and rank acceptable individuals. Mutually acceptable Neutrals are thereby identified. The AAA approach served as the model for other ADR standards. See, e.g., *Employment Due Process Protocol ' C.3*; Securities Industry Conference on Arbitration, *List Selection Rule* (Final Draft, Sept. 18, 1997) (proposed by SICA as modification to Section 8 of the *Uniform Code of Arbitration*); Proposed Rule Change by National Association of Securities Dealers, File No. SR-NASD097 (proposed by NASD as modification to Rules 10310 and 10311 of the NASD Code of Arbitration Procedure). The concern was expressed that the list selection approach may create a financial tie between Neutrals in the pool and Providers, who will be "repeat players" in the ADR Program. Such considerations may mandate, among other things, a larger panel of Neutrals, rotating assignments, or disclosure of past awards rendered by arbitrators.

In the interest of informed selection, the Advisory Committee recommends that parties be provided with or have access to some information regarding recent ADR proceedings conducted by prospective Neutrals. Cf. *Employment Due Process Protocol ' B.3* (recommending that parties be provided with names, addresses, and phone numbers of party representatives in a prospective arbitrator's six most recent cases to aid in selection).

The dictates of fairness also extend to the conduct of ADR sessions. Thus, for example, arbitrators generally are forbidden from communicating with parties outside of hearings. See *III Federal Arbitration Law ' 32.4*. Similarly, standards for mediator conduct demand impartiality. See, e.g., *Standards for Court-Connected Programs ' 8.1*.



Although the rules and procedures of an ADR Program and oversight by the Independent ADR Institution are important in assuring the impartiality of Neutrals, it is also essential that Neutrals be bound to perform in accordance with recognized ethical standards. In the case of arbitrators, the leading ethical standard is the *Code of Ethics for Arbitrators in Commercial Disputes* (current version). Similarly, ethical standards governing mediator eligibility also require impartiality. See, e.g., *Standards for Court-Connected Programs* ' 8.1. It is the responsibility of the Independent ADR Institution to develop or adopt ethical standards for Neutrals and to ensure that Neutrals understand and conform to applicable standards.

Some arbitration procedures provide for a "tripartite" panel in which each party appoints its own "party-arbitrator," and the two party-arbitrators select a third arbitrator to complete the panel. See generally *III Federal Arbitration Law* ' 28.4; see also Alan Scott Rau, *Integrity in Private Judging*, 38 S. Tex. L. Rev. 485, 505-08 (1997) (noting problems with party-arbitrator concept). For a number of reasons, the Advisory Committee believed such practices should be avoided in the Consumer sphere, and that all arbitrators should be neutral. Cf. *Kaiser Permanente Review and Recommendations* 42 (expressing serious concerns regarding tripartite panel approach).

Practical Suggestions

Independent ADR Institutions should develop procedures which are appropriate to each of the ADR Programs they administer. A helpful model for program administrators is the User Advisory Committee now being utilized by the AAA to establish procedures and policies for ADR in the areas of employment, construction, health care, and other transactional settings. Cf. *Kaiser Permanente Review and Recommendations* 32 (recommending "on-going, volunteer Advisory Committee" comprised of representatives of various interest groups, including "an appropriate consumer advocacy organization" to consult in development of arbitration program). Such entities should provide a forum in which representatives of Consumers and Providers cooperate in the development and implementation of policies and procedures governing an ADR program, including selection of Neutrals.

For selection of Neutrals, the Independent ADR Institution might utilize a list procedure similar to that used by the AAA. The list of prospective Neutrals should include pertinent biographical information, including the names of parties and representatives involved in recent arbitration proceedings handled by the prospective Neutral. Cf. *Employment Due Process Protocol* ' B.3 (recommending that parties be provided with names, addresses, and phone numbers of party representatives in a prospective arbitrator's six most recent cases to aid in selection). Each party should be afforded discretion to reject any candidate with or without cause. Failing agreement on a Neutral or panel of Neutrals in this fashion, the Neutral should be appointed by the Independent ADR Institution, subject to objection for good cause.

Principle 4. Quality and Competence of Neutrals

All parties are entitled to competent, qualified Neutrals. Independent ADR Institutions are responsible for establishing and maintaining standards for Neutrals in ADR Programs they administer.

Reporter's Comments

Organizations providing ADR services for Consumer transactions should have a continuing obligation to monitor the quality of the services they provide. This obligation requires that they establish and maintain standards for Neutrals within



the program which are appropriate to the issues or disputes being addressed. The SPIDR Commission on Qualifications calls upon private as well as public programs offering ADR services to set and monitor program performance. See *SPIDR Principles*, Principle 6, at 3-4. Likewise, the *Standards for Court-Connected Programs* call upon courts to “ensure that the mediation programs to which they refer cases are monitored adequately...and evaluated [periodically].” *Standards for Court-Connected Programs* ‘ 6.0.

The most critical element in ADR quality control is the establishment and maintenance of standards of competence for Neutrals within the program. “Competence” refers to “the acquisition of skills, knowledge and...other attributes” deemed necessary to assist others in resolving disputes in a particular setting. See *SPIDR Report on Qualifications* at 6. In 1989, the SPIDR Commission on Qualifications published a list of general skills and areas of knowledge that should be considered by groups establishing competency standards. See *SPIDR Principles*, Principle 11, at 4-7.

While ensuring the competence of Neutrals is always important, it is particularly “critical in contexts where party choice over the process, program or neutral is limited” a reality of many Consumer ADR programs. See *SPIDR Report on Qualifications* at 5; *SPIDR Principles*, Principle 3 at 2 (extent to which Neutral qualifications are mandated should vary by degree of choice parties have over dispute resolution process, ADR Program, and Neutral). The SPIDR Commission on Qualifications requires private programs to, among other things, establish clear criteria for the selection and evaluation of Neutrals and conduct periodic performance evaluations. *SPIDR Principles* at 3. See also *SPIDR Report on Qualifications* at 6 (Neutrals, professional associations, programs and Consumers should all have responsibility for addressing and assessing Neutral performance); American Bar Ass’n Young Lawyers Div. & Special Comm. On Alternative Means of Dispute Resolution, *Resolving Disputes: An Alternative Approach, A Handbook for Establishment of Dispute Settlement Centers* 32 (1983) (noting importance of post-mediation evaluation by administering agency).

The Advisory Committee concluded that it would be inappropriate (and, probably, impossible) to set forth a set of universally applicable qualifications for Neutrals in Consumer disputes. The Advisory Committee’s conclusions parallel those of other groups establishing broad standards for the conduct of ADR. See, e.g., *SPIDR Report on Qualifications*; *SPIDR Principles* at 1, 2. As the SPIDR Commission on Qualifications determined, Neutral qualifications are best established by joint efforts of concerned “stakeholders” in specific contexts. See, e.g., *Kaiser Permanente Review and Recommendations* 35-36 (recommending involvement of advisory committee in development of arbitrator qualifications).

It is important for Consumers to have a voice in establishing and maintaining standards of competence and quality in ADR programs. The SPIDR Commission on Qualifications recently observed that “consumers...share a responsibility with programs, [Neutrals]...and associations to join in evaluating and reporting on the performance of [Neutrals]...and programs and contributing to the development of policies and standards on qualifications.” *SPIDR Report on Qualifications*, ‘ G.2. at 9. See also *SPIDR Principles*, Principle 2 at 2 (private entities making judgments about neutral qualifications should be guided by groups that include representatives of consumers of services). Although Neutral expertise is traditionally a hallmark of arbitration, technical or professional experience often carries with it the perception if not the reality of bias. From the Consumer’s perspective, therefore, an arbitrator who shares the professional or commercial background of a Provider may not be the ideal judge. See, e.g., *Broemmer v. Abortion Serv. of Phoenix*, 840 P.2d 1013 (Ariz. 1992) (adhesion arbitration agreement provided by abortion clinic which, among other things, required arbitrator to be a licensed obstetrician/gynecologist, was unenforceable as beyond reasonable expectations of patient).



An Independent ADR Institution's responsibility for the qualifications of Neutrals in a particular Consumer ADR program dictates the development of an appropriate training program. Ideally, the training should include a mentoring program with experienced Neutrals as well as coverage of applicable principles of Consumer law. See Mark E. Budnitz, *Arbitration of Disputes Between Consumers and Financial Institutions: A Serious Threat to Consumer Protection*, 10 Ohio St. J. on Disp. Res. 267, 315 (arbitrators need special legal expertise to address statutory issues respecting consumer claims against financial institutions). Successful completion of such training should be reflected in the information on prospective Neutrals furnished to the parties prior to selection. Cf. *Employment Due Process Protocol* ' C.2.

The Advisory Committee generally supports the concept of broad choice in selection of Neutrals, and recognizes the right of Consumers and Providers to jointly select any Neutral in whom the parties have requisite trust, even one who does not possess all of the qualifications recommended by an ADR Program. Cf. *Employment Due Process Protocol* ' C.1.; *Standards for Court-Connected Programs* ' 13.4 ("Parties should have the widest possible latitude in selecting mediators, consistent with public policy."). This assumes, of course, that both parties have a true choice in the matter, that they are duly informed about the background and qualifications of the Neutrals proposed, and that all such Neutrals have made full disclosure of possible conflicts of interest in accordance with Principle 3.

Practical Suggestions

Elements of effective quality control include the establishment of standards for Neutrals, the development of a training program, and a program of ongoing performance evaluation and feedback. Because the requirements of parties will vary with the circumstances, it will be necessary to establish standards for Neutrals in an ADR Program with due regard for the specific needs of users of the program. As noted in connection with Principle 3, a helpful model for program administrators is the User Advisory Committee now being utilized by the AAA to establish procedures and policies for ADR in the areas of employment, construction, health care, and other transactional settings. Such entities could bring Consumer and Provider representatives together to assist in the development and implementation of programs to train, qualify and monitor the performance of Neutrals.

Principle 5. Small Claims

Consumer ADR Agreements should make it clear that all parties retain the right to seek relief in a small claims court for disputes or claims within the scope of its jurisdiction.

Reporter's Comments

Disputes arising out of Consumer transactions often involve relatively small amounts of money. Such disputes may be well-suited to resolution by informal ADR processes and judicial small claims procedures.

Within the judicial system, the least expensive and most efficient alternative for resolution of claims for minor amounts of money often lies in small claims courts. These courts typically provide a convenient, less formal and relatively expeditious judicial forum for handling such disputes, and afford the benefit, where necessary, of the coercive powers of the judicial



system. The Advisory Committee concluded that access to small claims tribunals is an important right of Consumers which should not be waived by a pre-dispute ADR Agreement.

Practical Suggestions

Because, for cases involving small amounts of money, parties retain the option of an oral hearing in small claims court, it may be reasonable for the ADR Agreement to provide for arbitration of small claims without a face-to-face hearing. Such alternatives may include “desk arbitration,” which involves the making of an arbitration award based on written submissions; proceedings conducted by telephone or electronic data transmission; and other options. See Principle 12.

Mediation conducted by telephone conference call has also proven effective in resolving Consumer disputes. At least one major auto manufacturer has successfully used this technique to resolve warranty claims.

Principle 6. Reasonable Cost

1. *Reasonable Cost.* Providers of goods and services should develop ADR programs which entail reasonable cost to Consumers based on the circumstances of the dispute, including, among other things, the size and nature of the claim, the nature of goods or services provided, and the ability of the Consumer to pay. In some cases, this may require the Provider to subsidize the process.
2. *Handling of Payment.* In the interest of ensuring fair and independent Neutrals, the making of fee arrangements and the payment of fees should be administered on a rational, equitable and consistent basis by the Independent ADR Institution.

Reporter's Comments

A fundamental principle of our civil justice system is that a person should never be denied access to a court due to an inability to pay court costs. The reality is that the public justice system is heavily subsidized, and that users pay only a small fraction of the actual cost of trial and related procedures. Moreover, indigent litigants may be afforded relief from even these small fees. This principle has been extended in many cases to court-connected ADR programs, in which courts defray all or part of the expenses of mediation or court-connected arbitration. See *Standards for Court-Connected Programs*, “5.1.a, 13.0 (“[c]ourts should impose mandatory attendance only when the cost of mediation is publicly funded”; “[c]ourts should make mediation available to parties regardless of the parties’ ability to pay”). According to data from the National Center for State Courts’ ADR database, approximately 60% of programs did not depend upon the parties to pay mediator fees for contract and tort cases; no programs charged user fees for mediation of small claims. See *Standards for Court-Connected Programs* ‘ 13.2., Commentary, at 13-4.

Similar policies have prompted various private ADR tribunals to institute mechanisms for waiving filing fees and other administrative expenses in appropriate cases. See, e.g., *NASD Code* ‘ 10332 (permitting Director of Arbitration to waive fees or deposits for parties in securities arbitration); *Nazon v. Shearson Lehman Bros., Inc.*, 832 F. Supp. 1540, 1543 (S.D. Fla. 1993) (employee, although required to bear expenses of pursuing civil rights claim in arbitration, might seek waiver of fees under NASD rules). One federal court of appeals recently concluded that to be enforceable with respect to actions under statutes governing employment discrimination, an arbitration agreement must not “require employees to pay



either unreasonable costs or any arbitrators' fees or expenses as a condition of access to the arbitration forum." *Cole v. Burns Int'l Security Serv.*, 105 F.3d 1465, 1482-84 (D.C. Cir. 1997).

Due to the wide range of transactions and the equally broad spectrum of conflict in the Consumer arena, it is inappropriate to mandate bright-line rules regarding ADR costs. In determining what is reasonable, consideration should be given to the nature of the conflict (including the size of monetary claims, if any), and the nature of goods or services provided. In some cases, it may be possible to fulfill the principle of reasonable cost by the use of the Internet, the telephone, other electronic media, or through written submissions. See, e.g., Michael F. Altschul & Elizabeth S. Stong, *AAA Develops New Arbitration Rules to Resolve Wireless Disputes*, ADR Currents, Fall 1997, at 6. Abbreviated procedures may be particularly appropriate in the context of small monetary claims, where there is always the alternative of a face-to-face hearing in small claims court. See Principle 5.

In some cases, the need to ensure reasonable costs for the Consumer will require the Provider of goods or services to subsidize the costs of ADR which is mandated by the agreement. Indeed, many companies today deem it appropriate to pay most or all of the costs of ADR procedures for claims and disputes involving individual employees. See Mei L. Bickner, et al, *Developments in Employment Arbitration*, 52 Disp. Res. J. 8 (1997). The consensus of the Committee was that if participation in mediation is mandated by the ADR agreement, the Provider should pay the costs of the procedure, including mediator's fees and expenses. The Committee considered, and ultimately rejected, the alternative of establishing specific requirements for Provider subsidization of the cost of arbitration procedures, other than to conclude that the Provider of goods and services should ensure the consumer a basic minimum arbitration procedure appropriate to the circumstances.

In some cases, an arbitrator may find it appropriate to defray the cost of Consumer participation in arbitration by an award of costs. Some lemon laws provide for such relief. See, e.g., *Chrysler Corp. v. Maiocco*, 209 Conn. 579, 552 A.2d 1207 (1989) (applying Connecticut Lemon Law); *Walker v. General Motors Corp.*, 160 Misc.2d 903, 611 N.Y.S.2d 741 (1994) (applying provision of New York Lemon Law permitting "prevailing consumer" to receive award of attorney's fees); *General Motors Corp. v. Fischer*, 140 Misc.2d 243, 530 N.Y.S.2d 484 (1988) (same). In some cases, it may be appropriate for an arbitrator in a Consumer case to render an award of attorney's fees pursuant to statute or in other cases where a court might do so. Without such an award, however, the Committee does not support the proposition that Providers are required to subsidize Consumers' attorney's fees for ADR.

At the same time, there are legitimate concerns that having the Provider pay all or a substantial portion of neutral's fees and expenses may undermine the latter's impartiality. For this reason, as observed in the *Employment Due Process Protocol*, "[i]mpartiality is best assured by the parties sharing the fees and expenses of the mediator and arbitrator." *Employment Due Process Protocol* ' 6. See also Stephen J. Ware, *Arbitration and Unconscionability After Doctor's Associates, Inc. v. Casarotto*, 31 Wake Forest L. Rev. 1001, 1023 (1996). But see Alan Scott Rau, *Integrity in Private Judging*, 38 S. Tex. L. Rev. 485, 528 (1997). Therefore, the Advisory Committee concludes that Consumers should have the option to share up to half of the Neutral's fees and expenses. In addition, unless the parties agree otherwise after a dispute arises, the handling of fee arrangements and the payment of fees should be conducted by the Independent ADR Institution. The latter, "by negotiating the parties' share of costs and collecting such fees, might be able to reduce the bias potential



of disparate contributions by forwarding payment to the mediator and/or arbitrator without disclosing the parties' share therein." *Employment Due Process Protocol* ' 6.

Some ADR Programs serving Consumers are staffed wholly or partly by unpaid volunteers. See, e.g., *BBB Arbitration Rules* at 2. The use of such programs, including community dispute resolution centers, may be a satisfactory means of addressing cost concerns associated with Consumer ADR, particularly in cases involving low stakes. However, concerns have been expressed by some authorities regarding overdependence on volunteer Neutrals. See *Standards for Court-Connected Programs* ' 13.1, Commentary, at 13-2 (warning of dangers of exclusive reliance on volunteers in ADR programs). Care must be taken by those responsible for overseeing such programs to make certain that lower cost does not come at the expense of adequately qualified Neutrals.

Practical Suggestions

In the event that an ADR procedure is mandated by the Provider of goods and services and the Consumer demonstrates an inability to pay all or part of the costs of the procedure, the Provider should front such costs subject to allocation in the arbitration award or mediation settlement.

In some cases, it may be possible to fulfill the principle of reasonable cost by the use of the Internet, the telephone, other electronic media, or through written submissions. See, e.g., Michael F. Altschul & Elizabeth S. Stong, *AAA Develops New Arbitration Rules to Resolve Wireless Disputes*, *ADR Currents*, Fall 1997, at 6.

Principle 7. Reasonably Convenient Location

In the case of face-to-face proceedings, the proceedings should be conducted at a location which is reasonably convenient to both parties with due consideration of their ability to travel and other pertinent circumstances. If the parties are unable to agree on a location, the determination should be made by the Independent ADR Institution or by the Neutral.

Reporter's Comments

The Advisory Committee concludes that ADR proceedings should take place at a location that is reasonably convenient to all parties.

Flexibility in choosing a hearing location is a theoretical advantage of consensual conflict resolution, permitting minimal cost and inconvenience to all parties. On the other hand, location terms may put one party at a great disadvantage, significantly increasing the cost and logistical complexity of dispute resolution. This is particularly true with regard to binding arbitration, which may involve the participation of multiple witnesses as well as the parties and their representatives. See *III Federal Arbitration Law* ' 32.8.3.

Typically, contractual agreements which provide that arbitration hearings will be conducted in a particular place are honored by the courts. See, e.g., *Management Recruiters Int'l, Inc. v. Bloor*, 129 F.3d 851 (6th Cir. 1997) (under *Federal Arbitration Act*, forum expectations of parties in arbitration agreement are enforceable, and may not be upset by state



law); *Bear Stearns & Co. v. Bennett*, 938 F.2d 31, 32 (2nd Cir. 1991) (noting “prima facie validity” of forum-selection clauses, including those in arbitration agreements); *Snyder v. Smith*, 736 F.2d 409, 419 (7th Cir.), cert. denied, 469 U.S. 1037, 105 S. Ct. 513, 83 L. Ed.2d 403 (1984) (courts must give effect to freely-negotiated arbitration clause in commercial agreement). See II *Federal Arbitration Law* ‘ 24.2.3.4 (discussing *Federal Arbitration Act*). Cf. *Carnival Cruise Lines, Inc. v. Shute*, 449 U.S.585, 111 S.Ct. 1522, 113 L. Ed. 2d 622 (1991) (judicial forum selection clause in terms on cruise ship passenger ticket enforceable); *M/S Bremen v. Zapata Off-Shore Co.*, 407 U.S. 1, 92 S. Ct. 1907, 32 L.Ed.2d (1972) (judicial forum selection clause is prima facie valid and should be enforced unless enforcement is shown by the resisting party to be unreasonable under the circumstances).

The same is true of cases where the parties agree to a process for selecting location, such as that provided by the AAA Rules. See, e.g., AAA Commercial Rule 11. There is authority for pre-award challenges to location selection mechanisms. *Aerojet-General Corp. v. AAA*, 478 F.2d 248 (9th Cir. 1973) (pre-award judicial review appropriate where choice of arbitration locale not made in good faith and one or more parties are faced with severe irreparable injury). Again, however, such action is likely to be deemed appropriate only in extreme cases. See *Seguro de Servicio de Salud v. McAuto Systems*, 878 F.2d 5, 9 n.6 (1st Cir. 1989); *S.J. Groves & Sons Co. v. AAA*, 452 F. Supp. 121, 124 (D. Minn. 1978).

Some courts, however, have identified limits on locational designations in judicial forum selection provisions. See Mark E. Budnitz, *Arbitration of Disputes Between Consumers and Financial Institutions: A Serious Threat to Consumer Protection*, 10 Ohio St. J. on Disp. Res. 267, 292; David S. Schwartz, *Enforcing Small Print to Protect Big Business: Employee and Consumer Rights Claims in an Age of Compelled Arbitration*, 1997 Wis. L. Rev. 36, 121 n.366. Forum selection clauses may be overcome if it can be demonstrated that their incorporation in the contract was the result of fraud, undue influence, or an extreme disparity in bargaining power, or if the selected forum is so inconvenient that it would effectively deprive a party of a day in court. See, e.g., *Kubis & Persyk Assoc., Inc. v. Sun Microsystems, Inc.*, 146 N.J. 176, 188-97, 680 A.2d 618, 624-29 (1996) (reviewing cases and recognizing limits on enforceability of forum selection clauses); *Moses v. Business Card Expr., Inc.*, 929 F.2d 1131, 1136-39 (6th Cir.), cert. denied, 502 U.S. 821, 112 S. Ct. 81, 116 L.Ed.2d 54 (1991) (in considering change of venue motion, forum selection clause must be considered along with convenience of parties and witnesses and overall fairness); *Hoffman v. Minuteman Press Int’l, Inc.*, 747 F. Supp. 552 (W.D. Mo. 1990) (denying venue change in accordance with forum selection agreement on basis of extreme hardship and alleged fraud in the inducement); *Cutter v. Scott & Fetzer Co.*, 510 F. Supp. 905, 908 (E.D. Wis. 1981) (refusing to enforce forum selection clause on basis of state Fair Dealership Law, and observing that clause was not the subject of negotiation). See also *Restatement (Second) of Conflict of Laws* ‘ 80 (1969) (agreement regarding place of action will be given effect unless it is unfair or unreasonable); Benjamin Levin & Richard Morrison, *Kubis and the Changing Landscape of Forum Selection Clauses*, 16 Franchise. L.J. 97 (1997) (discussing trend to limit enforceability of forum selection clauses in franchise agreements by statute and case law); Donald B. Brenner, *There is a Developing Trend Among Courts of Making Choice of Forum Clauses in Franchise Agreements Presumptively Invalid*, 102 Com. L.J. 94 (1997) (same).

In the course of finding a judicial forum selection provision in a form franchise agreement presumptively invalid, the New Jersey Supreme Court recognized that the following factors may be relevant to enforceability: (1) whether the provision is the product of arm’s length negotiations or is effectively imposed by a party with disproportionate bargaining power; and (2) whether the provision provides an “indirect benefit to...[the stronger party by making] litigation more costly and cumbersome for economically weaker...[parties] that often lack the sophistication and resources to litigate effectively



a long distance from home.” *Kubis*, 146 N.J. at 193-94, 680 A.2d at 626-27. See also *Model Choice of Forum Act* ‘ 3(4) Comment (1968) (“A significant factor to be considered in determining whether there was an abuse of economic power or other unconscionable means’ [sufficient to deny enforcement to a forum selection clause] is whether the choice of forum agreement was contained in an adhesion, or take-it-or-leave-it’ contract.”).

Such considerations may also affect the enforceability of an agreement to arbitrate. See *Patterson v. ITT Consumer Financial Corp.*, 14 Cal. App. 4th, 1659, 18 Cal. Rptr.2d 563 (1993) (arbitration provisions in loan agreements requiring California consumers to arbitrate in Minnesota were unconscionable).

Similar concerns have led some states to enact laws placing geographical limitations on the situs of arbitration. See, e.g., *Hambell v. Alphagraphics Franchising Inc.*, 779 F. Supp. 910 (E.D. Mich. 1991) (provision in franchise agreement for arbitration to take place outside state is void and unenforceable under Mich. Stat. Ann. ‘ 19.854(27) (f) (1984)); *Donmoor, Inc. v. Sturtevant*, 449 So.2d 869 (Fla. Ct. App. 1984) (clause in contract providing for arbitration in another state is unenforceable). Of course, such laws may be preempted by federal substantive law within the scope of the *Federal Arbitration Act*. See *Levin & Morrison*, *supra*, at 115-16.

In light of concerns such as the foregoing which are also relevant in the consumer arena, the Advisory Committee concluded that contractual ADR provisions should include a commitment to conduct ADR at a “reasonably convenient location.” Some members of the Advisory Committee favored setting an arbitrary mileage limit (i.e. “no more than 50 miles from the place where the transaction occurred”) while others advocated the nearest large city. Others pointed out that parties sometimes relocate. There was general agreement, however, that an agreed-upon process for independent determination of the locale if the parties fail to agree would be fair and equitable to both parties. See, e.g., *AAA Rule 11*; *Uniform Code of Arbitration* ‘ 9; *NASD Code of Arbitration Procedure* ‘ 10315. A similar function may be performed by the arbitrator or other duly appointed Neutral. (The AAA Rules already accord arbitrators the authority to set specific sites for arbitration hearings. See *AAA Rule 21*.)

In many cases, it may be possible to minimize the need for long distance travel and attendant expenses through the use of telephonic communications and submission of documents. An example of the application of such devices is the Expedited Procedures of the *AAA Rules*, which are generally applied to claims of \$50,000 or less. See *AAA Rules 9*, 53-57. See also *Uniform Code of Arbitration* ‘ 2. Telephonic mediation has long been a feature of some lemon law programs, and is currently being used in Consumer ADR by the National Futures Association (NFA). The National Association of Securities Dealers (NASD) is currently conducting a pilot program utilizing telephonic mediation.

Recent projects sponsored by the Better Business Bureau, the American Arbitration Association, and other organizations suggest the possibilities of online conflict resolution for online transactions as well as other kinds of disputes. See generally George H. Friedman, *Alternative Dispute Resolution and Emerging Online Technologies: Challenges and Opportunities*, 19 *Hastings Comm. & Ent. L.J.* 695 (1997).

If, as proposed, Consumers have the alternative of pursuing relief in a small claims court of competent jurisdiction, many concerns associated with long distance travel will be obviated with regard to small claims.



Practical Suggestions

Unless a convenient location can be specifically identified in the ADR agreement, the location should be left to the agreement of the parties after a dispute has arisen. The rules governing ADR under the agreement should establish a process for determination of the location by an independent party (such as a Neutral or the Independent ADR Institution) if the parties cannot agree on a location.

In some cases, it may be reasonable to conduct proceedings by telephone or electronic data transmission, with or without submission of documents. See, e.g., Principle 12. Such options may be particularly desirable in the case of arbitration of small claims, since the parties have the choice of going to small claims court. See Principle 5.

Principle 8. Reasonable Time Limits

ADR proceedings should occur within a reasonable time, without undue delay. The rules governing ADR should establish specific reasonable time periods for each step in the ADR process and, where necessary, set forth default procedures in the event a party fails to participate in the process after reasonable notice.

Reporter's Comments

A primary impetus for conflict resolution outside the court system is the potential for relatively speedy and efficient resolution of disputes. From the Consumer's perspective, moreover, the expectation of a reasonably prompt conclusion is likely to be, along with cost savings, the leading perceived advantage of consensual mediation or arbitration. See *Madden v. Kaiser Foundation Hospitals*, 17 Cal.3d 699, 711, 131 Cal. Rptr. 882, 552 P.2d 1178 (1976) (speed and economy of arbitration, in contrast to the expense and delay of jury trial, could prove helpful to all parties).

The principle of relatively prompt, efficient conflict resolution underlies standards governing the conduct of Neutrals. Mediators are admonished that "[a] quality process requires a commitment by the mediator to diligence..." *Joint Standards for Mediators*, Art. VI. *The Joint Standards for Mediators* also comment that "[m]ediators should only accept cases when they can satisfy the reasonable expectations of the parties concerning the timing of the process." *Id.*

A basic requirement is that the rules governing ADR establish and further the basic principle of conflict resolution within a reasonable time. This means not only that the rules should set forth specific time periods for various steps in the ADR process, but that default rules come into play if a party fails to participate in the manner required by the rules after due notice. This principle is embodied in leading ADR standards, including the *AAA Commercial Rules*. See, e.g., Rules 6, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, 21, 35, 36, 41. See also *BBB Arbitration Rule 27* ("BBB shall make every effort to obtain a final resolution of your complaint within 60 days, unless state or federal law provides otherwise. This time period may be extended at the request of the customer.").

Of course, it is not enough that the agreement places strict time limitations on procedural steps if these limitations are not effectively enforced a likely occurrence when an ADR Program is not independent of the Provider. Extreme disparity between stipulated time limits and actual practice under arbitration rules may render an arbitration agreement



unenforceable, as discussed at length in a recent California Supreme Court decision. See generally *Engalla v. Permanente Med. Grp., Inc.*, 938 P.2d 903 (Cal. 1997). The court pointedly observed,

[M]any large institutional users of arbitration, including most health maintenance organizations (HMO's), avoid the potential problems of delay in the selection of arbitrators by contracting with neutral third party organizations, such as the American Arbitration Association (AAA). These organizations will then assume responsibility for administering the claim from the time the arbitration demand is filed, and will ensure the arbitrator or arbitrators are chosen in a timely manner.

Id. at 975-76. In response to this decision, Kaiser appointed an advisory panel to propose reforms to its arbitration program. See *Kaiser Permanente Review and Recommendations* 33-34 (recommending establishment of and adherence to stated arbitration process deadlines).

Similarly, courts interpreting state lemon laws have acknowledged the right of Consumers to forgo arbitration and sue in court when the statutory period for the lemon law remedy elapsed without a remedy through no fault of their own. See, e.g., *Harrison v. Nissan Motor Corp.*, 111 F.3d 343 (3rd Cir. 1997) (court suit permissible where BBB failed to conduct arbitration within stipulated period); *Ford Motor Co. v. Ward*, 577 So.2d 641 (1991) (Consumer not required to exhaust arbitration procedures before bringing suit where dealer made it impossible for Consumer to arbitrate).

Practical Suggestions

When a Consumer dispute involves a small amount of money and relatively straightforward issues, it is reasonable to assume that an out-of-court resolution of such issues should be relatively quick. In such cases, it may be appropriate to develop expedited procedures and to set outside time limits on ADR Processes. Thus, for example, "Fast Track" arbitration procedures for construction disputes provide that "[t]he arbitration shall be completed by settlement or award within sixty (60) days of confirmation of the arbitrator's appointment, unless all parties agree otherwise or the arbitrator extends this time in extraordinary cases..." AAA *Construction Procedures*, ' F-12. The rules also require the award to be rendered within seven days from the closing of the hearing. See *id.*, ' F-11.

Similarly, the AAA *Wireless Rules* set forth Fast Track procedures for matters involving less than \$2,000 in claims or counterclaims. The Fast Track contemplates a "desk" arbitration procedure involving a hearing on documents; a limit of one seven-day extension on the time to respond to a claim or counterclaim; notice by telephone, electronic mail and other forms of electronic communication and by overnight mail, shortened time limits to select an arbitrator; no discovery except in extraordinary cases; a shortened time limit for rendition of award; and a time standard which sets a goal of 45 days from appointment of the arbitrator to award.

Principle 9. Right to Representation

All parties participating in processes in ADR Programs have the right, at their own expense, to be represented by a spokesperson of their own choosing. The ADR rules and procedures should so specify.



Reporter's Comments

The right to be counseled by an attorney or other representative is an important one that is frequently reflected in standard rules governing ADR proceedings. See, e.g., AAA Commercial Rule 22; NASD Code ' 10316; BBB Arbitration Rule 9.

The Advisory Committee adapted pertinent provisions of the *Employment Due Process Protocol*. See *Employment Due Process Protocol* ' B.1.

In the interest of full disclosure of potential conflicts of interest on the part of Neutrals, the Advisory Committee recommends that the names and affiliations of lawyers and other representatives of each party be communicated to prospective Neutrals and to all parties prior to selection of Neutrals.

As previously noted, the Advisory Committee recognizes that the cost of legal services should be borne by the parties who are receiving the services, and Providers should not be expected to subsidize the cost of legal representation for Consumers. There may, however, be situations where an arbitrator awards attorney's fees in circumstances where they would be available in court. See Commentary to Principle 6.

The Advisory Committee recognizes that the involvement of non-attorney representatives in some forms of binding arbitration has raised issues respecting the unauthorized practice of law. The Committee takes no position regarding these issues.

Practical Suggestions

Although the cost of legal services should be borne by the parties who are receiving the services, Independent ADR Institutions should provide Consumers with information regarding referral services and other institutions which might offer assistance in locating and securing competent spokespersons, such as bar associations, legal service associations, and Consumer organizations.

Principle 10. Mediation

The use of mediation is strongly encouraged as an informal means of assisting parties in resolving their own disputes.

Reporter's Comments

The increasing popularity of mediation has been a primary impetus for the revolution in conflict resolution approaches. Mediation describes a range of processes in which an impartial person helps disputing parties to communicate and to make voluntary, informed choices in an effort to resolve their dispute. The rapid growth of mediation may be attributed to its informality, flexibility, and emphasis on the particular needs of disputing parties. For this reason, mediation is uniquely adaptable to a wide spectrum of controversies.



The widespread use of mediation in court-connected programs inspired the development of a set of national standards for such endeavors. See generally *Standards for Court-Connected Programs*.

Parallel developments are occurring in the private sphere. Recently, the leading standard construction industry contract was modified to require mediation as an element in project conflict resolution, necessitating modification of related AAA rules. See *AAA Construction Procedures*.

Advisory Committee members agreed that mediation should be encouraged as a valuable intervention strategy, but differed as to the propriety and reasonableness of Provider-drafted ADR Agreements in Consumer contracts which require Consumers to participate in mediation. Those unopposed to such provisions, a majority of Advisory Committee members, noted that mediation offers significant potential advantages and relatively few risks to participants. Particularly where the Provider subsidizes mediation, they reasoned, the prospective benefits to Consumers far outweigh the costs. Those expressing concerns regarding “mandatory” mediation adhere to the view that the choice to participate in settlement discussions should be made voluntarily, and only after conflict arises. Other concerns relate to the cost of mediation, the quality of mediators, the likelihood that not all disputes will be appropriate for mediation, and the lack of understanding of mediation processes (including an understanding of the role of the neutral intervener) on the part of many Consumers. Cf. *Standards for Court-Connected Programs* ‘ 5.0 (courts should impose mandatory attendance in court-connected mediation only when the cost of mediation is publicly funded, the mediation program is of high quality, and other requirements are met); *SPIDR Report on Court-Mandated ADR* at 2-3.

Encouragement of the use of mediation involves, among other things, educating Consumers and their attorneys about the process. See Principle 2 “Access to Information Regarding ADR Program.” See also *SPIDR Principles* at 6 (“It is the responsibility of...private programs offering dispute resolution services to define clearly the services they provide...[and provide information about the program and neutrals to the parties.]”). At a minimum, Consumers should be provided with (or have immediate access to) written information to explain mediation. As a rule, such information should be in the same language as the principal contract for goods or services. Cf. *Standards for Court-Connected Programs* ‘ 3.2.b., Commentary, at 3-4 (If a significant percentage of the population served is non-English-speaking, the material should be available in other languages as well.) See Principle 2.

Education of users should also include some treatment of the distinctive styles and strategies employed by mediators. Today, mediators handling commercial disputes sometimes employ a facilitative, non-directive approach to problem-solving; in other situations, a more directive approach may be employed. See generally Leonard L. Riskin, *Understanding Mediators’ Orientations, Strategies, and Techniques: A Grid for the Perplexed*, 1 Harv. Negotiation L. Rev. 7 (1996) (providing a graphic tool for analyzing mediator approaches). Participants need to decide in advance of selection the approach they want a mediator to adopt. The Independent ADR Institution should advise the parties regarding the possibility of interviewing prospective mediators regarding qualifications and style, and help to arrange such interviews.

Practical Suggestions

As referenced in Principle 5, mediation conducted by telephone conference call has proven to be an effective, economical method of resolving Consumer disputes where in-person mediation may not be feasible.



Special Provisions Relating to Binding Arbitration

Principle 11. Agreements to Arbitrate

Consumers should be given:

- a. clear and adequate notice of the arbitration provision and its consequences, including a statement of its mandatory or optional character;
- b. reasonable access to information regarding the arbitration process, including basic distinctions between arbitration and court proceedings, related costs, and advice as to where they may obtain more complete information regarding arbitration procedures and arbitrator rosters;
- c. notice of the option to make use of applicable small claims court procedures as an alternative to binding arbitration in appropriate cases; and,
- d. a clear statement of the means by which the Consumer may exercise the option (if any) to submit disputes to arbitration or to court process.

Reporter's Comments

In convening the Advisory Committee which developed this Protocol, the AAA requested that the Committee focus its attention upon due process standards for the conduct of Consumer ADR processes and not directly address the process of forming an agreement to mediate or to arbitrate. Committee deliberations revealed a range of opinions regarding the use of pre-dispute binding arbitration agreements in Consumer contracts. Without taking a position on the appropriateness of such agreements, the Committee developed Principle 11 with the intended purpose of providing guidance to the AAA and similar Independent ADR Institutions in the development of specific arbitration programs within the context of existing law enforcing pre-dispute arbitration agreements. Within this context, Principle 11 emphasizes the importance of knowing, informed assent to arbitration agreements.

Practical Suggestions

Consumers should have clear and adequate notice of the arbitration provision and basic information regarding the process at the time of assent. The appropriate method of giving notice and providing essential information will vary with the circumstances. For example, electronic transactions involving software licensure agreements require different notice procedures than face-to-face negotiations or paper transactions. In all cases, however, there should be some form of conspicuous notice of the agreement to arbitrate and its basic consequences (including comparison to court process, cost information, etc.). In addition, the Consumer should be given the opportunity to acquire additional information regarding the arbitration process. The latter might be obtainable through a mail or Web site address, an 800 number or other means for Consumers to obtain additional information regarding arbitration rules and procedures (such as a brochure available on request).



The following is an example of a possible notice. Ideally, the “notice box” would be sufficiently prominent in the contract document or electronic record so that a Consumer would readily notice it.

NOTICE OF ARBITRATION AGREEMENT:

This agreement provides that all disputes between you and [PROVIDER] will be resolved by BINDING ARBITRATION.

You thus GIVE UP YOUR RIGHT TO GO TO COURT to assert or defend your rights under this contract (EXCEPT for matters that may be taken to SMALL CLAIMS COURT).

* Your rights will be determined by a NEUTRAL ARBITRATOR and NOT a judge or jury.

* You are entitled to a FAIR HEARING, BUT the arbitration procedures are SIMPLER AND MORE LIMITED THAN RULES APPLICABLE IN COURT.

* Arbitrator decisions are as enforceable as any court order and are subject to VERY LIMITED REVIEW BY A COURT.

For More Details,

*Review Section 6.2 above, OR

* Check our Arbitration Web Site @ ACMEADR.COM, OR

* Call 1-800-000-0000

Among other things, Consumers should have access to information regarding the initiation of the arbitration process. This may be accomplished, for example, by providing customers with a brochure outlining relevant arbitration procedures. If the Consumer has the option of choosing between arbitration or court process, either at the time of contracting or after disputes have arisen, the timing and means of electing the option should also be clearly stated in the notice.

Principle 12. Arbitration Hearings

1. *Fundamentally-Fair Hearing.* All parties are entitled to a fundamentally-fair arbitration hearing. This requires adequate notice of hearings and an opportunity to be heard and to present relevant evidence to impartial decision- makers. In some cases, such as some small claims, the requirement of fundamental fairness may be met by hearings conducted by electronic or telephonic means or by a submission of documents. However, the Neutral should have discretionary authority to require a face-to-face hearing upon the request of a party.
2. *Confidentiality in Arbitration.* Consistent with general expectations of privacy in arbitration hearings, the arbitrator should make reasonable efforts to maintain the privacy of the hearing to the extent permitted by applicable law. The arbitrator should also carefully consider claims of privilege and confidentiality when addressing evidentiary issues.



Reporter's Comments

There is universal agreement that parties to arbitration are entitled to a “fundamentally-fair hearing.” See III *Federal Arbitration Law* ‘ 32.3.1.1. The language of subsection 1 closely follows the definition of a “fundamentally-fair hearing” set forth in *Bowles Financial Grp., Inc. v. Stifel, Nicolaus & Co.*, 22 F.3d 1010, 1013 (10th Cir. 1994) (applying the *Federal Arbitration Act*). Beyond these basic requirements, of course, “[a]rbitration need not follow all the niceties of...courts.” *Grovner v. Georgia-Pacific Corp.*, 625 F.2d 1289, 1290 (5th Cir. 1980). Moreover, the arbitrators have great leeway in conducting hearings, within the bounds of the parties’ agreement. See *Federal Arbitration Law*, supra, “ 32.1., 32.3.1.1.

Although authority is split on whether or not parties are guaranteed a face-to-face hearing before the arbitrators, see *id.*, the Advisory Committee concluded that while in some circumstances fundamental fairness may require a face-to-face hearing, in other cases the requirement may be satisfied by telephonic or electronic communications or submissions of documents. See, e.g., *Construction Arbitration Procedures* ‘ F-9. See, e.g., Michael F. Altschul & Elizabeth S. Stong, AAA *Develops New Arbitration Rules to Resolve Wireless Disputes*, ADR Currents, Fall 1997, at 6. In small claims cases, the requirement of these Principles that parties retain the option of going to small claims court may make it reasonable for the ADR agreement to provide alternatives to a face-to-face hearing.

Although confidentiality of hearings may be considered an advantage of arbitration, there is no absolute guarantee of confidentiality. See *id.*, ‘ 32.6.1. Unlike court proceedings, however, the general public has no right to attend arbitration proceedings; if the parties agree, moreover, attendance at hearings may be severely restricted. See, e.g., AAA *Commercial Rule 25* (directing arbitrators to “maintain the privacy of the hearings unless the law provides to the contrary”). Likewise, arbitrators should be mindful of evidentiary privileges and confidentiality rights available to its parties under applicable law and have discretion to issue protective orders respecting such rights.

The Advisory Committee recognized the dilemma posed by the tension between the desire for confidentiality in arbitration and the need to provide Consumers access to information regarding arbitrators and sponsoring Independent ADR Institutions, including case statistics, data on recent arbitrations and other pertinent information. See, e.g., Alan Scott Rau, *Integrity in Private Judging*, 38 S. Tex. L. Rev. 485, 524-26 (1997) (discussing concerns with “asymmetry of information” regarding arbitrators when one party is an institutional “repeat player,” and suggesting need for increased disclosure of information regarding past decisions by an arbitrator); Mark E. Budnitz, *Arbitration of Disputes Between Consumers and Financial Institutions: A Serious Threat to Consumer Protection*, 10 Ohio St. J. on Disp. Res. 267, 293 (discussing disparity between “repeat players” and consumers with regard to knowledge of prospective arbitrators). Although the Advisory Committee did not address this issue, it recommends that the matter be the focus of serious study by the Committee or a similar advisory group, supported by appropriate independent research efforts.

Practical Suggestions

Because these Principles provide that parties should retain the option of an oral hearing in small claims court (Principle 5), it may be reasonable for the ADR agreement to provide other means for small claims arbitration. Such alternatives may include a “desk arbitration” involving a decision on written submissions, participation in proceedings by telephone or electronic data transmission, and other options.



As is generally the case in commercial arbitration, arbitrators may undertake reasonable means to protect the privacy of the hearing.

Principle 13. Access to Information

No party should ever be denied the right to a fundamentally-fair process due to an inability to obtain information material to a dispute. Consumer ADR agreements which provide for binding arbitration should establish procedures for arbitrator-supervised exchange of information prior to arbitration, bearing in mind the expedited nature of arbitration.

Reporter's Comments

It is understood that ADR sometimes represents a tradeoff between the concept of full discovery associated with court procedures and the efficiencies associated with minimal pretrial process. A hallmark of binding arbitration is the avoidance of the cost and delay associated with extensive pre-hearing discovery. See *III Federal Arbitration Law* ' 34.1. In recent years, however, the notion that arbitration means little or no discovery has moderated due to the widening range of cases submitted to arbitration and the increasing recognition that at least some pre-hearing exchange of information may be necessary and appropriate to meet the due process rights of participants and may in some cases reduce the overall length of the process. See *id.*, Ch. 34. See also Mark E. Budnitz, *Arbitration of Disputes Between Consumers and Financial Institutions: A Serious Threat to Consumer Protection*, 10 Ohio St. J. on Disp. Res. 267, 283-84, 311, 314 (arguing that limits on discovery in arbitration hamper consumer claimants).

Addressing statutory disputes arising out of employment relationships, the *Employment Due Process Protocol* states that "[a]dequate but limited pre-trial discovery is to be encouraged and employees [and their representatives] should have access to all information reasonably relevant to mediation and/or arbitration of their claims." *Employment Due Process Protocol* ' B.3. The Committee supports the concept of limiting the exchange of information as much as possible while ensuring that Consumers and Providers each have access to information that is legally obtainable and relevant to their case. In most cases, this means that pre-hearing information exchange will consist of an exchange of documents as directed by the arbitrator, identification of witnesses and a summary of their expected testimony. Arbitrators should have the authority to require additional discovery when necessary, such as requiring the deposition of witnesses unable to appear at the hearing in order to preserve their testimony.

Although information exchange issues which cannot be handled by the agreement of the parties should generally be left to the discretion of the arbitrator, it may be appropriate for advisory groups (including adequate consumer representation) to develop guidelines for information exchange in specific kinds of cases. See, e.g., National Association of Securities Dealers, National Arbitration and Mediation Committee, *Report of the Drafting Subcommittee on The Discovery Guide*, Dec. 3, 1997 Draft.

Some Advisory Committee members also expressed concern about the forced production of privileged documents, and argued that arbitrators should be required to observe established privileges such as the attorney-client privilege and work-product privilege. See James H. Carter, *The Attorney-Client Privilege and Arbitration*, ADR Currents, Winter 1996-97, 1. As stated in Principle 12, arbitrators should "carefully consider claims of privilege and confidentiality when addressing



evidentiary issues.” Such protections may be addressed in the arbitration agreement (including incorporated arbitration procedures), and should be thoroughly treated, along with information exchange issues, in arbitrator training programs.

Practical Suggestions

In many cases, issues relating to information exchange may be addressed by the arbitrator(s) at a preliminary conference. See, e.g., *AAA Wireless Rules* “ R-9, R-10. Some rules require that all exhibits be exchanged a certain number of days prior to hearings. See *id.*, R-10.

Principle 14. Arbitral Remedies

The arbitrator should be empowered to grant whatever relief would be available in court under law or in equity.

Reporter's Comments

As a general rule, arbitrators have broad authority to fashion relief appropriate to the circumstances. See III *Federal Arbitration Law* ‘ 36.1.1. Their discretion is limited only by the agreement of the parties and the scope of the submission to arbitration. See *id.*, ‘ 36.1.2.

There are, however, a number of issues respecting the ability of arbitrators to award certain remedies which would be available in court. For example, although the trend under federal and state law is to acknowledge the authority of arbitrators to award punitive damages, a few state courts still take the opposing view. See generally *Federal Arbitration Law*, *supra*, ‘ 36.3; Thomas J. Stipanowich, *Punitive Damages and the Consumerization of Arbitration*, 92 Nw. U. L. Rev. 1 (1998). And although courts may award attorney's fees where permitted by statute or by agreement of the parties, or where a party acts vexatiously or in bad faith, there is conflicting authority regarding the ability of arbitrators to take similar action. See generally *Federal Arbitration Law*, *supra*, ‘ 36.8.

This provision incorporates language similar to that contained in the *Employment Due Process Protocol*, ‘ C.5. The intent is to make clear that arbitrators deriving their authority from Consumer contracts should enjoy the same authority courts have to fashion relief, including awarding attorney's fees and punitive damages in appropriate cases.

Contractual limitations of damages may limit the authority of arbitrators in the same fashion that they limit judicial remedies. It is possible that an award of damages in excess of a contractual limit would be vacated under pertinent statutory standards or common law principles. See, e.g., *FAA* ‘ 10(a) (4). But see Stipanowich, *Punitive Damages*, *supra*, at 33-36 (discussing public policy limitations on pre-dispute caps on punitive damages).

Principle 15. Arbitration Awards

1. *Final and Binding Award; Limited Scope of Review.* If provided in the agreement to arbitrate, the arbitrator's award should be final and binding, but subject to review in accordance with applicable statutes governing arbitration awards.
2. *Standards to Guide Arbitrator Decision-Making.* In making the award, the arbitrator should apply any identified, pertinent contract terms, statutes and legal precedents.



3. *Explanation of Award.* At the timely request of either party, the arbitrator should provide a brief written explanation of the basis for the award. To facilitate such requests, the arbitrator should discuss the matter with the parties prior to the arbitration hearing.

Reporter's Comments

Review of arbitration awards is very limited under modern arbitration statutes. Courts are very reluctant to vacate awards, or to second-guess the decisions of arbitrators on matters of procedure or substance. See generally *IV Federal Arbitration Law*, ch. 40. "Arbitrators can misconstrue contracts, make erroneous decisions of fact, and misapply law, all without having their awards vacated." See *id.*, ' 40.6.1. While some members of the Advisory Committee expressed concerns regarding the current state of the law, it was generally agreed that finality was a primary objective of arbitration and that it would be inappropriate to recommend more rigorous judicial review for Consumer arbitration awards than for other arbitration awards. At the same time, however, the Advisory Committee concluded that the rules should specifically direct arbitrators to follow pertinent contract terms and legal principles. This requirement may have implications for qualifications and training of Neutrals pursuant to Principle 4.

Leading modern arbitration statutes do not require arbitrators to provide a written explanation or give reasons for their awards. See generally *III Federal Arbitration Law* ' 37.4.1. Similarly, some leading commercial arbitration rules do not require findings of fact or conclusions of law. See, e.g., *AAA Commercial Rules*. Those supporting "bare" awards argue that a written rationale will make it more likely that courts will inquire into the merits of the award, contrary to policies of finality underlying modern statutes. They also observe that not being required to write an opinion simplifies the arbitral task and permits multi-member arbitration panels, like juries, to agree on a decision without concurring on a rationale. See *id.*

On the other hand, some other commercial arbitration rules call for a statement of the underlying rationale. See, e.g., *CPR Rules for Non-administered Arbitration of Business Disputes*, Rule 13.2. Those supporting awards with written rationales argue that a written rationale encourages more disciplined decision-making and enhances party satisfaction with the result. See Alan Scott Rau, *Integrity in Private Judging*, 38 S. Tex. L. Rev. 485, 529-39 (1997) (offering arguments in favor of "reasoned" awards). After considering the pros and cons of "reasoned" awards, the Advisory Committee concluded that arbitrators of Consumer disputes should provide at least a brief written explanation if requested to do so by any party.

As noted in the Comments accompanying Principle 12, the Advisory Committee recognized the dilemma posed by the tension between the desire for confidentiality in arbitration (including information regarding arbitration awards) and the need to provide Consumers access to information regarding arbitrators and sponsoring Independent ADR Institutions, including case statistics, data on recent arbitrations and other pertinent information. Although the Advisory Committee did not address this issue, it recommends that the matter be the focus of serious study by the Advisory Committee or a similar advisory group, supported by appropriate independent research efforts.

Practical Suggestions

To facilitate requests for reasoned awards, the arbitrator should raise the issue with the parties prior to the arbitration hearing. The matter should be addressed at the preliminary conference if one is conducted.



A Due Process Protocol for Mediation and Arbitration of Consumer Disputes

Dated: April 17, 1998

Some of the signatories to this Protocol were designated by their respective organizations, but the Protocol reflects their personal views and should not be construed as representing the policy of the designating organizations.

The Honorable Winslow Christian

Co-chair
Justice (Retired)
California Court of Appeal

William N. Miller

Co-chair
Director of the ADR Unit
Office of Consumer Affairs
Virginia Division of Consumer Protection
Designated by National Association of Consumer
Agency Administrators

David B. Adcock

Office of the University Counsel
Duke University

Steven G. Gallagher

Senior Vice President
American Arbitration Association

Michael F. Hoellering

General Counsel
American Arbitration Association

J. Clark Kelso

Director
Institute for Legislative Practice
University of the Pacific
McGeorge School of Law

Elaine Kolish

Associate Director
Division of Enforcement
Bureau of Consumer Protection
Federal Trade Commission

Robert Marotta

Wolcott, Rivers, Wheary, Basnight & Kelly, P.C.
Formerly Office of the General Counsel
General Motors Corporation

Robert E. Meade

Senior Vice President
American Arbitration Association

Ken McEldowney

Executive Director
Consumer Action

Michelle Meier

Former Counsel for Government Affairs
Consumers Union

Anita B. Metzen

Executive Director
American Council on Consumer Interests

James A. Newell

Associate General Counsel
Freddie Mac



Shirley F. Sarna

Assistant Attorney General-In-Charge
Consumer Frauds and Protection Bureau
Office of the Attorney General State of New York
Designated by National Association of
Attorneys General

Daniel C. Smith

Vice President and Deputy General Counsel
Fannie Mae

Terry L. Trantina

Member
Ravin, Sarasohn, Cook, Baumgarten, Fisch & Rosen, P.C.
Formerly General Attorney
AT&T Corp.

Deborah M. Zuckerman

Staff Attorney
Litigation Unit
American Association of Retired Persons

Thomas Stipanowich

Academic Reporter
W.L. Matthews Professor of Law
University of Kentucky College of Law

Commercial

Arbitration Rules and Mediation Procedures

Including Procedures for Large, Complex Commercial Disputes



American Arbitration Association®

Available online at adr.org/commercial
Arbitration Rules Amended and Effective September 1, 2022
Mediation Procedures Amended and Effective June 1, 2026

If you would like to speak to a member of the AAA Commercial Team, please visit <https://go.adr.org/commercial-contact.html>.

Table of Contents

Important Notice 7

Introduction..... 7

Standard Arbitration Clause..... 8

Administrative Fees 8

Mediation 8

Large, Complex Cases..... 9

Commercial Arbitration Rules..... 10

 R-1. Agreement of Parties*..... 10

 R-2. AAA, Delegation of Duties, Conduct of Parties, Administrative Review Council .. 11

 R-3. National Roster of Arbitrators..... 11

 R-4. Filing Requirements and Procedures 11

 R-5. Answers and Counterclaims 13

 R-6. Changes of Claim 14

 R-7. Jurisdiction 14

 R-8. Consolidation and Joinder 15

 R-9. Interpretation and Application of Rules..... 17

 R-10. Mediation 17

 R-11. Administrative Conference 17

 R-12. Fixing of Locale..... 17

 R-13. Appointment from National Roster..... 18

 R-14. Direct Appointment by Party 19

 R-15. Appointment of Chairperson by Party-Appointed Arbitrators, Parties, or
 the AAA 19

 R-16. Nationality of Arbitrator 20

 R-17. Number of Arbitrators..... 20

 R-18. Disclosure 20

 R-19. Disqualification of Arbitrator..... 21

 R-20. Communication with Arbitrator 21

 R-21. Vacancies..... 22

 R-22. Preliminary Hearing 22

 R-23. Pre-Hearing Exchange and Production of Information..... 22

R-24. Enforcement Powers of Arbitrator. 23

R-25. Date, Time, Place, and Method of Hearing 23

R-26. Attendance at Hearing 24

R-27. Representation 24

R-28. Oaths 24

R-29. Official Record of Proceedings. 24

R-30. Interpreters. 25

R-31. Postponements. 25

R-32. Arbitration in the Absence of a Party or Representative 25

R-33. Conduct of Proceedings. 25

R-34. Dispositive Motions 26

R-35. Evidence 26

R-36. Evidence by Written Statements and Post-Hearing Filing of Documents or Other
Evidence. 26

R-37. Inspection or Investigation 27

R-38. Interim Measures 27

R-39. Emergency Measures of Protection 27

R-40. Closing of Hearing 29

R-41. Reopening of Hearing. 29

R-42. Waiver of Rules 29

R-43. Extensions of Time. 29

R-44. Serving of Notice and Communications 30

R-45. Confidentiality. 30

R-46. Majority Decision 30

R-47. Time of Award. 31

R-48. Form of Award. 31

R-49. Scope of Award. 31

R-50. Award Upon Settlement – Consent Award. 32

R-51. Delivery of Award to Parties 32

R-52. Modification of Award. 32

R-53. Release of Documents for Judicial Proceedings. 32

R-54. Applications to Court and Exclusion of Liability 32

R-55. Administrative Fees 33

R-56. Expenses. 33

R-57. Neutral Arbitrator’s Compensation. 33

R-58. Deposits 34

R-59. Remedies for Nonpayment	34
R-60. Sanctions	35
Preliminary Hearing Procedures	36
P-1. General	36
P-2. Checklist	36
Expedited Procedures	39
E-1. Limitation on Extensions	39
E-2. Changes of Claim or Counterclaim	39
E-3. Serving of Notice	39
E-4. Appointment and Qualifications of Arbitrator	39
E-5. Discovery, Motions, and Conduct of Proceedings	40
E-6. Proceedings on Documents and Procedures for the Resolution of Disputes Through Document Submission	40
E-7. Date, Time, Place, and Method of Hearing	41
E-8. The Hearing	41
E-9. Time of Award	41
E-10. Arbitrator's Compensation	41
Procedures for Large, Complex Commercial Disputes	42
L-1. Administrative Conference	42
L-2. Arbitrators	42
L-3. Management of Proceedings	43
Administrative Fee Schedule	43
Commercial Mediation Procedures	44
M-1. Agreement of Parties*	44
M-2. Initiation of Mediation	44
M-3. Representation	45
M-4. Appointment of the Mediator	45
M-5. Mediator's Impartiality and Duty to Disclose	46
M-6. Vacancies	46
M-7. Duties and Responsibilities of the Mediator	46
M-8. Responsibilities of the Parties	47
M-9. Privacy	47
M-10. Confidentiality	48

M-11. No Stenographic Record 48

M-12. Termination of Mediation 48

M-13. Exclusion of Liability..... 49

M-14. Interpretation and Application of Procedures 49

M-15. Deposits..... 49

M-16. Expenses 49

M-17. Cost of the Mediation 49

Commercial Arbitration Rules and Mediation Procedures

(Including Procedures for Large, Complex Commercial Disputes)



Important Notice

These rules and any amendment of them shall apply in the form in effect at the time the administrative filing requirements are met for a demand for arbitration or submission agreement received by the AAA®. To ensure that you have the most current information, see our web site at www.adr.org.

Introduction

Each year, many millions of business transactions take place. Occasionally, disagreements develop over these business transactions. Many of these disputes are resolved by arbitration, the voluntary submission of a dispute to an impartial person or persons for final and binding determination. Arbitration has proven to be an effective way to resolve these disputes privately, promptly, and economically.

The American Arbitration Association® (AAA), a not-for-profit, public service organization, offers a broad range of dispute resolution services to business executives, attorneys, individuals, trade associations, unions, management, consumers, families, communities, and all levels of government. Services are available through AAA headquarters in New York and through offices located in major cities throughout the United States. Hearings may be held at locations convenient for the parties and are not limited to cities with AAA offices. In addition, the AAA serves as a center for education and training, issues specialized publications, and conducts research on various forms of alternative dispute resolution.

Standard Arbitration Clause

The parties can provide for arbitration of future disputes by inserting the following clause into their contracts:

Any controversy or claim arising out of or relating to this contract, or the breach thereof, shall be settled by arbitration administered by the American Arbitration Association under its Commercial Arbitration Rules, and judgment on the award rendered by the arbitrator(s) may be entered in any court having jurisdiction thereof.

Arbitration of existing disputes may be accomplished by use of the following:

We, the undersigned parties, hereby agree to submit to arbitration administered by the American Arbitration Association under its Commercial Arbitration Rules the following Controversy: (describe briefly). We further agree that the above controversy be submitted to (one) (three) arbitrator(s). We further agree that we will faithfully observe this agreement and the rules, that we will abide by and perform any award rendered by the arbitrator(s), and that a judgment of any court having jurisdiction may be entered on the award.

The services of the AAA are generally concluded with the transmittal of the award. Although there is voluntary compliance with the majority of awards, judgment on the award can be entered in a court having appropriate jurisdiction if necessary.

Administrative Fees

The AAA charges a filing fee based on the amount of the claim or counterclaim. This fee information, which is included with these rules, allows the parties to exercise control over their administrative fees. The fees cover AAA administrative services; they do not cover arbitrator compensation or expenses, if any, reporting services, or any post-award charges incurred by the parties in enforcing the award.

Mediation

Subject to the right of any party to opt out, in cases where a claim or counterclaim exceeds \$100,000, the Rules provide that the parties shall mediate their dispute upon the administration of the arbitration or at any time when the arbitration is pending. In mediation, the neutral mediator assists the parties in reaching a

settlement but does not have the authority to make a binding decision or award. Mediation is administered by the AAA in accordance with its Commercial Mediation Procedures. There is no additional filing fee where parties to a pending arbitration attempt to mediate their dispute under the AAA's auspices.

Although these rules include a mediation procedure that will apply to many cases, parties may still want to incorporate mediation into their contractual dispute settlement process. Parties can do so by inserting the following mediation clause into their contract in conjunction with a standard arbitration provision:

If a dispute arises out of or relates to this contract, or the breach thereof, and if the dispute cannot be settled through negotiation, the parties agree first to try in good faith to settle the dispute by mediation administered by the American Arbitration Association under its Commercial Mediation Procedures before resorting to arbitration, litigation, or some other dispute resolution procedure.

If the parties want to use a mediator to resolve an existing dispute, they can enter into the following submission agreement:

The parties hereby submit the following dispute to mediation administered by the American Arbitration Association under its Commercial Mediation Procedures. (The clause may also provide for the qualifications of the mediator(s), method of payment, locale of meetings, and any other item of concern to the parties.)

Large, Complex Cases

Unless the parties agree otherwise, the Procedures for Large, Complex Commercial Disputes, which appear in this pamphlet, will be applied to all cases administered by the AAA under the Commercial Arbitration Rules in which the disclosed claim or counterclaim of any party is at least \$1,000,000 exclusive of claimed interest, arbitration fees and costs. The key features of these Procedures include:

- > A highly qualified, trained Roster of Neutrals;
- > A mandatory preliminary hearing with the arbitrators, which may be conducted by teleconference or other electronic means;
- > Broad arbitrator authority to order and control the exchange of information, including depositions;
- > A presumption that hearings will proceed on a consecutive or block basis.

Commercial Arbitration Rules

R-1. Agreement of Parties*

- (a) The parties shall be deemed to have made these Rules a part of their arbitration agreement whenever they have provided for arbitration by the American Arbitration Association (“AAA”) under its Commercial Arbitration Rules or for arbitration by the AAA of a domestic commercial dispute without specifying particular rules. These Rules and any amendment to them shall apply in the form in effect at the time the administrative requirements are met for a Demand for Arbitration or Submission Agreement received by the AAA. Any disputes regarding which AAA rules shall apply shall be decided by the AAA. The parties, by written agreement, may vary the procedures set forth in these Rules. After appointment of the arbitrator, such modifications may be made only with the consent of the arbitrator.
- (b) Unless the parties agree or the AAA determines otherwise, the Expedited Procedures shall apply in any case in which no disclosed claim or counterclaim exceeds \$100,000, exclusive of interest, attorneys’ fees, and arbitration fees and costs. Parties may also agree to use these Procedures in larger cases. Unless the parties agree otherwise, these Procedures will not apply in cases involving more than two parties. The Expedited Procedures shall be applied as described in Procedures E-1 through E-10, in addition to any other portion of these Rules that is not in conflict with the Expedited Procedures.
- (c) Unless the parties agree otherwise, the Procedures for Large, Complex Commercial Disputes shall apply to all cases in which the disclosed claim or counterclaim of any party is at least \$1,000,000, exclusive of claimed interest, attorneys’ fees, arbitration fees and costs. Parties may also agree to use the Procedures in cases involving claims or counterclaims under \$1,000,000 or in nonmonetary cases. The Procedures for Large, Complex Commercial Disputes shall be applied as described in Procedures L-1 through L-3 in addition to any other portion of these Rules that is not in conflict with the Procedures for Large, Complex Commercial Disputes.
- (d) Parties may, by agreement, apply the Expedited Procedures; the Procedures for Large, Complex Commercial Disputes; or the Procedures for the Resolution of Disputes Through Document Submission (Procedure E-6) to any dispute.
- (e) All other cases shall be administered in accordance with Rules R-1 through R-60 of these Rules.

** The AAA will apply the Employment/Workplace Rules to any dispute between an individual employee or an independent contractor (working or performing as an individual and not incorporated) and a business or organization and the dispute involves work or work-related claims, including any statutory claims and including work-related claims under independent contractor agreements. Should a contract call for the Consumer Rules, and the dispute is not between a consumer and a business, the AAA has the discretion to apply the Commercial Rules and Commercial Fee schedule. (Revised 5/1/25)*

** Beginning June 1, 2021, the AAA will apply the Consumer Arbitration Fee Schedule to any dispute between an online marketplace or platform and an individual user or subscriber (using or subscribed to the service as an individual and not incorporated) and the dispute does not involve work or work-related claims.*

R-2. AAA, Delegation of Duties, Conduct of Parties, Administrative Review Council

- (a) When parties agree to arbitrate under these Rules, or when they provide for arbitration by the AAA and an arbitration is initiated under these Rules, they thereby authorize the AAA to administer the arbitration.
- (b) The authority and duties of the AAA are prescribed in the agreement of the parties and in these Rules, and may be carried out through such of the AAA's representatives as it may direct. The AAA may, in its discretion, assign the administration of an arbitration to any of its offices. Arbitrations administered under these Rules shall only be administered by the AAA or by an individual or organization authorized by the AAA to do so.
- (c) The AAA requires that parties and their representatives conduct themselves in accordance with the AAA's *Standards of Conduct for Parties and Representatives* when utilizing the AAA's services. Failure to do so may result in the AAA's declining to further administer a particular case or caseload.
- (d) For cases proceeding under the Procedures for Large, Complex Commercial Disputes, and for other cases where the AAA, in its sole discretion, deems it appropriate, the AAA may act through its Administrative Review Council to take the following administrative actions:
 - i) determine challenges to the appointment or continuing service of an arbitrator;
 - ii) make an initial determination as to the locale of the arbitration, subject to the power of the arbitrator to make a final determination; or
 - iii) decide whether a party has met the administrative requirements to file an arbitration under these Rules.

R-3. National Roster of Arbitrators

The AAA shall establish and maintain a National Roster of Arbitrators ("National Roster") and shall appoint arbitrators as provided in these Rules. The term "arbitrator" in these Rules refers to the arbitration panel, constituted for a particular case, whether composed of one or more arbitrators, or to an individual arbitrator, as the context requires.

R-4. Filing Requirements and Procedures

- (a) Filing Requirements
 - i) Arbitration under an arbitration provision in a contract shall be initiated by the initiating party ("claimant") filing with the AAA a Demand for Arbitration, the administrative filing fee, and a copy of the applicable arbitration agreement from the parties' contract which provides for arbitration. The filing fee must be paid before a matter is considered properly filed.

- ii) Arbitration pursuant to a court order shall be initiated by the initiating party filing with the AAA a Demand for Arbitration, the administrative filing fee, and a copy of any applicable arbitration agreement from the parties' contract which provides for arbitration.
 - a) The filing party shall include a copy of the court order.
 - b) The filing fee must be paid before a matter is considered properly filed. If the court order directs that a specific party is responsible for the filing fee, it is the responsibility of the filing party to either make such payment to the AAA and seek reimbursement as directed in the court order or to make other such arrangements so that the filing fee is submitted to the AAA with the Demand.
 - c) The party filing the Demand with the AAA is the claimant and the opposing party is the respondent regardless of which party initiated the court action. Parties may request that the arbitrator alter the order of proceedings if necessary pursuant to Rule R-33.
- iii) Parties to any existing dispute who have not previously agreed to use these Rules may commence an arbitration under these Rules by filing a written Submission Agreement and the administrative filing fee. To the extent that the parties' Submission Agreement contains any variances from these Rules, such variances should be clearly stated in the Submission Agreement.
- iv) Information to be included with any arbitration filing includes:
 - a) the name of each party;
 - b) the address of each party and, if known, the telephone number and email address;
 - c) if applicable, the name, address, telephone number, and email address of any known representative for each party;
 - d) a statement setting forth the nature of the claim including the relief sought and the amount involved; and
 - e) the locale requested if the arbitration agreement does not specify one.

(b) Filing Procedures

- i) The initiating party may file or submit a dispute to the AAA in the following manner:
 - a) through AAA WebFile®, located at www.adr.org;
 - b) by filing the complete Demand or Submission with any AAA office, regardless of the intended locale of hearing; or
 - c) by emailing the complete Demand or Submission to casefiling@adr.org, with payment to follow as directed by the AAA.
- ii) The filing party shall simultaneously provide a copy of the Demand and any supporting documents to the opposing party.

- iii) Any papers, notices, or process necessary or proper for the initiation of an arbitration under this Rule may be served on a party:
 - a) by mail addressed to the party or its authorized representative at their last known address;
 - b) by electronic service/email, with the prior agreement of the party being served;
 - c) by personal service; or
 - d) by any other service methods provided for under the applicable procedures of the courts of the state where the party to be served is located.
- iv) The AAA shall provide notice to the parties (or their representatives if so named) of the receipt of a Demand or Submission when the administrative filing requirements have been satisfied. The date on which the filing requirements are satisfied shall establish the date of filing the dispute for administration. However, all disputes in connection with the AAA's determination of the date of filing may be decided by the arbitrator.
- v) It is the responsibility of the filing party to ensure that any conditions precedent to the filing of a case are met prior to filing an arbitration, as well as any time requirements associated with the filing. Any dispute regarding whether a condition precedent has been met may be raised with the arbitrator for determination.
- vi) The AAA has the authority to make an administrative determination whether the filing requirements set forth in this Rule have been met.
- vii) If the filing does not satisfy the filing requirements set forth in Section (a) above, the AAA shall acknowledge to all named parties receipt of the incomplete filing, and the filing may be returned to the initiating party.
- (c) *Authority of arbitrator.* Any decision made by the AAA regarding filing requirements and procedures shall not interfere with the arbitrator's authority to determine jurisdiction pursuant to Rule R-7.

R-5. Answers and Counterclaims

- (a) A respondent may file an answering statement with the AAA within 14 calendar days after notice of the filing of the Demand is sent by the AAA. The respondent shall, at the time of any such filing, send a copy of any answering statement to the claimant and to all other parties to the arbitration. If no answering statement is filed within the stated time, the respondent will be deemed to deny the claim. Failure to file an answering statement shall not operate to delay the arbitration.
- (b) A respondent may file a counterclaim at any time after notice of the filing of the Demand is sent by the AAA, subject to the limitations set forth in Rule R-6. The respondent shall send a copy of the counterclaim to the claimant and all other parties to the arbitration. If a counterclaim is asserted, it shall include a statement setting forth the nature of the counterclaim including the relief sought and the

amount involved. The filing fee as specified in the applicable AAA Fee Schedule must be paid at the time of filing. The claimant may file an answering statement or reply in response to the counterclaim with the AAA within 14 calendar days after notice of the filing of the counterclaim is sent by the AAA.

- (c) If the respondent alleges that a different arbitration provision is controlling, the matter will be administered in accordance with the arbitration provision submitted by the initiating party subject to a final determination by the arbitrator.
- (d) If the counterclaim does not meet the requirements for filing a claim and the deficiency is not cured by the date specified by the AAA, it may be returned to the filing party.

R-6. Changes of Claim

- (a) A party may at any time prior to the close of the hearing or by any earlier date established by the arbitrator increase or decrease the amount of its claim or counterclaim. Written notice of the change of claim amount must be provided to the AAA and all parties. If the change of claim amount results in an increase in the administrative fee, the balance of the fee is due before the change of claim or counterclaim amount may be accepted by the arbitrator. After the arbitrator is appointed, however, a party may increase the amount of its claim or counterclaim, or alter its request for non-monetary relief, only with the arbitrator's consent.
- (b) Any new or different claim or counterclaim, as opposed to an increase or decrease in the amount of a pending claim or counterclaim, shall be made in writing and filed with the AAA, and a copy shall be provided to the other party, who shall have 14 calendar days from the date of such transmittal within which to file an answer to the proposed change of claim or counterclaim with the AAA. After the arbitrator is appointed, however, no new or different claim or counterclaim may be submitted except with the arbitrator's consent.
- (c) A party that filed a claim or counterclaim of an undisclosed or undetermined amount must specify the amount of the claim or counterclaim to the AAA, all parties, and the arbitrator at least seven calendar days prior to the commencement of the hearing or by any other date established by the arbitrator. If the disclosed amount of the claim or counterclaim results in an increased filing fee, that fee must be paid at the time the claim or counterclaim amount is disclosed. For good cause shown and with the consent of the arbitrator, a party may proceed to the hearing with an undisclosed or undetermined claim or counterclaim, provided that the final amount of the claim or counterclaim is set forth in a post-hearing brief or submission and any appropriate filing fee is paid.

R-7. Jurisdiction

- (a) The arbitrator shall have the power to rule on his or her own jurisdiction, including any objections with respect to the existence, scope, or validity of the arbitration agreement or to the arbitrability of any claim or counterclaim, without any need to refer such matters first to a court.

- (b) The arbitrator shall have the power to determine the existence or validity of a contract of which an arbitration clause forms a part. Such an arbitration clause shall be treated as an agreement independent of the other terms of the contract. A decision by the arbitrator that the contract is null and void shall not for that reason alone render invalid the arbitration clause.
- (c) A party must object to the jurisdiction of the arbitrator or to the arbitrability of a claim or counterclaim no later than the filing of the answering statement to the claim or counterclaim that gives rise to the objection. The arbitrator may rule on such objections as a preliminary matter or as part of the final award.

R-8. Consolidation and Joinder

(a) Consolidation

- i) Two or more arbitrations may be consolidated if all parties to all of the arbitrations to be consolidated so agree.
- ii) Unless all parties agree to consolidation, the party requesting consolidation of two or more arbitrations must file with the AAA and serve on all other parties a written request for consolidation with the supporting reasons for such request within 90 days of the date the AAA determines that all administrative filing requirements were satisfied for the last-filed case that is part of the consolidation request. Such time limit may be extended by the arbitrator appointed in the first-filed case upon a showing of good cause for the late request. The other parties to the arbitrations shall provide their written responses to the consolidation request within 10 calendar days after the AAA sends notice of receipt of the request.
- iii) At its discretion, the AAA either may direct that the consolidation request be decided by the arbitrator appointed in the first-filed case or may appoint a consolidation arbitrator for the sole purpose of deciding the consolidation request.
- iv) The arbitrator deciding consolidation may order consolidation of two or more cases for all purposes or for such limited purposes and under such conditions as the arbitrator may direct.
- v) Absent agreement of all parties, an arbitrator appointed for the sole purpose of deciding the consolidation request shall have no further power to act, and shall be removed from the case, after the consolidation request is decided.
- vi) In deciding whether to consolidate, the arbitrator or consolidation arbitrator shall take into account all relevant circumstances, including:
 - a) the terms and compatibility of the agreements to arbitrate,
 - b) applicable law,
 - c) the timeliness of the request to consolidate and the progress already made in the arbitrations,
 - d) whether the arbitrations raise common issues of law and/or fact, and

- e) whether consolidation of the arbitrations would serve the interests of justice and efficiency.

(b) Joinder

- i) Additional parties may be joined to an arbitration if all parties to the arbitration and the parties proposed to be joined so agree.
 - ii) Absent such consent, all requests for joinder must be submitted to the AAA prior to the appointment of an arbitrator pursuant to these Rules or within 90 days of the date the AAA determines that all administrative filing requirements have been satisfied. The arbitrator may extend this deadline on a showing of good cause for the late request.
 - iii) If the existing parties and the parties proposed to be joined are unable to agree to the joinder of those additional parties to an ongoing arbitration, the arbitrator shall decide whether parties should be joined. If an arbitrator has not yet been appointed in the case, the AAA may appoint an arbitrator for the sole purpose of deciding the joinder request. Absent agreement of all parties, the arbitrator appointed for the sole purpose of deciding the joinder request shall have no further power to act, and shall be removed from the case, after the joinder request is decided.
 - iv) The party requesting the joinder of one or more parties to a pending arbitration must file with the AAA a written request that provides the names and contact information for such parties; the names and contact information for the parties' representatives, if known; and the supporting reasons for such request, including applicable law. The requesting party must provide a copy of the joinder request to all parties in the arbitration and all parties it seeks to join at the same time it files the request with the AAA. The other parties to the arbitration and the parties sought to be joined shall provide their written responses to the joinder request within 14 days after the AAA sends notice of receipt of the request for joinder.
 - v) The requesting party shall comply with the provisions of Rule R-4(a) as to all parties sought to be joined.
- (c) If an arbitrator determines that separate arbitrations shall be consolidated or that the joinder of additional parties is permissible, that arbitrator may also determine:**
- i) whether any arbitrator previously appointed to an existing case that was consolidated shall remain on the newly constituted case;
 - ii) whether any arbitrator previously appointed to a case where additional parties have been joined shall remain;
 - iii) if appropriate, a process for selecting the arbitrator(s) to fill any vacancies; and
 - iv) unless agreed otherwise by the parties, the allocation among the parties of arbitrator compensation and expenses, subject to reapportionment by the arbitrator appointed to the ongoing or newly constituted case in the final award.

- (d) The AAA may take reasonable administrative actions to accomplish any consolidation or joinder ordered by the arbitrator or as agreed to by the parties. Pending the determination on a consolidation or joinder request, the AAA shall have the authority to stay the arbitration or arbitrations impacted by the consolidation or joinder request, at its sole discretion.

R-9. Interpretation and Application of Rules

The arbitrator shall interpret and apply these Rules insofar as they relate to the arbitrator's powers and duties. When there is more than one arbitrator and a difference arises among them concerning the meaning or application of these Rules, it shall be decided by a majority vote. If that is not possible, either an arbitrator or a party may refer the question to the AAA for final decision. All other rules shall be interpreted and applied by the AAA.

R-10. Mediation

In all cases where a claim or counterclaim exceeds \$100,000, upon the AAA's administration of the arbitration or at any time while the arbitration is pending, the parties shall mediate their dispute pursuant to the applicable provisions of the AAA's Commercial Mediation Procedures, or as otherwise agreed by the parties. Absent an agreement of the parties to the contrary, the mediation shall take place concurrently with the arbitration and shall not serve to delay the arbitration proceedings. However, any party to an arbitration may unilaterally opt out of this Rule upon notification to the AAA and the other parties to the arbitration. The parties shall confirm the completion of any mediation or any decision to opt out of this Rule to the AAA. Unless agreed to by all parties and the mediator, the mediator shall not be appointed as an arbitrator to the case.

R-11. Administrative Conference

At the request of any party or upon the AAA's own initiative, the AAA may conduct an administrative conference, in person, by videoconference or by telephone, with the parties and/or their representatives. The conference may address such issues as arbitrator selection, mediation of the dispute, potential exchange of information, a timetable for hearings, and any other administrative matters.

R-12. Fixing of Locale

The parties may mutually agree on the locale where the arbitration is to be held. When the parties' arbitration agreement requires a specific locale, absent the parties' agreement to change it, or a determination by the arbitrator that

applicable law requires a different locale, the locale shall be that specified in the arbitration agreement.

Any disputes regarding the locale that are to be decided by the AAA must be submitted to the AAA and all other parties within 14 calendar days after the AAA sends notice of the filing of the Demand or by the date established by the AAA. Disputes regarding locale shall be determined in the following manner:

- (a) When the parties' arbitration agreement is silent with respect to locale, and if the parties disagree as to the locale, the AAA shall initially determine the locale of arbitration, subject to the power of the arbitrator after appointment to make a final determination on the locale.
- (b) If the reference to a locale in the arbitration agreement is ambiguous, and the parties are unable to agree to a specific locale, the AAA shall determine the locale, subject to the power of the arbitrator to finally determine the locale.
- (c) If the parties' arbitration agreement specifies more than one possible locale, the filing party may select any of the specified locales at the time of filing, subject to the power of the arbitrator to finally determine the locale.

The arbitrator, at the arbitrator's sole discretion, shall have the authority to conduct special hearings for document production purposes or otherwise at other locations if reasonably necessary and beneficial to the process.

R-13. Appointment from National Roster

If the parties have not appointed an arbitrator and have not provided any other method of appointment, the arbitrator shall be appointed in the following manner:

- (a) The AAA shall send simultaneously to each party to the dispute an identical list of 10 (unless the AAA decides that a different number is appropriate) names of persons chosen from the National Roster. The parties are encouraged to agree to an arbitrator from the submitted list and to advise the AAA of their agreement.
- (b) If the parties are unable to agree upon an arbitrator, each party to the dispute shall have 14 calendar days from the transmittal date in which to strike names objected to, number the remaining names in order of preference, and return the list to the AAA. At its discretion, the AAA may limit the number of strikes permitted. The parties are not required to exchange selection lists. If a party does not return the list within the time specified, all persons named therein shall be deemed acceptable to that party. From among the persons who have been approved on both lists, and in accordance with the designated order of mutual preference, the AAA shall invite the acceptance of an arbitrator to serve. If the parties fail to agree on any of the persons named, or if acceptable arbitrators are unable to act, or if

for any other reason the appointment cannot be made from the submitted lists, the AAA shall have the power to make the appointment from among other members of the National Roster without the submission of additional lists.

- (c) Unless the parties agree otherwise, when there are two or more claimants or two or more respondents, the AAA may appoint all the arbitrators.

R-14. Direct Appointment by Party

- (a) If the agreement of the parties names an arbitrator or specifies a method of appointing an arbitrator, that designation or method shall be followed. If a party selects an arbitrator for appointment, it shall file the name, address, telephone number, and email address of the arbitrator with the AAA. Upon the request of any appointing party, the AAA shall submit a list of members of the National Roster from which the party may, if it so desires, make the appointment.
- (b) Where the parties have agreed that each party is to name one arbitrator, the arbitrators so named must meet the standards of Rule R-19 with respect to impartiality and independence unless the parties have specifically agreed pursuant to Rule R-19(b) that the party-appointed arbitrators are to be non-neutral and need not meet those standards.
- (c) If the agreement specifies a period of time within which an arbitrator shall be appointed and any party fails to make the appointment within that period, the AAA shall make the appointment.
- (d) If no period of time is specified in the agreement, the AAA shall notify the party to make the appointment. If within 14 calendar days after such notice has been sent, an arbitrator has not been appointed by a party, the AAA shall make the appointment.

R-15. Appointment of Chairperson by Party-Appointed Arbitrators, Parties, or the AAA

- (a) Where there is a panel of three or more arbitrators, one arbitrator will be designated as the panel chairperson. Such designation will be according to the terms of the parties' arbitration agreement. However, if the parties' arbitration agreement does not specify how the chairperson is to be selected, the chairperson can be designated, at the AAA's discretion, by the party-appointed arbitrators, the parties, the panel, or the AAA.
- (b) If the arbitration agreement specifies a period of time for appointment of the chairperson and no appointment is made within that period or any agreed extension, the AAA may appoint the chairperson. If no period of time is specified for appointment of the chairperson, and the party-appointed arbitrators or the parties do not make the appointment within 14 calendar days from the date of the appointment of the last party-appointed arbitrator, the AAA may appoint the chairperson.

- (c) Absent the agreement of the parties, the chairperson shall be appointed from the National Roster, and the AAA shall furnish to the party-appointed arbitrators, in the manner provided in Rule R-13, a list selected from the National Roster, and the appointment of the chairperson shall be made as provided in that Rule.

R-16. Nationality of Arbitrator

Where the parties are nationals of different countries, the AAA, at the request of any party or on its own initiative, may appoint as arbitrator a national of a country other than that of any of the parties. The request must be made before the time set for the appointment of the arbitrator as agreed by the parties or set by these Rules.

R-17. Number of Arbitrators

- (a) The parties may agree on the number of arbitrators to hear and determine the case. If the arbitration agreement does not specify the number of arbitrators or is ambiguous, and the parties do not otherwise agree, the dispute shall be heard and determined by one arbitrator, unless the AAA, in its discretion, directs that three arbitrators be appointed. A party may request three arbitrators in the Demand or Answer, which request the AAA will consider in exercising its discretion regarding the number of arbitrators appointed to the dispute.
- (b) Use of terms such as “the arbitrator”, “an arbitrator”, or “the arbitrators” in the arbitration agreement, without further specifying the number of arbitrators, shall not be deemed by the AAA to reflect an agreement as to the number of arbitrators.
- (c) Any request for a change in the number of arbitrators as a result of an increase or decrease in the amount of a claim or a new or different claim must be made to the AAA and other parties to the arbitration no later than seven calendar days after receipt of the Rule R-6-required notice of change of claim amount. If the parties are unable to agree with respect to the request for a change in the number of arbitrators, the AAA shall make that determination.

R-18. Disclosure

- (a) Any person appointed or to be appointed as an arbitrator, as well as the parties and their representatives, shall disclose to the AAA any circumstance likely to give rise to justifiable doubt as to the arbitrator’s impartiality or independence, including any bias or any financial or personal interest in the result of the arbitration or any past or present relationship with the parties or their representatives. Such obligation shall remain in effect throughout the arbitration. Failure on the part of a party or a representative to comply with the requirements of this Rule may result in the waiver of the right to object to an arbitrator in accordance with Rule R-42.

- (b) Upon receipt of such information from the arbitrator or another source, the AAA shall communicate the information to the parties and, if it deems it appropriate to do so, to the arbitrator and others.
- (c) Disclosure of information pursuant to this Rule R-18 is not an indication that the arbitrator considers the disclosed circumstance likely to affect impartiality or independence.

R-19. Disqualification of Arbitrator

- (a) Any arbitrator shall be impartial and independent and shall perform his or her duties with diligence and in good faith, and shall be subject to disqualification for:
 - i) partiality or lack of independence,
 - ii) inability or refusal to perform his or her duties with diligence and in good faith, and
 - iii) any grounds for disqualification provided by applicable law.
- (b) The parties may agree in writing, however, that arbitrators directly appointed by a party pursuant to Rule R-14 shall be non-neutral, in which case such arbitrators need not be impartial or independent and shall not be subject to disqualification for partiality or lack of independence.
- (c) Upon objection of a party to the continued service of an arbitrator, or on its own initiative, the AAA shall determine whether the arbitrator should be disqualified on the grounds set out above, and shall inform the parties of its decision, which decision shall be conclusive.

R-20. Communication with Arbitrator

- (a) No party and no one acting on behalf of any party shall communicate *ex parte* with an arbitrator or a candidate for arbitrator concerning the arbitration, except that a party, or someone acting on behalf of a party, may communicate *ex parte* with a candidate for direct appointment pursuant to Rule R-14 in order to advise the candidate of the general nature of the controversy and of the anticipated proceedings and to discuss the candidate's qualifications, availability, or independence in relation to the parties or to discuss the suitability of candidates for selection as a third arbitrator where the parties or party-designated arbitrators are to participate in that selection.
- (b) Rule R-20(a) does not apply to arbitrators directly appointed by the parties who, pursuant to Rule R-19(b), the parties have agreed in writing are non-neutral. Where the parties have so agreed under Rule R-19(b), the AAA shall as an administrative practice suggest to the parties that they agree further that Rule R-20(a) should nonetheless apply prospectively.
- (c) As set forth in Rule R-44, unless otherwise instructed by the AAA, in the Rules, or by the arbitrator, any documents submitted by any party to the AAA or to the arbitrator shall simultaneously be provided to the other party or parties to the arbitration.

R-21. Vacancies

- (a) If for any reason an arbitrator is unable or unwilling to perform the duties of the office, the AAA may, on proof satisfactory to it, declare the office vacant. Vacancies shall be filled in accordance with the applicable provisions of these Rules.
- (b) In the event of a vacancy in a panel of neutral arbitrators after the hearings have commenced, the remaining arbitrator or arbitrators may continue with the hearing and determination of the controversy, unless the parties agree otherwise.
- (c) In the event of the appointment of a substitute arbitrator, the panel of arbitrators shall determine in its sole discretion whether it is necessary to repeat all or part of any prior hearings.

R-22. Preliminary Hearing

- (a) At the discretion of the arbitrator, and depending on the size and complexity of the arbitration, a preliminary hearing should be scheduled as soon as practicable after the arbitrator has been appointed. The parties should be invited to attend the preliminary hearing along with their representatives. The preliminary hearing may be conducted in person, by video conference or by telephone.
- (b) At the preliminary hearing, the parties and the arbitrator should be prepared to discuss and establish a procedure for the conduct of the arbitration that is appropriate to achieve a fair, efficient, and economical resolution of the dispute. Procedures P-1 and P-2 of these Rules address the issues to be considered at the preliminary hearing.

R-23. Pre-Hearing Exchange and Production of Information

- (a) *Authority of arbitrator.* The arbitrator shall manage any necessary exchange of information among the parties with a view to achieving an efficient and economical resolution of the dispute, while at the same time promoting equality of treatment and safeguarding each party's opportunity to fairly present its claims and defenses.
- (b) *Documents.* The arbitrator may, on application of a party or on the arbitrator's own initiative:
 - i) require the parties to exchange documents in their possession or custody on which they intend to rely;
 - ii) require the parties to update their exchanges of the documents on which they intend to rely as such documents become known to them;
 - iii) require the parties, in response to reasonable document requests, to make available to the other party documents in the responding party's possession or custody, not otherwise readily available to the party seeking the documents, and reasonably believed by the party seeking the documents to exist and to be relevant and material to the outcome of disputed issues; and

- iv) require the parties, when documents to be exchanged or produced are maintained in electronic form, to make such documents available in the form most convenient and economical for the party in possession of such documents, unless the arbitrator determines that there is good cause for requiring the documents to be produced in a different form. The parties should attempt to agree in advance upon, and the arbitrator may determine, reasonable search parameters to balance the need for production of electronically stored documents relevant and material to the outcome of disputed issues against the cost of locating and producing them.

R-24. Enforcement Powers of Arbitrator

The arbitrator shall have the authority to issue any orders necessary to enforce the provisions of Rules R-22 and R-23 and any other rule or procedure and to otherwise achieve a fair, efficient and economical resolution of the case, including, without limitation:

- (a) conditioning any exchange or production of confidential documents and information, and the admission of confidential evidence at the hearing, on appropriate orders to preserve such confidentiality;
- (b) imposing reasonable search parameters for electronic and other documents if the parties are unable to agree;
- (c) allocating costs of producing documentation, including electronically stored documentation;
- (d) in the case of willful non-compliance with any order issued by the arbitrator, drawing adverse inferences, excluding evidence and other submissions, and/or making special allocations of costs or an interim award of costs arising from such non-compliance; and
- (e) issuing any other enforcement orders which the arbitrator is empowered to issue under applicable law.

R-25. Date, Time, Place, and Method of Hearing

The arbitrator shall set the date, time, place, and method (including video, audio or other electronic means when appropriate) for each hearing. The parties shall respond to requests for hearing dates in a timely manner, be cooperative in scheduling the earliest practicable date, and adhere to the established hearing schedule. The AAA shall send a notice of hearing to the parties at least 10 calendar days in advance of the hearing date, unless otherwise agreed by the parties.

R-26. Attendance at Hearing

The arbitrator and the AAA shall maintain the privacy of the hearings unless the law provides to the contrary. Any person having a direct interest in the arbitration is entitled to attend hearings. The arbitrator shall otherwise have the power to require the exclusion of any witness, other than a party or other essential person, during the testimony of any other witness. It shall be discretionary with the arbitrator to determine the propriety of the attendance of any other person.

R-27. Representation

Any party may participate without representation (*pro se*), or by counsel or any other representative of the party's choosing, unless such choice is prohibited by applicable law. A party intending to be so represented shall notify the other party and the AAA of the name, telephone number and address, and email address if available, of the representative at least seven calendar days prior to the date set for the hearing at which that person is first to appear. When such a representative initiates an arbitration or responds for a party, notice is deemed to have been given.

R-28. Oaths

Before proceeding with the first hearing, each arbitrator may take an oath of office and, if required by law, shall do so. The arbitrator may require witnesses to testify under oath administered by any duly qualified person and, if it is required by law or requested by any party, shall do so.

R-29. Official Record of Proceedings

- (a) Any party desiring a transcribed record of a hearing shall make arrangements directly with a transcriber or transcription service and shall notify the arbitrator and the other parties of these arrangements at least seven calendar days in advance of the hearing. The requesting party or parties shall pay the cost of the record.
- (b) No other means of recording any proceeding will be permitted absent the agreement of the parties or per the direction of the arbitrator.
- (c) If the transcript or any other recording is agreed by the parties or determined by the arbitrator to be the official record of the proceeding, it must be provided to the arbitrator and made available to the other parties at the direction of the arbitrator.
- (d) The arbitrator may resolve any disputes with regard to apportionment of the costs of the transcription or other recording.

R-30. Interpreters

Any party wishing an interpreter shall make all arrangements directly with the interpreter and shall assume the costs of the service.

R-31. Postponements

The arbitrator may postpone any hearing upon agreement of the parties, upon request of a party for good cause shown, or upon the arbitrator's own initiative.

R-32. Arbitration in the Absence of a Party or Representative

Unless the law provides to the contrary, the arbitration may proceed in the absence of any party or representative who, after due notice, fails to be present or fails to obtain a postponement. An award shall not be made solely on the default of a party. The arbitrator shall require the party who is present to submit such evidence as the arbitrator may require for the making of an award.

R-33. Conduct of Proceedings

- (a) The claimant shall present evidence to support its claim. The respondent shall then present evidence to support its defense. Witnesses for each party shall also submit to questions from the arbitrator and the adverse party. The arbitrator has the discretion to vary this procedure, provided that the parties are treated with equality and that each party has the right to be heard and is given a fair opportunity to present its case.
- (b) The arbitrator, exercising his or her discretion, shall conduct the proceedings with a view to expediting the resolution of the dispute and may direct the order of proof, bifurcate proceedings and direct the parties to focus their presentations on issues the decision of which could dispose of all or part of the case.
- (c) The arbitrator may also allow for some or all of the presentation of evidence by alternative means including video, audio or other electronic means other than an in-person presentation. Such alternative means must afford a full opportunity for all parties to present any evidence that the arbitrator deems material and relevant to the resolution of the dispute and, when involving witnesses, provide an opportunity for cross-examination.
- (d) The parties may agree to waive oral hearings in any case and may also agree to utilize the *Procedures for Resolution of Disputes Through Document Submission*, found in Procedure E-6.

R-34. Dispositive Motions

- (a) The arbitrator may allow the filing of and make rulings upon a dispositive motion only if the arbitrator determines the moving party has shown that the motion is likely to succeed and to dispose of or narrow the issues in the case.
- (b) Consistent with the goal of achieving an efficient and economical resolution of the dispute, the arbitrator shall consider the time and cost associated with the briefing of a dispositive motion in deciding whether to allow any such motion.
- (c) Fees, expenses, and compensation associated with a motion or an application to make a motion may be assessed as provided for in Rule R-49(c).

R-35. Evidence

- (a) The parties may offer such evidence as is relevant and material to the dispute and shall produce such evidence as the arbitrator may deem necessary to an understanding and determination of the dispute. Conformity to legal rules of evidence shall not be necessary. All evidence shall be taken in the presence of all of the arbitrators and all of the parties, except where any of the parties is absent, in default, or has waived the right to be present.
- (b) The arbitrator shall determine the admissibility, relevance, and materiality of the evidence offered and may exclude evidence deemed by the arbitrator to be cumulative or irrelevant.
- (c) The arbitrator shall take into account applicable principles of legal privilege, such as those involving the confidentiality of communications between a lawyer and client.
- (d) An arbitrator or other person authorized by law to subpoena witnesses or documents may do so upon the request of any party or independently.

R-36. Evidence by Written Statements and Post-Hearing Filing of Documents or Other Evidence

- (a) At a date agreed upon by the parties or ordered by the arbitrator, the parties shall give written notice for any witness or expert witness who has provided a written witness statement to appear in person at the arbitration hearing for examination. If such notice is given, and the witness fails to appear, the arbitrator may disregard the written witness statement and/or expert report of the witness or make such other order as the arbitrator may consider to be just and reasonable.
- (b) If a witness whose testimony is represented by a party to be essential is unable or unwilling to testify at the hearing, either in person or through electronic or other means, either party may request that the arbitrator order the witness to appear in person for examination before the arbitrator at a time and location where the witness is willing and able to appear voluntarily or can legally be compelled to do so. Any such order may be conditioned upon payment by the requesting party of all reasonable costs associated with such examination.

- (c) If the parties agree or the arbitrator directs that documents or other evidence be submitted to the arbitrator after the hearing, the documents or other evidence shall be filed with the AAA for transmission to the arbitrator. All parties shall be afforded an opportunity to examine and respond to such documents or other evidence.

R-37. Inspection or Investigation

An arbitrator finding it necessary to make an inspection or investigation in connection with the arbitration shall direct the AAA to so advise the parties. The arbitrator shall set the date and time and the AAA shall notify the parties. Any party who so desires may be present at such an inspection or investigation. In the event that one or all parties are not present at the inspection or investigation, the arbitrator shall make an oral or written report to the parties and afford them an opportunity to comment.

R-38. Interim Measures

- (a) The arbitrator may take whatever interim measures he or she deems necessary, including injunctive relief and measures for the protection or conservation of property and disposition of perishable goods.
- (b) Such interim measures may take the form of an interim award, and the arbitrator may require security for the costs of such measures.
- (c) A request for interim measures addressed by a party to a judicial authority shall not be deemed incompatible with the agreement to arbitrate or a waiver of the right to arbitrate.

R-39. Emergency Measures of Protection

- (a) Unless the parties agree otherwise, the provisions of this Rule shall apply to arbitrations conducted under arbitration clauses or agreements entered on or after October 1, 2013. This Rule shall not apply to cases administered pursuant to the Expedited Procedures.
- (b) A party in need of emergency relief prior to the constitution of the panel shall notify the AAA and all other parties in writing of the nature of the relief sought and the reasons why such relief is required on an emergency basis. The application shall also set forth the reasons why the party is entitled to such relief. Such notice may be given by facsimile or email or other reliable means, but must include a statement certifying that all other parties have been notified or an explanation of the steps taken in good faith to notify other parties.

- (c) Within one business day of receipt of notice from the AAA initiating the request referenced in section (b), the AAA shall appoint a single emergency arbitrator designated to rule on emergency applications. The emergency arbitrator shall expeditiously disclose any circumstance likely, on the basis of the facts disclosed on the application, to affect such arbitrator's impartiality or independence. Any challenge to the appointment of the emergency arbitrator must be made within one business day of the communication by the AAA to the parties of the appointment of the emergency arbitrator and the circumstances disclosed.
- (d) The emergency arbitrator shall as soon as possible, but in any event within two business days of appointment, establish a schedule for consideration of the application for emergency relief. Such a schedule shall provide a reasonable opportunity to all parties to be heard, but may provide for proceeding by telephone or video conference or on written submissions as alternatives to a formal hearing. The emergency arbitrator shall have the authority vested in the tribunal under Rule R-7, including the authority to rule on her or his own jurisdiction, and shall resolve any disputes over the applicability of this Rule R-39.
- (e) If, after consideration, the emergency arbitrator is satisfied that the party seeking the emergency relief has shown that immediate and irreparable loss or damage shall result in the absence of emergency relief, and that such party is entitled to such relief under applicable law, the emergency arbitrator may enter an interim order or award granting the relief and stating the reason therefore.
- (f) Any application to modify an interim award of emergency relief must be based on changed circumstances and may be made to the emergency arbitrator until the non-emergency ("merits") arbitrator is appointed; thereafter such a request shall be addressed to the merits arbitrator. The emergency arbitrator shall have no further power to act after the merits arbitrator is appointed unless the emergency arbitrator is named as the merits arbitrator or as a member of the panel.
- (g) Any interim award of emergency relief may be conditioned on provision by the party seeking such relief for appropriate security.
- (h) A request for interim measures addressed by a party to a judicial authority shall not be deemed incompatible with this Rule, the agreement to arbitrate or a waiver of the right to arbitrate. If the AAA is directed by a judicial authority to nominate a special master to consider and report on an application for emergency relief, the AAA shall proceed as provided in this Rule, and the references to the emergency arbitrator shall be read to mean the special master, except that the special master shall issue a report rather than an interim award.
- (i) The costs associated with applications for emergency relief shall initially be apportioned by the emergency arbitrator or special master, subject to the power of the merits arbitrator to determine finally the apportionment of such costs. The emergency arbitrator may take into consideration whether the request for emergency relief was made in good faith.

R-40. Closing of Hearing

- (a) The arbitrator shall specifically inquire of all parties whether they have any further proofs to offer or witnesses to be heard. Upon receiving negative replies or if satisfied that the record is complete, the arbitrator shall declare the hearing closed.
- (b) If documents or responses are to be filed as provided in Rule R-36, or if briefs are to be filed, the hearing shall be declared closed as of the date the arbitrator is satisfied that the record is complete, and such date shall occur no later than seven calendar days from the date of receipt of the last such submissions or hearing transcript.
- (c) The time limit within which the arbitrator is required to make the award shall commence, in the absence of other agreements by the parties, upon the closing of the hearing. The AAA may extend the time limit for rendering of the award only in unusual and extreme circumstances.

R-41. Reopening of Hearing

The hearing may be reopened on the arbitrator's initiative, or by the direction of the arbitrator upon application of a party, at any time before the award is made. If reopening the hearing would prevent the making of the award within the specific time agreed to by the parties in the arbitration agreement, the matter may not be reopened unless the parties agree to an extension of time. When no specific date is fixed by agreement of the parties, the arbitrator shall have 30 calendar days from the closing of the reopened hearing within which to make an award (or 14 calendar days if the case is governed by the Expedited Procedures).

R-42. Waiver of Rules

Any party who proceeds with the arbitration after knowledge that any provision or requirement of these Rules has not been complied with and who fails to state an objection in writing shall be deemed to have waived the right to object.

R-43. Extensions of Time

The parties may modify by mutual agreement any period of time established by these Rules or the parties' arbitration agreement. The AAA or the arbitrator may for good cause extend any period of time established by these Rules, except the time for making the award. The AAA shall notify the parties of any extension.

R-44. Serving of Notice and Communications

- (a) The service methods set forth in Rule R-4(b)(iii) may also be used for the delivery of any filing, notice or communication throughout the course of the arbitration proceeding.
- (b) The AAA, the arbitrator, and the parties may also use alternative methods of communication or other platforms as directed by the AAA or as agreed by the parties or directed by the arbitrator to exchange any communication or other notice required by these Rules during the course of the arbitration.
- (c) Unless otherwise instructed by the AAA or by the arbitrator, any party submitting any document or written communication to another party, the AAA or the arbitrator, shall simultaneously provide that material to all other participants, including the AAA.
- (d) Failure to provide the other party with copies of communications provided to the AAA or the arbitrator may prevent the AAA or the arbitrator from acting on any requests or objections contained therein.
- (e) The AAA may direct that any oral or written communications sent by a party or their representative shall be sent in a particular manner. The failure of a party or their representative to comply with any such direction may result in the AAA's refusal to consider the issue raised in the communication.
- (f) The AAA may initiate administrative communications with the parties or their representatives either jointly or individually.
- (g) Any method of service on or notice to a party must be made in such a manner to provide that party with reasonable opportunity to be heard with regard to the dispute.

R-45. Confidentiality

- (a) Unless otherwise required by applicable law, court order, or the parties' agreement, the AAA and the arbitrator shall keep confidential all matters relating to the arbitration or the award.
- (b) Upon the agreement of the parties or the request of any party, the arbitrator may make orders concerning the confidentiality of the arbitration proceedings or of any other matters in connection with the arbitration and may take measures for protecting trade secrets and confidential information.

R-46. Majority Decision

- (a) When the panel consists of more than one arbitrator, unless required by law or by the arbitration agreement or section (b) of this Rule, a majority of the arbitrators must make all decisions.
- (b) Where there is a panel of three arbitrators, absent an objection of a party or another member of the panel, the chairperson of the panel is authorized to

resolve any disputes related to the exchange of information or procedural matters without the need to consult the full panel.

- (c) Absent an objection of a party or another member of the panel, the chairperson may sign any order on behalf of the panel.

R-47. Time of Award

The award shall be made promptly by the arbitrator and, unless otherwise agreed by the parties or specified by law, no later than 30 calendar days from the date of closing the hearing, or, if oral hearings have been waived, from the due date set for receipt of the parties' final statements and proofs.

R-48. Form of Award

- (a) Any award shall be in writing and signed by a majority of the arbitrators. Signatures may be executed in electronic or digital form. The award shall be executed in the form and manner required by law.
- (b) The arbitrator need not render a reasoned award unless the parties request such an award in writing prior to appointment of the arbitrator or unless the arbitrator determines that a reasoned award is appropriate.

R-49. Scope of Award

- (a) The arbitrator may grant any remedy or relief that the arbitrator deems just and equitable and within the scope of the agreement of the parties, including, but not limited to, specific performance of a contract.
- (b) In addition to a final award, the arbitrator may make other decisions, including interim, interlocutory, or partial rulings, orders, and awards. In any interim, interlocutory, or partial award, the arbitrator may assess and apportion the fees, expenses, and compensation related to such award as the arbitrator determines is appropriate.
- (c) In the final award or any order disposing of all of the case, the arbitrator shall assess the fees, expenses, and compensation provided in Rules R-55, R-56, and R-57. The arbitrator may also assess such fees, expenses, and compensation in any order or award disposing of part of the case. The arbitrator may apportion such fees, expenses, and compensation among the parties in such amounts as the arbitrator determines is appropriate.
- (d) The award of the arbitrator may include:
 - i) interest at such rate and from such date as the arbitrator may deem appropriate; and
 - ii) an award of attorneys' fees if all parties have requested such an award or it is authorized by law or the parties' arbitration agreement.

R-50. Award Upon Settlement – Consent Award

- (a) If the parties settle their dispute during the course of the arbitration and if the parties so request, the arbitrator may set forth the terms of the settlement in a “consent award.” A consent award must include an allocation of arbitration costs, including administrative fees and expenses as well as arbitrator fees and expenses as set forth in Rule R-49(c).
- (b) The consent award shall not be released to the parties until all administrative fees and all arbitrator compensation have been paid in full.

R-51. Delivery of Award to Parties

Parties shall accept as notice and delivery of the award the placing of the award or a true copy thereof in the mail addressed to the parties or their representatives at their last known addresses, personal or electronic service of the award, or the filing of the award in any other manner that is permitted by law.

R-52. Modification of Award

- (a) Within 20 calendar days after the transmittal of any award, any party, upon notice to the other parties, may request the arbitrator, through the AAA, interpret the award or correct any clerical, typographical, or computational errors in the award. The arbitrator is not empowered to re-determine the merits of any claim already decided. The other parties shall be given 10 calendar days to respond to the request. The arbitrator shall dispose of the request within 20 calendar days after transmittal by the AAA to the arbitrator of the request and any response thereto.
- (b) If the arbitrator has established a different schedule for such requests, responses, and disposition, the arbitrator’s schedule will supersede the deadlines set forth in this Rule.

R-53. Release of Documents for Judicial Proceedings

The AAA shall, upon the written request of a party to the arbitration, furnish to the party, at its expense, copies or certified copies of any papers in the AAA’s possession that are not determined by the AAA to be privileged or confidential.

R-54. Applications to Court and Exclusion of Liability

- (a) No judicial proceeding by a party relating to the subject matter of the arbitration shall be deemed a waiver of the party’s right to arbitrate.
- (b) Neither the AAA nor any arbitrator in a proceeding under these Rules is a necessary or proper party in any judicial proceedings relating to the arbitration or any other services provided by the AAA.

- (c) Parties to an arbitration under these Rules shall be deemed to have consented that judgment upon the arbitration award may be entered in any federal or state court having jurisdiction thereof.
- (d) Parties to an arbitration under these Rules shall be deemed to have consented that the AAA shall not be liable to any party in any action for damages, or injunctive or other relief, for any act or omission in connection with any arbitration administered in whole or in part by the AAA or conducted under these Rules. Parties shall also be deemed to have consented that the arbitrator shall not be liable to any party in any action for damages, or injunctive or other relief, for an act or omission in connection with any arbitration administered in whole or in part by the AAA.
- (e) Parties to an arbitration under these Rules may not call the arbitrator, the AAA, or AAA employees as a witness in litigation or any other proceeding relating to the arbitration. The arbitrator, the AAA and AAA employees are not competent to testify as witnesses in any such proceeding.

R-55. Administrative Fees

As a not-for-profit organization, the AAA shall prescribe administrative fees to compensate it for the cost of providing administrative services. The fee schedule in effect when the Demand is filed will apply throughout the pendency of the case. The administrative fees shall be paid initially by the party or parties making a claim or counterclaim, subject to final apportionment by the arbitrator in the award. The AAA may, in the event of extreme hardship on the part of any party, defer or reduce the administrative fees.

R-56. Expenses

The expenses of witnesses for either side shall be paid by the party producing such witnesses. All other expenses of the arbitration, including required travel and other expenses of the arbitrator, AAA representatives, and any witness and the cost of any proof produced at the direct request of the arbitrator, shall be borne equally by the parties, unless they agree otherwise or unless the arbitrator in the award assesses such expenses or any part thereof against any specified party or parties.

R-57. Neutral Arbitrator's Compensation

- (a) Arbitrators shall be compensated at a rate consistent with the arbitrator's stated rate of compensation at the time their AAA resume is presented to the parties for consideration pursuant to Rule R-13, unless otherwise determined by the AAA. Such compensation will be consistent with the provisions of the arbitrator's executed *Notice of Compensation Arrangements*.

- (b) If there is disagreement concerning the terms of compensation, an appropriate rate shall be established with the arbitrator by the AAA and confirmed to the parties.
- (c) Any arrangement for the compensation of a neutral arbitrator shall be made through the AAA and not directly between the parties and the arbitrator.

R-58. Deposits

- (a) The AAA will require the parties to deposit in advance of any hearings such sums of money as it deems necessary to cover the expense of the arbitration, including the arbitrator's compensation and expenses, if any, and shall render an accounting to the parties and return any unexpended balance at the conclusion of the case. A party's failure to make the requested deposits by the date established by the AAA may result in the AAA's or the arbitrator's taking any appropriate steps as set forth in Rule R-59.
- (b) Other than in cases where the arbitrator serves for a flat fee, deposit amounts requested will be based on estimates provided by the arbitrator. The arbitrator will determine the estimated amount of deposits using the information provided by the parties with respect to the complexity of each case.
- (c) The AAA shall request from the arbitrator an itemization or explanation for the arbitrator's request for deposits.
- (d) The AAA will allocate the deposits requested among the parties and will establish due dates for the collection of those deposits.

R-59. Remedies for Nonpayment

If arbitrator compensation or expenses or the AAA's administrative fees have not been paid in full, the AAA may so inform the parties so that one of them may advance the required payment.

- (a) Upon receipt of information from the AAA that payment for administrative fees or deposits for arbitrator compensation or expense have not been paid in full, to the extent the law allows, a party may request that the arbitrator take specific measures relating to a party's non-payment. Such measures may include, but are not limited to:
 - i) limiting a party's ability to assert or pursue its claim, and
 - ii) prohibiting a non-paying party from filing any motion.
- (b) In no event, however, shall a party be precluded from defending a claim or counterclaim.
- (c) The arbitrator must provide the party opposing a request for such measures with the opportunity to respond prior to making any ruling regarding the same.

- (d) In the event that the arbitrator grants any request for relief which limits any party's participation in the arbitration, the arbitrator shall require the party who is making a claim and who has made appropriate payments to submit such evidence as the arbitrator may require for the making of an award.
- (e) Upon receipt of information from the AAA that full payments have not been received, the arbitrator, on the arbitrator's own initiative or at the request of the AAA or a party, may order the suspension of the arbitration. If no arbitrator has yet been appointed, the AAA may suspend the proceedings.
- (f) If the arbitration has been suspended by either the AAA or the arbitrator and the parties have failed to make the full payments requested within the time provided after the suspension, the arbitrator, or the AAA if an arbitrator has not been appointed, may terminate the proceedings.

R-60. Sanctions

- (a) The arbitrator may, upon a party's request, order appropriate sanctions where a party fails to comply with its obligations under these Rules or with an order of the arbitrator. In the event that the arbitrator enters a sanction that limits any party's participation in the arbitration or results in an adverse determination of an issue or issues, the arbitrator shall explain that order in writing and shall require the submission of evidence and legal argument prior to making of an award. The arbitrator may not enter a default award as a sanction.
- (b) The arbitrator must provide a party that is subject to a sanction request with the opportunity to respond prior to making any determination regarding the sanctions application.

Preliminary Hearing Procedures

P-1. General

- (a)** In all but the simplest cases, holding a preliminary hearing as early in the process as possible will help the parties and the arbitrator organize the proceeding in a manner that will maximize efficiency and economy, and will provide each party a fair opportunity to present its case.
- (b)** Care must be taken to avoid importing procedures from court systems, as such procedures may not be appropriate to the conduct of arbitrations as an alternative form of dispute resolution that is designed to be simpler, less expensive and more expeditious.

P-2. Checklist

- (a)** The following checklist suggests subjects that the parties and the arbitrator should address at the preliminary hearing, in addition to any others that the parties or the arbitrator believe to be appropriate to the particular case. The items to be addressed in a particular case will depend on the size, subject matter, and complexity of the dispute, and are subject to the discretion of the arbitrator:
 - i)** the possibility of other non-adjudicative methods of dispute resolution, including mediation pursuant to Rule R-10;
 - ii)** whether all necessary or appropriate parties are included in the arbitration;
 - iii)** whether a party will seek a more detailed statement of claims, counterclaims or defenses;
 - iv)** whether there are any anticipated amendments to the parties' claims, counterclaims, or defenses;
 - v)** which
 - a)** arbitration rules;
 - b)** procedural law; and
 - c)** substantive law govern the arbitration;
 - vi)** issues related to cybersecurity, privacy and data protection to provide for an appropriate level of security and compliance in connection with the proceeding;
 - vii)** whether there are any threshold or dispositive issues that can efficiently be decided without considering the entire case, including without limitation,
 - a)** any preconditions that must be satisfied before proceeding with the arbitration;
 - b)** whether any claim or counterclaim falls outside the arbitrator's jurisdiction or is otherwise not arbitrable;

- c) consolidation of the claims or counterclaims with another arbitration; or
 - d) bifurcation of the proceeding.
- viii)** whether the parties will exchange documents, including electronically stored documents, on which they intend to rely in the arbitration, and/or make written requests for production of documents within defined parameters;
 - ix)** whether to establish any additional procedures to obtain information that is relevant and material to the outcome of disputed issues;
 - x)** how costs of any searches for requested information or documents that would result in substantial costs should be borne;
 - xi)** whether any measures are required to protect confidential information;
 - xii)** Whether the parties shall disclose:
 - a)** whether any non-party (such as a third-party funder or an insurer) has undertaken to pay or to contribute to the cost of a party's participation in the arbitration, and if so, to identify the person or entity concerned and to describe the nature of the undertaking; and
 - b)** whether any non-party (such as a funder, insurer, parent company, or ultimate beneficial owner) has an economic interest in the outcome of the arbitration, and if so, to identify the person or entity concerned and to describe the nature of the interest;
 - xiii)** whether the parties intend to present evidence from expert witnesses, and if so, whether to establish a schedule for the parties to identify their experts and exchange expert reports;
 - xiv)** whether, according to a schedule set by the arbitrator, the parties will:
 - a)** identify all witnesses, the subject matter of their anticipated testimonies, exchange written witness statements, and determine whether written witness statements will replace direct testimony at the hearing;
 - b)** exchange and pre-mark documents that each party intends to submit; and
 - c)** exchange pre-hearing submissions, including exhibits;
 - xv)** the date, time and place of the arbitration hearing;
 - a)** whether, at the arbitration hearing,
 - b)** testimony may be presented in person, in writing, by videoconference, via the internet, telephonically, or by other reasonable means;
 - xvi)** there will be a stenographic transcript or other record of the proceeding and, if so, who will make arrangements to provide it;
 - xvii)** whether any procedure needs to be established for the issuance of subpoenas;
 - xviii)** the identification of any ongoing, related litigation or arbitration;
 - xix)** whether post-hearing submissions will be filed;

- xx)** the form of the arbitration award; and
 - xxi)** any other matter the arbitrator considers appropriate or a party wishes to raise.
- (b)** The arbitrator shall issue a written order memorializing decisions made and agreements reached during or following the preliminary hearing.

Expedited Procedures

E-1. Limitation on Extensions

- (a) Except in extraordinary circumstances, the AAA or the arbitrator may grant a party no more than one seven-day extension of time to respond to the Demand for Arbitration or counterclaim as provided in Rule R-5.
- (b) Any other extension requests may be granted only after consideration of Procedure E-7.

E-2. Changes of Claim or Counterclaim

A claim or counterclaim may be increased in amount, or a new or different claim or counterclaim added, any time prior to the appointment of the arbitrator. However, after the arbitrator is appointed, no new or different claim or counterclaim may be submitted except with the arbitrator's consent. If an increased claim or counterclaim exceeds \$100,000, the case will be administered under the regular Commercial Arbitration Rules unless all parties and the arbitrator agree that the case may continue to be administered under the Expedited Procedures.

E-3. Serving of Notice

In addition to notice provided by Rule R-44, the parties shall also accept notice by telephone. Telephonic notices by the AAA shall subsequently be confirmed in writing to the parties. Should there be a failure to confirm in writing any such oral notice, the proceeding shall nevertheless be valid if notice has, in fact, been given by telephone.

E-4. Appointment and Qualifications of Arbitrator

- (a) The AAA shall simultaneously submit to each party an identical list of five proposed arbitrators drawn from its National Roster from which one arbitrator shall be appointed.
- (b) The parties are encouraged to agree to an arbitrator from this list and to advise the AAA of their agreement. If the parties are unable to agree upon an arbitrator, each party may strike two names from the list and return it to the AAA within seven days from the date of the AAA's mailing to the parties. If for any reason the appointment of an arbitrator cannot be made from the list, the AAA may make the appointment from other members of the panel without the submission of additional lists.
- (c) The parties will be given notice by the AAA of the appointment of the arbitrator, who shall be subject to disqualification for the reasons specified in Rule R-19.

The parties shall notify the AAA within seven calendar days of any objection to the arbitrator appointed. Any such objection shall be for cause and shall be confirmed in writing to the AAA with a copy to the other party or parties.

E-5. Discovery, Motions, and Conduct of Proceedings

- (a) At least two business days prior to the hearing, the parties shall exchange copies of all exhibits they intend to submit at the hearing. The arbitrator shall resolve disputes concerning the exchange of exhibits.
- (b) No other discovery shall be permitted except as allowed by the arbitrator for good cause shown. If the arbitrator allows additional discovery, the AAA, in consultation with the arbitrator, may remove the case from the Expedited Procedures.
- (c) There shall be no motions except as allowed by the arbitrator for good cause shown.

E-6. Proceedings on Documents and Procedures for the Resolution of Disputes Through Document Submission

Where no party's claim exceeds \$25,000, exclusive of interest, attorneys' fees and arbitration costs, and other cases in which the parties agree, the dispute shall be resolved by submission of documents, unless any party requests an oral hearing, or the arbitrator determines that an oral hearing is necessary. Where cases are resolved by submission of documents, the following procedures may be utilized at the agreement of the parties or the discretion of the arbitrator:

- (a) Within 14 calendar days of confirmation of the arbitrator's appointment, the arbitrator may convene a preliminary management hearing, via conference call, video conference, or internet, to establish a fair and equitable procedure for the submission of documents, and, if the arbitrator deems appropriate, a schedule for one or more telephonic or electronic conferences.
- (b) The arbitrator has the discretion to remove the case from the documents-only process if the arbitrator determines that an in-person hearing is necessary.
- (c) If the parties agree to in-person hearings after a previous agreement to proceed under this Procedure, the arbitrator shall conduct such hearings. If a party seeks to have in-person hearings after agreeing to this Procedure, but there is not agreement among the parties to proceed with in-person hearings, the arbitrator shall resolve the issue after the parties have been given the opportunity to provide their respective positions on the issue.
- (d) The arbitrator shall establish the date for either written submissions or a final telephonic or electronic conference. Such date shall operate to close the hearing and the time for the rendering of the award shall commence.
- (e) Unless the parties have agreed to a form of award other than that set forth in Rule R-48, when the parties have agreed to resolve their dispute by this Procedure, the

arbitrator shall render the award within 14 calendar days from the date the hearing is closed.

- (f) If the parties agree to a form of award other than that described in Rule R-48, the arbitrator shall have 30 calendar days from the date the hearing is declared closed in which to render the award.
- (g) The award is subject to all other provisions of the regular Commercial Arbitration Rules which pertain to awards.

E-7. Date, Time, Place, and Method of Hearing

In cases in which a hearing is to be held, the arbitrator shall set the date, time, place, and method of the hearing, to be scheduled to take place no more than 60 days after the preliminary hearing or as otherwise mutually agreed to between the parties and the arbitrator. The AAA will notify the parties in advance of the hearing date.

E-8. The Hearing

- (a) Absent good cause shown, the hearing shall not exceed one day. Each party shall have equal opportunity to submit its proofs and complete its case. The arbitrator shall determine the order of the hearing, and may require further submission of documents within two business days after the hearing.
- (b) For good cause shown, the arbitrator may schedule one additional day of hearings to be completed within seven business days after the initial day of hearing or as soon as practicable as determined by the arbitrator. In cases where the hearing is scheduled to exceed one day, the AAA, in consultation with the arbitrator, may remove the case from the Expedited Procedures.
- (c) Generally, there will be no stenographic record. Any party desiring a transcribed record of the hearing may arrange for one pursuant to the provisions of Rule R-29.

E-9. Time of Award

Unless otherwise agreed by the parties and arbitrator, the award shall be rendered not later than 14 calendar days from the date of the closing of the hearing or, if oral hearings have been waived, from the due date established for the receipt of the parties' final statements and proofs.

E-10. Arbitrator's Compensation

- (a) Arbitrators will receive compensation at a rate to be suggested by the AAA regional office.
- (b) For cases that are removed from the Expedited Procedures after the preliminary hearing is held, the arbitrator shall be compensated pursuant to Rule R-57.

Procedures for Large, Complex Commercial Disputes

L-1. Administrative Conference

Prior to the dissemination of a list of potential arbitrators, the AAA may, unless the parties agree otherwise, conduct an administrative conference with the parties and/or their attorneys or other representatives by conference call or video conference. The conference will take place as soon as practicable after the commencement of the arbitration. In the event the parties are unable to agree on a mutually acceptable time for the conference, the AAA may contact the parties individually to discuss the issues contemplated herein. Such administrative conference shall be conducted for the following purposes and for such additional purposes as the parties or the AAA may deem appropriate:

- (a) to obtain additional information about the nature and magnitude of the dispute and the anticipated length of hearing and scheduling;
- (b) to discuss the views of the parties about the technical and other qualifications of the arbitrators;
- (c) to obtain conflicts statements from the parties; and
- (d) to consider, with the parties, whether mediation or other non-adjudicative methods of dispute resolution might be appropriate.

L-2. Arbitrators

- (a) Large, complex commercial cases shall be heard and determined by either one or three arbitrators, as may be agreed upon by the parties. With the exception in paragraph (b) below, if the parties do not agree upon the number of arbitrators and a claim or counterclaim involves at least \$3,000,000 then three arbitrators shall hear and determine the case; otherwise one arbitrator shall hear and determine the case.
- (b) In cases involving the financial hardship of a party or other circumstance, the AAA at its discretion may require that only one arbitrator hear and determine the case, regardless of the amount of the claim and counterclaim.
- (c) The AAA shall appoint the arbitrator as agreed by the parties. If they are unable to agree on a method of appointment, the AAA shall appoint arbitrators from the Large, Complex Commercial Case Panel, in the manner provided in the regular Commercial Arbitration Rules. Absent agreement of the parties, the arbitrator shall not have served as the mediator in the mediation phase of the instant proceeding.

L-3. Management of Proceedings

- (a) The arbitrator shall take such steps as deemed necessary or desirable to avoid delay and to achieve a fair, speedy and cost-effective resolution of a Large, Complex Commercial Dispute.
- (b) As promptly as practicable after the selection of the arbitrator(s), a preliminary hearing shall be scheduled in accordance with Procedures P-1 and P-2 of these rules.
- (c) The parties shall exchange copies of all exhibits they intend to submit at the hearing at least 10 calendar days prior to the hearing unless the arbitrator determines otherwise.
- (d) The parties and the arbitrator shall address issues pertaining to the pre-hearing exchange and production of information in accordance with Rule R-23 of the AAA Commercial Rules, and the arbitrator's determinations on such issues shall be included within a scheduling order.
- (e) The arbitrator, or any single member of the panel, shall be authorized to resolve any disputes concerning the pre-hearing exchange and production of documents and information by any reasonable means within their discretion, including, without limitation, the issuance of orders set forth in Rules R-23 and R-24 of the AAA Commercial Rules.
- (f) In exceptional cases, at the discretion of the arbitrator, upon good cause shown and consistent with the expedited nature of arbitration, the arbitrator may order depositions to obtain the testimony of a person who may possess information determined by the arbitrator to be relevant and material to the outcome of the case. The arbitrator may allocate the cost of taking such a deposition.
- (g) Generally, hearings will be scheduled on consecutive days or in blocks of consecutive days in order to maximize efficiency and minimize costs.

Administrative Fee Schedule

FOR THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATIVE FEE SCHEDULE, PLEASE VISIT
www.adr.org/feeschedule.

Commercial Mediation Procedures

M-1. Agreement of Parties*

The parties shall be deemed to have made these Procedures a part of their dispute resolution agreement whenever, by stipulation or in their contract, they have provided for mediation or conciliation of existing or future disputes to be administered by the American Arbitration Association (AAA) or under these Procedures. Where parties agree to mediate under these Procedures, they are deemed to have agreed to have AAA administer the mediation. Unless the parties agree otherwise in writing, the Procedures and any amendment to them shall apply in the form in effect as of the date of filing of a request for mediation.

The parties by written agreement, may vary any part of these Procedures including, but not limited to, agreeing to conduct the mediation via telephone or other electronic or technical means.

M-2. Initiation of Mediation

Any party or parties to a dispute may initiate mediation with the AAA by filing a Request for Mediation online via AAA WebFile® at www.adr.org, via email to casefiling@adr.org, or by mail to:

American Arbitration Association

Case Filing Services

120 Broadway

Floor 21 - Intake

New York, NY 10271

The party initiating the mediation shall simultaneously notify the other party or parties of the request. The initiating party shall provide the following information to the AAA and the other party or parties as applicable:

- (i) A copy of the mediation provision of the parties' contract or the parties' stipulation to mediate.

**If a contract calls for the Commercial Mediation Procedures, and the dispute is between a consumer and a business or between an online marketplace or platform and an individual user or subscriber (using or subscribed to the service as an individual and not incorporated) and the dispute does not involve work or work-related claims, the AAA has the discretion to apply the Consumer Mediation Procedures and Consumer Fee Schedule.*

If the dispute is between an individual employee or an independent contractor (working or performing as an individual and not incorporated) and a business or organization and the dispute involves work or work-related claims, including any statutory claims and including work-related claims under independent contractor agreements, the AAA has the discretion to apply the Employment/Workplace Mediation Procedures and Employment/Workplace Fee Schedule.

If a contract calls for the Consumer Mediation Procedures, and the dispute is not between a consumer and a business, the AAA has the discretion to apply the Commercial Mediation Procedures and Commercial Fee schedule.

- (ii) The names, mailing addresses, email addresses, and telephone numbers of all parties to the dispute and representatives, if any, in the mediation.
- (iii) A brief statement of the nature of the dispute and the relief requested.
- (iv) Any specific qualifications the mediator should possess.

M-3. Representation

Subject to any applicable law, any party may be represented by persons of the party's choice. The names and addresses of such persons shall be communicated in writing to all parties and to the AAA.

M-4. Appointment of the Mediator

If the parties have not agreed on the mediator to be appointed and have not provided any other method of appointment, the mediator shall be appointed in the following manner:

- (i) Upon receipt of a request for mediation, the AAA will direct each party to the AAAi Mediator Search Tool. The parties are encouraged to meet and confer to agree on a mediator identified through the search tool and to notify the AAA of their mutual selection by the deadline the AAA set.
- (ii) If the parties are unable to agree on a mediator through use of the search tool, the parties may request that the AAA provide a list of mediators drawn from the AAA Panel of Mediators. The parties are encouraged to meet and confer to agree on a mediator from the list and to advise the AAA of their agreement.
- (iii) If the parties are still unable to agree on a mediator after conferring regarding the mediator list, one of the following procedures shall apply:
 - (a) The parties may mutually agree that the AAA administratively appoint the mediator; or,
 - (b) Each party shall strike the names of any unacceptable mediators from the list, rank the remaining mediators in order of preference, and return the completed list to the AAA within the time specified. If a party fails to return the list within the prescribed time, all mediators on the list shall be deemed acceptable to that party. From the mediators mutually approved by the parties, and in accordance with the highest order of mutual preference, the AAA shall invite a mediator to serve.

M-5. Mediator's Impartiality and Duty to Disclose

AAA mediators are required to abide by the *Model Standards of Conduct for Mediators* in effect at the time a mediator is appointed to a case. Where there is

a conflict between the *Model Standards* and any provision of these Procedures, these Procedures shall govern. The Model Standards require mediators to (i) decline a mediation if the mediator cannot conduct it in an impartial manner, and (ii) disclose, as soon as practicable, all actual and potential conflicts of interest that are reasonably known to the mediator and could reasonably be seen as raising a question about the mediator's impartiality.

Prior to accepting an appointment, AAA mediators are required to make a reasonable inquiry to determine whether there are any facts that a reasonable individual would consider likely to create a potential or actual conflict of interest for the mediator. AAA mediators are required to disclose any circumstance likely to create a presumption of bias or prevent a resolution of the parties' dispute within the timeframe desired by the parties. Upon receipt of such disclosures, the AAA shall immediately communicate the disclosures to the parties for their comments.

The parties may, upon receiving the mediator's disclosure of actual or potential conflicts of interest waive such conflicts and proceed with the mediation. In the event that a party disagrees as to whether the mediator shall serve, or in the event that the mediator's conflict of interest might reasonably be viewed as undermining the integrity of the mediation, the AAA shall remove and replace the mediator in accordance with section M-4.

M-6. Vacancies

If any mediator becomes unwilling or unable to serve, the AAA will remove and replace the mediator, unless the parties agree otherwise, in accordance with section M-4.

M-7. Duties and Responsibilities of the Mediator

- (i) The mediator shall conduct the mediation based on the principle of party self-determination. Self-determination is the act of coming to a voluntary, uncoerced decision in which each party makes free and informed choices as to process and outcome.
- (ii) The mediator is authorized to conduct separate or *ex parte* meetings and other communications with the parties and/or their representatives, before, during, and after any scheduled mediation conference. Such communications may be conducted via telephone, in writing, via email, online /virtually, in person or otherwise.

- (iii) The parties are encouraged to exchange all documents pertinent to the relief requested. The mediator may request the exchange of memoranda on issues, including the underlying interests and the history of the parties' negotiations. Information that a party wishes to keep confidential may be sent to the mediator, as necessary, in a separate communication with the mediator.
- (iv) The mediator does not have the authority to impose a settlement on the parties but will attempt to help them reach a satisfactory resolution of their dispute. Subject to the discretion of the mediator, the mediator may make oral or written recommendations for settlement to a party privately or, if the parties agree, to all parties jointly.
- (v) In the event a complete settlement of all or some issues in dispute is not achieved within the scheduled mediation session(s), the mediator may continue to communicate with the parties, for a period of time, in an ongoing effort to facilitate a complete settlement.
- (vi) The mediator is not a legal representative of any party and has no fiduciary duty to any party.

M-8. Responsibilities of the Parties

The parties shall ensure that appropriate representatives of each party, having authority to consummate a settlement, attend the mediation conference.

Prior to and during the scheduled mediation conference session(s) the parties and their representatives shall, as appropriate to each party's circumstances, exercise their best efforts to prepare for and engage in a meaningful and productive mediation.

M-9. Privacy

Mediation sessions and related mediation communications are private proceedings. The parties and their representatives may attend mediation sessions. Other persons may attend only with the permission of all parties and with the consent of the mediator.

M-10. Confidentiality

Subject to applicable law or the parties' agreement, the mediator shall not divulge any confidential information disclosed to them by the parties or by other

participants (such as witnesses) in the course of the mediation. The mediator shall maintain the confidentiality of all information obtained in the mediation, and all records, reports, or other documents the mediator received while serving in that capacity shall be confidential.

The mediator shall not be compelled to divulge such records or to testify in regard to the mediation in any adversary proceeding or judicial forum.

The parties shall maintain the confidentiality of the mediation and shall not rely on, or introduce as evidence in any arbitral, judicial, or other proceeding the following, unless agreed to by the parties or required by applicable law:

- (i) Views expressed or suggestions made by a party or other participant with respect to a possible settlement of the dispute;
- (ii) Admissions made by a party or other participant in the course of the mediation proceedings;
- (iii) Proposals made or views expressed by the mediator; or
- (iv) The fact that a party had or had not indicated willingness to accept a proposal for settlement made by the mediator.

M-11. No Stenographic Record

There shall be no stenographic record of the mediation process.

M-12. Termination of Mediation

The mediation shall be terminated:

- (i) By the execution of a settlement agreement by the parties; or
- (ii) By a written or verbal declaration of the mediator to the effect that further efforts at mediation would not contribute to a resolution of the parties' dispute; or
- (iii) By a written or verbal declaration of all parties to the effect that the mediation proceedings are terminated; or
- (iv) When there has been no communication between the mediator and any party or party's representative for 21 days following the conclusion of the mediation conference.

M-13. Exclusion of Liability

Neither the AAA nor any mediator is a necessary party in judicial proceedings relating to the mediation. Neither the AAA nor any mediator shall be liable to any party for any error, act or omission in connection with any mediation conducted under these Procedures. Parties to a mediation under these Procedures may not call the mediator, the AAA, or AAA employees as a witness in litigation or any other proceeding relating to the mediation. The mediator, the AAA and AAA employees are not competent to testify as witnesses in any such proceeding.

M-14. Interpretation and Application of Procedures

The mediator shall interpret and apply these Procedures insofar as they relate to the mediator's duties and responsibilities. All other procedures shall be interpreted and applied by the AAA.

M-15. Deposits

Unless otherwise directed by the mediator, the AAA will require the parties to deposit in advance of the mediation conference such sums of money as the AAA, in consultation with the mediator, deems reasonable to cover the costs and expenses of the mediation. The AAA shall render an accounting to the parties and return any unexpended deposit balance at the conclusion of the mediation.

M-16. Expenses

All expenses of the mediation, including required traveling and other expenses or charges of the mediator, shall be borne equally by the parties unless they agree otherwise. The expenses of participants for either side shall be paid by the party requesting the attendance of such participants.

M-17. Cost of the Mediation

FOR THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATIVE FEE SCHEDULE, PLEASE VISIT www.adr.org/feeschedule.



American Arbitration Association®

800.778.7879 | websitemail@adr.org | adr.org

ADVERTISEMENT

Vacation club connected to prior settlements over consumer complaints



Downtown Charleston attracts millions of tourists every year, but some say that their vacations were ruined after their experience with one local business.

By [Blair Sabol](#) and [Ainslie Lycans](#)
Published: Nov. 4, 2022 at 1:12 PM EDT | Updated: Nov. 7, 2022 at 11:39 PM EST



CHARLESTON, S.C. (WCSC) - Downtown Charleston attracts millions of tourists every year, but some say that their vacations were ruined after their experience with one local business.

"I don't know that I would voluntarily go back to Charleston to be honest," Christopher Sawyer said. "Knowing that the city can't even crack down on something like this."

Sawyer and his wife traveled to South Carolina in May of 2021. He's not alone in his experience.

"It left a bad taste in my mouth for Charleston," Merle Teeling said.

ADVERTISEMENT





Jeffrey Pumilia, director of member services at Vacation Inspirations, says this is to avoid distractions.

Though, customers hypothesize that it was to rope them into a contract they couldn't get out of.

ADVERTISEMENT

"Well when we left, of course, I bring up my cell phone and start googling Vacation Inspiration[s] and oh my gosh, it was bad review after bad review," Teeling said. "I felt sick to my stomach."

"It was a very well-polished scheme and all this we didn't know who the company was prior to stepping foot in the presentation," Sawyer said. " It really is for lack of a better term scurvy."

The business sells memberships for \$2,000 to \$8,000 upfront, where customers sign a “non-cancellable” agreement immediately following the presentation.

Customers' complaints with the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs accuse the business of a high-pressure sales situation where they were told how to fill out forms, including checking "no" when asked on the forms if they were pressured into the deal.

ADVERTISEMENT

Pumilia denies these claims.

"We don't force anybody to do anything. It's all their choice," he said.

Sawyer never used the services and was unable to cancel the transaction on his credit card.

Teeling did, however.

ADVERTISEMENT

Though receiving rebates, she found that the deals never ended up being as good as a deal as promised.

"It wasn't any cheaper at all, it was more," she said.

The complaints

The complaints against Vacation Inspirations, now run by Destination Travel LLC, have continued to pile on since 2014. So far, there are 95 on the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs (SCADCA) [website](#) with 72 since a prior Live 5 investigation into the business in 2015.

ADVERTISEMENT

[READ MORE: Dozens of complaints filed against local vacation clubs](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

"They're experiencing buyer's remorse. We do everything in our power, our entire team works, you know with each member on any issue, problem or concern," Pumilia said.

In South Carolina, customers have 3-5 days to back out of a contract deal, but only in [specific](#) cases. This includes door-to-door sales, gym memberships and vacation timeshares.

"It's a minuscule number [of complaints]. We have tens of thousands of existing members in the same period that you provided us with for these 18 complaints, we had over 3,800 new members join," he said. "You're looking at less than one-half of one percent of individuals... that doesn't even include our existing member base."

Pumilia says 12,000 members use the service every year.

ADVERTISEMENT

The business has existed for 16 years, but only became accredited with the [Better Business Bureau in February 2022](#). It has an A+ rating.

In SCADA's database, out of the 18 most recent complaints reviewed, ten had a "business adequate response."

This means the business responded, but the customer may not have necessarily gotten what they had asked for.

The remaining eight closed with a "consumer satisfied" label. Four received a partial refund, only two appeared to get a full refund.

ADVERTISEMENT

"If it's an area that we don't have legal authority over or any sort of regulation, we can't force a business to do something," Bailey Parker, the director of communications at SCDCA, said.

Parker says SCADA often serves only as a mediator in these types of cases.

History of Consumer Complaints

The founding members of Vacation Inspirations have settled consumer complaints in two other states.

ADVERTISEMENT

Joseph Shirley and Randy Gardner, listed as managers under Destination Travel LLC which operates Vacation Inspirations, have also paid customer restitution, fines and attorneys' fees in Georgia and Texas.

In 2012, under Vacation Station LLC, the pair agreed to pay at least [\\$190,000 in civil penalties and customer restitutions to the Georgia Office of Consumer Protection](#).

The state's investigation revealed the business promised free airline tickets in exchange for attending a presentation, but attendees found out

[READ MORE: Refunds to be issued in Vacation Station settlement](#)

Five years later in Texas, Shirley and Gardner agreed to pay out another nearly \$75,000 for violating the Texas Deceptive Trade Practices Act and other statutes, [according to the Texas Attorney General's Office](#).

Pumilia refused to answer any questions regarding either’s involvement in the business or the settlements.

David Levine, the business’ lawyer, over the phone confirmed that they have signed consent orders in both states.

The orders did not include an admission of guilt in either case.

Levine said that mistakes were made in the past, but the company continues to move forward.

“Vacation Inspirations has served tens of thousands of satisfied members over the past decade. We pride ourselves on our ability to create wonderful vacation experiences for the families and individuals we work with. We also pride ourselves in our responsiveness to member concerns and making sure those concerns are addressed quickly and fairly,” Randy Gardner said in a statement.

Connecting with other Customers

The business offered Sawyer a partial refund, but he refused it.

“I didn’t want to sign the documentation that they had sent over because it suggested that I would be held legally liable if I said anything negative about the company,” he said. “To me, it’s more important to speak about this rather than to recoup \$2,000 and not say my peace about the experience,” he said.

Sawyer has started a Facebook page [Tales of Vacation Inspirations LLC Charleston South Carolina](#) and an email vacationinspirationscamera@gmail.com to connect with other customers.

Copyright 2022 WCSC. All rights reserved.

ADVERTISEMENT

Most Read

▶ **Charleston moving forward on plans to convert former Confederate fort**





📺 Woman, 2 youths charged in Goose Creek attack caught on camera



📺 'I cried like a baby': Lowcountry man wins millions



ADVERTISEMENT

Latest News

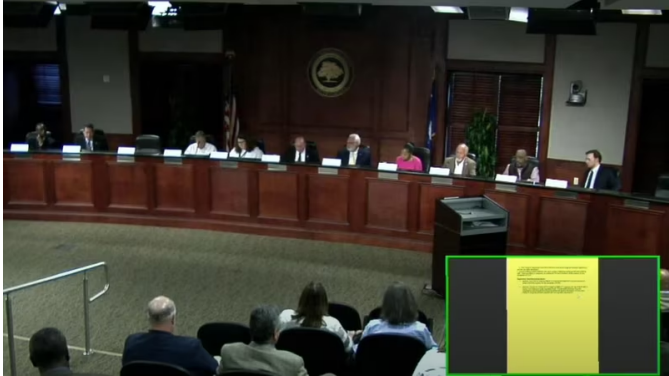


Murdaugh moved to protective custody at maximum security SC prison



📺 Potholes cost SCDOT \$1.2M in driver claims over last 3 years

18-year-old charged in Georgetown County stabbing



Finance committee approves recommendation for new jail medical provider

ADVERTISEMENT

News Contact Us		Weather		Sports		WCSC 2126 Charlie Hall Boulevard Charleston, SC 29414 (843) 402-5555	
Terms of Service	Privacy Policy	Public Inspection File	EEO Report	publicfile@live5news.com - (843) 402-5555		FCC Applications	WCSC Careers
		Closed Captioning/Audio Description		Advertising	Digital Advertising		
A Gray Media Group, Inc. Station - © 2002-2023 Gray Television, Inc.							

[Menu](#)

Public Information

SEARCH RESULTS

You Searched For

Business Name: **vacation inspiration**

Results

Name	Address	Phone	Complaints
Vacation Inspirations	229 Meeting Street Charleston, SC 29401	8776428747	121
Vacation Inspirations (Destination Trave	1662 Savannah Hwy., Suite 150 Charleston, SC 29407	7706718500	9

Total Complaints: 130

THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
In The Court of Appeals

APPEAL FROM CHARLESTON COUNTY
Court of Common Pleas

Deadra L. Jefferson, Circuit Court Judge

Appellate Case No. 2026-000058

Frank Perrelli, Jr., Appellant,

v.

Vacation Inspirations, Destination Travel, LLC, Joseph Shirley, Randy Gardner, and Jeffrey
Pumilia Respondents,

AND

Peter Skoler and Patricia Skoler, Appellants,

v.

Vacation Inspirations, Destination Travel, LLC, Joseph Shirley, Randy Gardner, and Jeffrey
Pumilia Respondents.

CERTIFICATE OF COUNSEL

The undersigned hereby certify that the Record on Appeal contains all material proposed to be
included by any of the parties and not any other material.

s/David W. Wolf
David W. Wolf (S.C. Bar No. 17041)
DAVID W. WOLF, P.A.
748-D St. Andrews Boulevard
Charleston, South Carolina 29407
Tel. (843) 853-9000
Fax (843) 853-9002
Email: david@wolflaw.com

s/Abby Edwards Saunders
Abby Edwards Saunders (S.C. Bar No. 17234)
Law Office of Abigail Edwards Saunders, LLC
1021 Sea Mountain Highway, Suite B2
North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina 29582
Tel. (843) 491-9770
Fax (843) 491-9760
Email: abigail@abbysaunderslaw.com

Attorneys for Appellants