



## Office for Conflict Resolution: Annual Report FY24

### About the Office

The University of Minnesota's Office for Conflict Resolution (OCR) is a resource for University faculty, staff and student employees, who are not covered by a union collective bargaining agreement, to assist in the resolution of workplace disputes—either through informal problem-solving initiatives or a peer hearing process. By listening to employment concerns and offering a range of processes to respond to challenges, OCR promotes a University culture of engagement and achievement.

OCR is an impartial and independent office; it is not part of either the Office of Human Resources or the Office of the General Counsel. Conflict resolution services are offered confidentially, subject only to limited exceptions. OCR serves employees at all 5 University campuses including University Extension and University affiliated community and research institutions with University employees, such as the Bell Museum, the Landscape Arboretum, the Hormel Institute, and water and mining research stations.

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*“Differences of opinion don’t have to be threats. They can be opportunities to learn.”*

*- Adam Grant*

## **Mission and Vision**

Our mission is to create and maintain an inclusive, collaborative workplace that enables people to do their best work by addressing conflict quickly, effectively, and constructively.

We envision a workplace where:

- All have the opportunity to contribute, achieve and thrive at the University and beyond.
- Conflict is seen as an opportunity for learning and growth.
- Faculty, staff, and student employees address conflict proactively and successfully.

## **Scope of Report**

FY24 (Fiscal Year 2024) refers to services initiated between July 1, 2023 and June 30, 2024.

This report provides a review of developments, service metrics, and trends during that period, as well as a brief overview of goals for Fiscal Year 2025.

## **Personnel Transitions**

OCR experienced a series of staffing changes during FY24.

Director Tamar Gronvell moved on from OCR in the fall of 2023 to accept an appointment from Governor Tim Walz as Minnesota’s Commissioner of Administration. OCR veteran Eric Schnell served as Interim Director until the March of 2024, when Adepeju O. Solarin came aboard as the new Director.





Assistant Director John Fields left his position in December of 2023. Interim administrative support was provided by Grievance Process Manager, Britt Anderson. At the outset of FY25, Max Markin was hired as the new, full-time Assistant Director.

## Continued Services

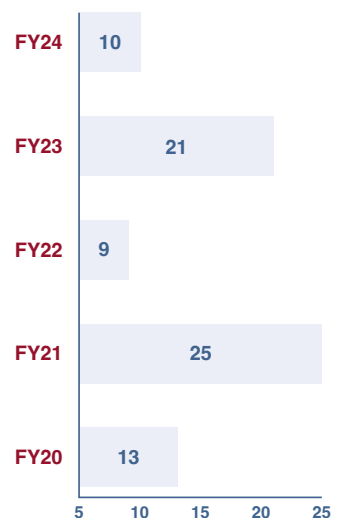
Throughout this period, OCR provided continuous informal and formal conflict resolution services to employees across the University of Minnesota system. The office resumed offering conflict skills workshops in the fall of 2024 following a pause earlier in the year.

## Partnering with University Leadership for System Improvements

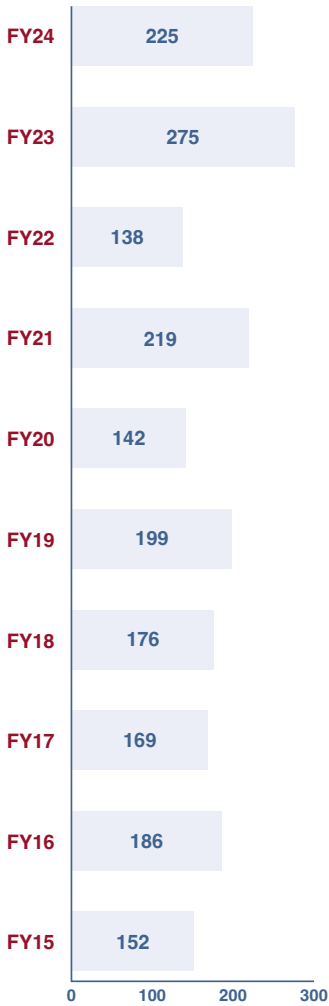
In FY24, Director Solarin continued OCR's tradition of partnership and collaboration with University leadership by serving on the Compliance Partners Group, providing guidance on improving University policies and processes. Xe also provided consultations to leadership in several University colleges and units, including the *Center for Metabolomics and Proteomics*.

A major partnership that builds on the work of former Director Gronvall and spearheaded by Director Solarin is a new one-year pilot project partnering with the labor-represented faculty on the Duluth campus to provide informal conflict resolution services. The OCR team is very excited about improving its connection with the Duluth campus and extending its informal services to this community of labor-represented faculty.

## Facilitated Dialogues



### Consultations



## SERVICE METRICS

### Informal Services

Informal conflict resolution matters are the largest part of the Office for Conflict Resolution’s workload.

The following statistics represent the number of individuals who met with OCR staff for one or more consultation meetings in FY24. Some consultations lead to more sustained conflict resolution processes, which may include follow up consultations, facilitated dialogues, or other interventions. No phone or email—although some do happen—inquiries are included in these totals below.

<b>Consultations</b>	225
<b>Facilitated Dialogues</b>	10

In FY24, OCR delivered 225 Consultations and hosted 10 Facilitated Dialogues.

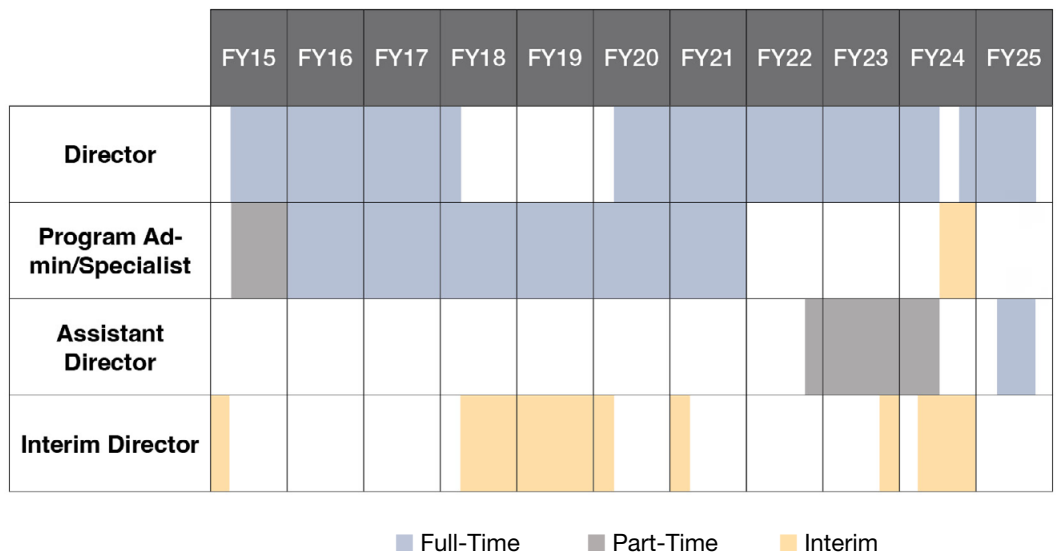
### Mode of Delivery

While the majority of visitors opt to attend consultations remotely, OCR continues to offer all of its informal and formal conflict resolution services, training and outreach both virtually and in-person across the University of Minnesota 5 campus system and Extension.

### Historical Metrics

As noted in the [Annual Report for FY23](#), OCR delivered services to a record-high number of employees that year. While the number of visitors participating in OCR’s informal services has trended upward over the past 10 years, a slight dip was observed in FY24. A previous [Annual Report \(FY22\)](#) attributed a significant decrease in services to staffing transitions that had resulted in OCR being temporarily understaffed. A similar connection could be made about the moderate decrease in services observed in FY24.

### OCR Staff Transitions







## Formal Services

Petitions are formal complaints that allege a violation of a University rule, regulation, policy, or practice.

When OCR processes a petition, a three-person peer panel conducts a hearing and makes recommendations to the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost (Provost) who makes the final decision. If a petitioner receives an unfavorable decision from either a peer hearing panel or from the Provost, the petitioner may elect to proceed to binding arbitration or the Minnesota Court of Appeals. To proceed to binding arbitration, the petitioner waives rights to pursue the claim in another forum. Alternatively, the petitioner may also have the right to appeal the decision to the Minnesota Court of Appeals by a writ of certiorari.

### Formal Services in FY23 and FY24

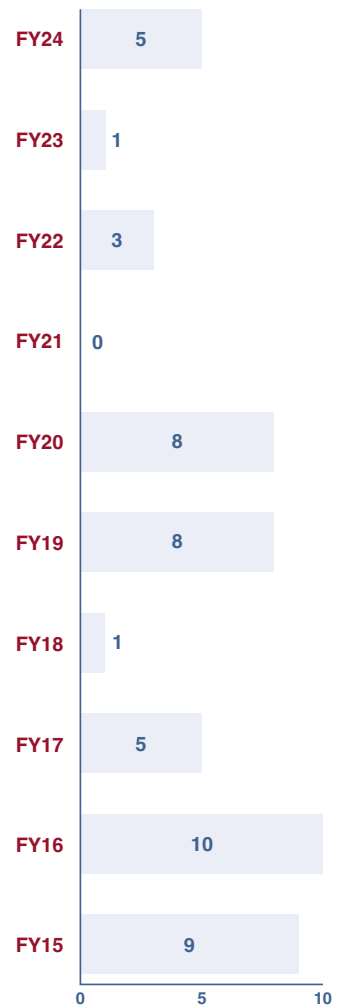
In FY24, two petitions culminated in Peer Panel Hearings and Final Decisions from the Provost. There were no matters that proceeded to arbitration.

A peer hearing on a petition is conducted before a three person panel of University faculty or staff. A hearing officer is selected from a roster of hearing officers nominated by faculty and staff committees and appointed by the Vice President for Equity and Diversity. A second panel member is selected by the petitioner from a roster of panelists appointed by representative employee committees. A third is appointed by the responsible senior administrator. After the hearing, the panel prepares a written recommendation that is distributed to the parties and to the Provost, who makes the final University decision on the matter.

### Jurisdictional Matters

Informal consultations are available to faculty, staff and student employees without jurisdictional thresholds. There are jurisdictional requirements, however, for initiating a formal petition requesting a peer hearing. The Conflict Resolution policies provide a procedure for determining if a particular matter is within the jurisdiction of the peer hearing process. When there is a jurisdictional challenge, the Director makes an advisory determination on the jurisdictional issue, which is subject to review by the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost (Provost).

## New Petitions Filed Over Time



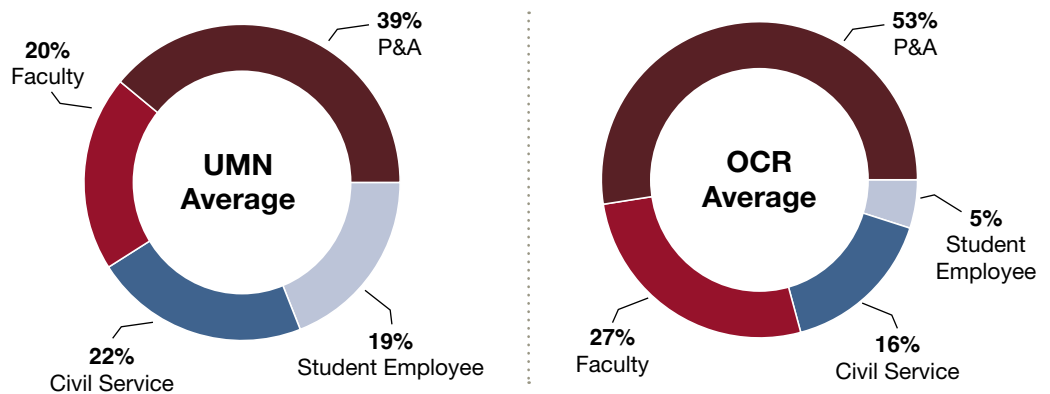


## Top Issues raised by OCR Visitors

1. Behavior (66)
2. Lack of Communication (57)
3. Supervision: Incompetent, Unfair, Harassing (49)
4. Assignment of Work (49)
5. Work Environment: Non-Supervisory Harassment/Bullying (47)

## Job Classification of OCR Visitors

The following chart shows the distribution of OCR visitors by job classification (FY20-FY24) compared with that of University employees as a whole over that same time range.



## TRAINING AND OUTREACH

In FY24, OCR engaged in less training and outreach activity than in a typical year as a result of staffing transitions. Outgoing Director Tamar Gronvall delivered one main educational program and one office overview. Moving into FY25, OCR has reprioritized training and outreach programs as a primary resource to support employees and further the mission and vision of the office.

## VISITOR SATISFACTION SURVEY

To evaluate visitor satisfaction, an email survey was sent to petitioners and respondents and those who consulted with the office in FY24. Overall, survey feedback received during FY24 reflects that visitors felt that OCR staff were respectful and that their concerns were heard and given prompt attention.

Due to the prioritization of direct services during a period of staffing transition, there was a brief lapse in the administration of the survey. Consequently, the response data below reflects feedback received between July 2023 and March 2024. Summaries of survey data from previous years can be found in [prior annual reports](#).

### FY24 Visitor Feedback:

**97%** replied that OCR staff were respectful

**89%** agreed their concerns were given prompt attention

**95%** felt that staff clearly explained the role of OCR





## GOALS FOR FY25

FY25 signals a return to a fully staffed Office for Conflict Resolution. The office is focused on strengthening its ability to deliver informal services, training, and outreach, while exploring new areas of partnership and development.

OCR has resumed delivery of Conflict Competency workshops, and is actively developing new programming to promote constructive engagement with workplace conflict across the University system.

Following a thorough review of internal processes, OCR is involved in new technology integration efforts to improve efficiency, visitor experience, and privacy and confidentiality.

In coordination with the Office for Equity and Diversity, an update to relevant policies and procedures is underway that will re-assign the administration of the formal grievance process to the Office for Equity and Diversity's Grievance Process Manager, allowing OCR to focus on informal conflict resolution processes, conflict competency training, and outreach.

Lastly, OCR has launched a pilot program to deliver informal services and training to labor-represented faculty on the Duluth campus.





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