

Office for Conflict Resolution: **Annual Report FY25**

About the Office

The University of Minnesota (UMN)'s Office for Conflict Resolution (OCR) provides informal services to help University employees address workplace disputes. OCR serves UMN faculty, staff, and student employees, who are not covered by a union collective bargaining agreement. 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 all 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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Mission and Vision

Our mission is to support the creation and maintenance of 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

Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) refers to services provided between July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2025.

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 2026.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Policy and Procedure Updates

A comprehensive review of University conflict resolution processes was completed in 2024-2025. This review resulted in the adoption of substantive changes to the relevant policies and procedures.

The revised policy now has two separate procedures—one describing the informal conflict resolution process and the other describing the formal conflict resolution process.

The updated policy newly:

- States that the formal process will be facilitated by the Office for Equity and Diversity's Grievance Process Manager, rather than by the Office for Conflict Resolution.
- Excludes discrimination complaints from the formal process. These complaints will be addressed exclusively through the process set forth by the Administrative Policy on Discrimination.
- Provides that a petition for the formal process must allege a violation of a specific written University rule, policy, or procedure pertaining to employment, and not a violation of a practice.
- Clarifies that, at the request of the Office for Conflict Resolution, a supervisor or manager must participate in a facilitated dialogue to attempt to resolve the workplace conflict, whereas the previous policy stated that their participation was "expected."
- States that a hearing panel is the decision-maker in the formal process, subject to appeal. In the previous process, the hearing panel made a recommended decision that was submitted to the Provost, who made a final decision.
- Removes the possibility of arbitration, and instead provides an internal appeal process.
- Provides more detailed procedures for the formal process that more closely align with procedures for other formal University grievance processes.

"Differences of opinion don't have to be threats. They can be opportunities to learn."

- Adam Grant

UMD Faculty Pilot Project

OCR is currently delivering informal services to unionized faculty on the Duluth (UMD) campus as part of a pilot program. (OCR is typically unable to deliver direct services to unionized employees.) This pilot program has been an exciting and welcome development in expanding informal services to yet another segment of our University community.

Graduate Student Unionization

Following over a year of negotiations, the Board of Regents unanimously approved a collective bargaining agreement with the Graduate Labor Union-United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (GLU-UE).

The three-year agreement went into effect on January 21, 2025 and covers 4,500 graduate assistantships on the Duluth and Twin Cities campuses. Pursuant to University policy, OCR is unable to provide direct services to these unionized graduate students.

Unique Offerings

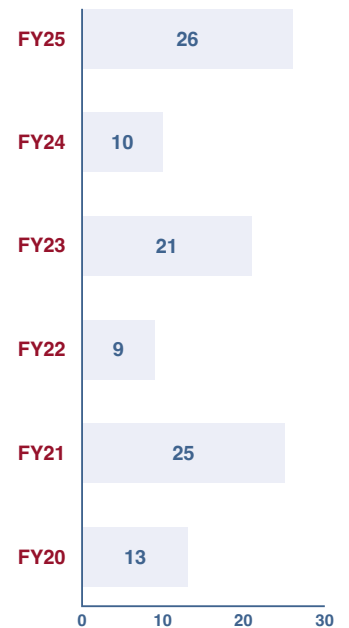
OCR has expanded its informal services to include facilitated workshops and retreats that are tailored to the specific needs of our visitors. While a retreat might be organized in response to an existing conflict, these offerings can also play a more preventive role. OCR can help proactively facilitate constructive communication around sensitive or high-stakes issues—such as curriculum changes or revisions to a mission and vision—that have the potential for conflict if not managed with care and intention.

These offerings are not limited to facilitated workshops or retreats. The OCR team is always open to co-laboring and collaborating with all its visitors on what exactly is needed.

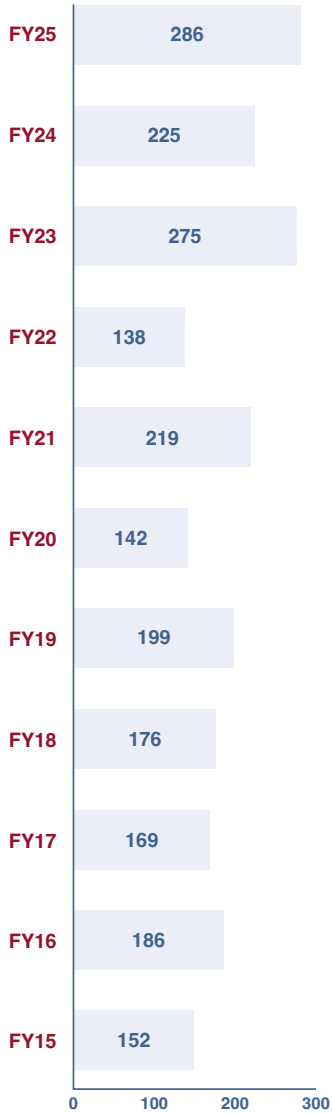
International Ombuds Association Annual Conference

In April of 2025, OCR Director Dr. Adepeju Solarin and Assistant Director Max Markin attended the *Foundations of the Organizational Ombuds Course* and annual conference of the International Ombuds Association in Miami, Florida. Representatives from the UMN’s Student Ombuds Services were in attendance as well. The conference provided great opportunities for professional development and networking with colleagues from peer institutions.

Facilitated Dialogues



Consultations



SERVICE METRICS

Informal Services

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

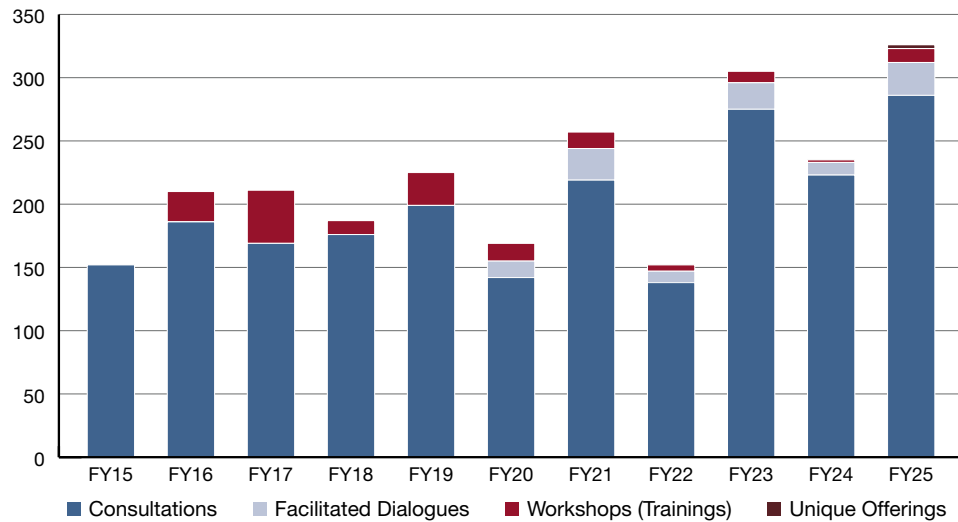
The following statistics represent the number of meetings that OCR staff held with visitors in FY25. Our informal services always begin with a private consultation. Some consultations lead to additional services, such as follow-up consultations, facilitated dialogues, group interventions, training, or other workshops.

In FY25, OCR revived and expanded conflict competency training and outreach efforts. These activities had declined in FY24 due to reduced capacity related to staffing transitions.

OCR hosted 26 facilitated dialogues and delivered 286 consultations, 3 unique service offerings, and 11 conflict competency training sessions to over 150 workshop attendees.

Consultations	286	Trainings	11
Facilitated Dialogues	26	Unique Offerings	3

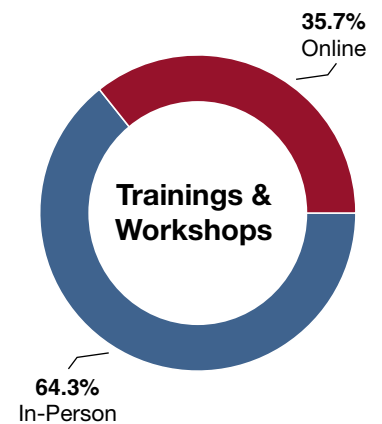
These metrics demonstrate a record-high number of services provided by OCR, topping the previous high reached in Fiscal Year 2023.



Mode of Delivery

While the majority of visitors opt to attend consultations remotely, OCR continues to offer all of its services, training and outreach both virtually and in-person across the University of Minnesota’s 5 campus system and Extension. In-person services are more commonly requested for large group interventions, training, and workshops.

Whereas the vast majority of consultations and facilitated dialogues are conducted virtually, 64.3% of workshops were delivered in-person, compared to 35.7% delivered online.



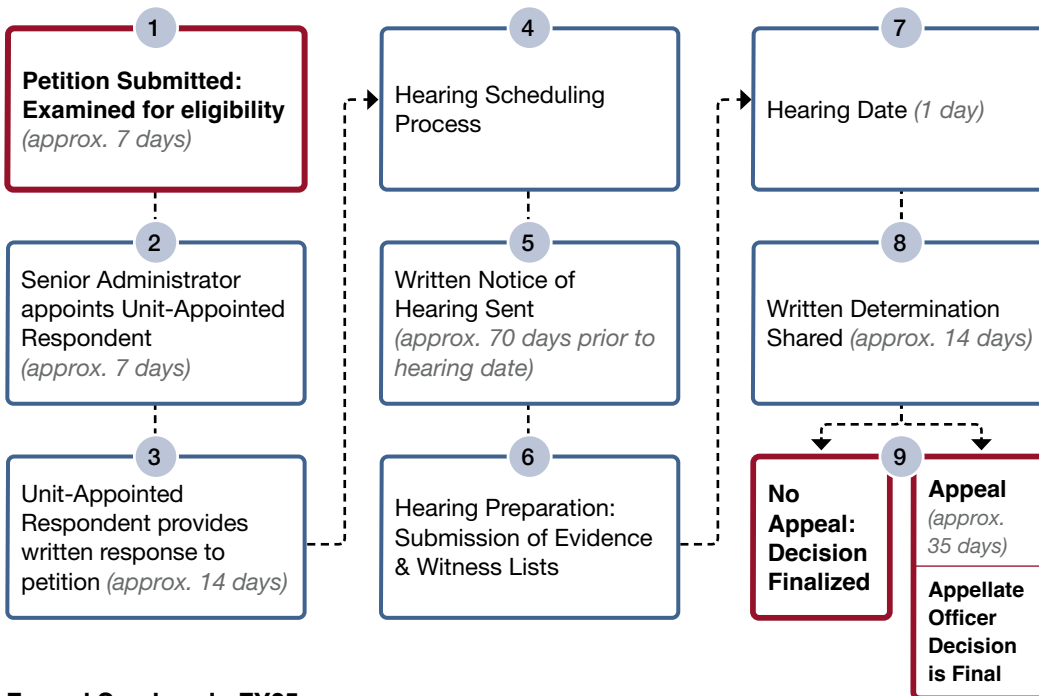


Formal Services

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

The formal petition process is available to resolve certain employment-related grievances that were addressed but not resolved via the OCR's informal services. The formal petition process is initiated by the submission of a petition requesting the resolution of an eligible employment-related grievance and includes a hearing, a hearing panel decision on the employment-related grievance, and an opportunity to appeal the panel's decision on limited grounds. The formal petition process is facilitated by the Office for Equity and Diversity's Grievance Process Manager.

Timeline for the Formal Petition Process

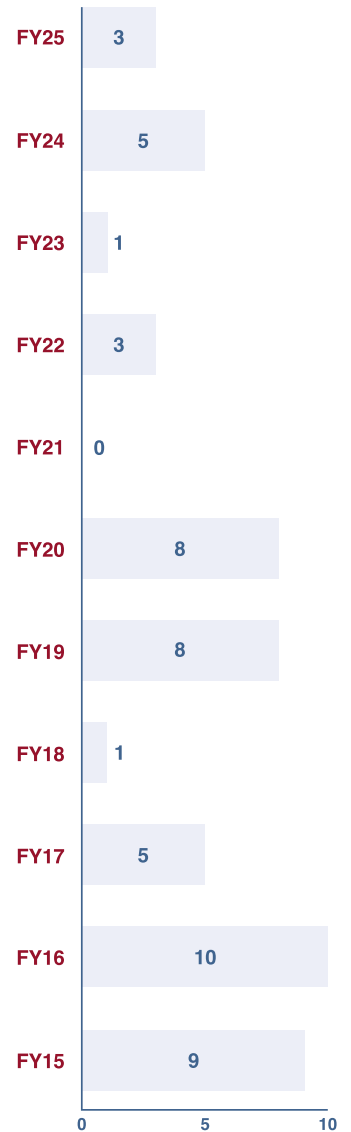


Formal Services in FY25

In FY25, three (3) formal petitions were filed. None proceeded to a formal hearing. All three were dismissed. All filed petitions were either untimely, contained ineligible claims, or a combination of both.

There was one appeal filed in response to a dismissal (applicable under the new policy), but the appeal was denied and the decision to dismiss was affirmed by the Appellate Officer.

New Petitions Filed Over Time



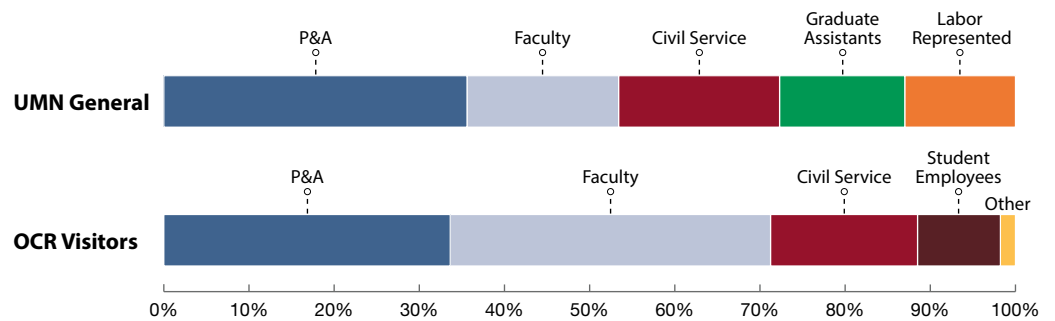
Top Issues raised by OCR Visitors in FY25

1. Behavior (140)
2. Lack of communication (50)
3. Relationship between Employees (49)
4. Supervision (44)
5. Work Environment/Harassment/Bullying (non-supervisory) (39)

Job Classification of OCR Visitors

The following chart shows the average distribution of OCR visitors by job classification (FY20-FY25) compared with that of University employees as a whole over that same time range.

The UMN averages are taken from Faculty and Staff Headcounts provided by Institutional Data and Research (IDR), which uses slightly different reporting categories (P&A, Faculty, Civil Service, Graduate Assistants, Labor Represented) versus OCR's internal service tracking (P&A, Faculty, Civil Service, Student Employees, Other). Nonetheless, this comparison provides some institutional context for our service metrics.



In FY25, OCR worked with substantially fewer P&A employees than in previous years, with these visitors making up only 33.63% of total visitors as compared to our historical average of 49.50%. Our data shows increases in visitors across all other job classifications. To the right is a complete breakdown of OCR's FY25 visitors by job classification:

Job Classification	% of OCR Visitors
P&A	33.63%
Faculty	37.61%
Civil Service	17.26%
Student Employees	9.73%
Other	1.77%

Visitor Satisfaction Survey

The important tradition of following-up and checking-in with OCR visitors continues with email surveys being sent to all participants in the OCR process. The OCR staff never takes it for granted that visitor satisfaction is high and incorporates all feedback received to increase the service and experience of each individual.

Here are three highlights from FY25:

97% replied that OCR staff were respectful

76% agreed OCR was helpful in addressing their concerns

97% felt that staff clearly explained the role of OCR

GOALS FOR FY26

In FY26, OCR continues to advance our mission across the University system through innovation, education, and collaboration.

In collaboration with University Health and Safety, we have developed a course on conflict de-escalation that is now available to UMN employees via Training Hub.

OCR has adopted the Standards of Practice of the International Ombuds Association, which include Independence, Impartiality, Informality, and Confidentiality. We continue to leverage new technology to streamline administrative processes and protect visitor data.

We are conducting a review of our handbook and website to optimize quality, relevance, and accessibility of content. We are working with Office of Digital Accessibility (ODA) and University Printing Services to align all content with WCAG standards.





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