

# NM ADR NEWS

Encouraging communication through mutual respect

April—June 2010

## About the OADPR

The 2007 Governmental Dispute Prevention & Resolution Act (GDPRA) created the OADPR to promote early dispute resolution and positive collaboration among state employees and agencies through the development and support of effective and efficient programs and policies. The Office operates as a Bureau of the Risk Management Division (RMD) of the General Services Department (GSD).

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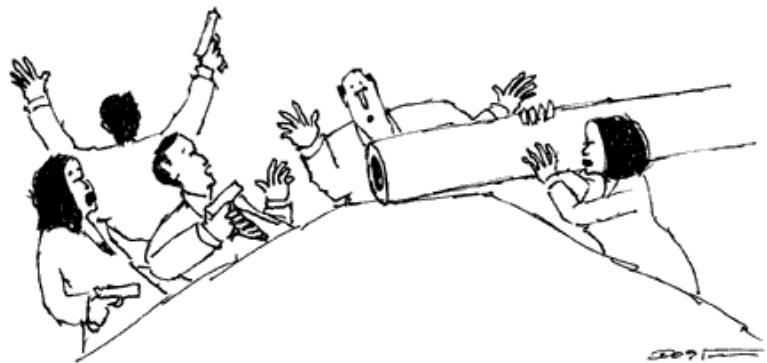
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**NEW MEXICO**  
GENERAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

## ADR CURRENT EVENTS AND TRAINING

- 1. MAY ADR BROWN BAG LUNCH PRESENTATION: "Finding a Better Way: Interest-Based Problem Solving"** – Monday, 5/24/10 from 12noon – 1pm at the Los Griegos Community Center, located at 1231 Candelaria, NW in Albuquerque. The presenter will be David Martinez, Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service Commissioner. **DON'T FORGET** to bring your lunch, along with your questions and ideas! Seating is limited. Questions? Interested in attending? Please contact Maria Voyles at [maria.voyles@state.nm.us](mailto:maria.voyles@state.nm.us).
- 2. LABOR MANAGEMENT RELATIONS TRAINING:** The Albuquerque Area Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, in partnership with state government, is presenting 3-day training programs statewide. This no-cost training, presented to managers from agencies with collective bargaining agreements in place, was designed to improve labor-management relationships through the development of collaborative problem-solving approaches. Skills learned in this training will enable participants to jointly respond to change and makes future mediation efforts more effective. Locations of remaining 2010 trainings: Silver City, Taos, Portales, Albuquerque, and Santa Fe. *Training notices will be sent by e-mail as classes are confirmed; if you would like to be added to our mailing list, please send your contact information to Maria Voyles at [maria.voyles@state.nm.us](mailto:maria.voyles@state.nm.us).*
- 3. MEETING OF THE STATE ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE PREVENTION & RESOLUTION COUNCIL:** A regular meeting of the Advisory Council will take place on Tuesday, May 18, 2010, from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at Porter Hall (1<sup>st</sup> floor of the Wendell Chino Building, located at 1220 South Saint Francis Drive in Santa Fe). ADR Coordinators and all others interested are invited to attend. Questions? Please contact Maria Voyles at [maria.voyles@state.nm.us](mailto:maria.voyles@state.nm.us).



*Ruth was outmanned at the negotiations,  
but not outgunned.*

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*Please contact our Office for more information on any of the above items.*

## **WICKED PROBLEMS**

*"Some problems are so complex that you have to be highly intelligent and well informed just to be undecided about them. – Laurence J. Peter*

A wicked problem is one in which each attempt to create a solution changes the understanding of the problem. Wicked problems cannot be solved in a traditional linear fashion because the problem definition evolves as new possible solutions are considered and/or implemented. Unfortunately, communities try to solve wicked problems using thinking, tools and methods that are useful only for simpler problems. Tensions mount around these "dilemmas" primarily because people don't consciously recognize that they are dealing with a complex, irresolvable problem. Americans like solutions, assume that there is a solution and tend to want to blame someone or something if the problem doesn't go away.

Governments and nonprofit organizations work with wicked, unsolvable problems because wicked problems always occur in a social context – the wickedness of the problem reflects the diversity among the stakeholders in the problem

Horst Rittel originally coined the term "wicked problem". He describes the characteristics of wicked problem as follows:

**1. You don't understand the problem until you have developed a solution.**

Every solution that is offered exposes new aspects of the problem, requiring further adjustments of the potential solutions. Indeed, there is no definitive statement of "The Problem." The problem is ill structured, an evolving set of interlocking issues and constraints. Rittel said, "One cannot understand the problem without knowing about its context; one cannot meaningfully search for information without the orientation of a solution concept; one cannot first understand and then solve." Moreover, what "The Problem" is depends on who you ask – different stakeholders have different views about what the problem is and what constitutes an acceptable solution.

**2. Wicked problems have no stopping rule.**

Since there is no definitive "The Problem", there is also no definitive "The Solution." The problem-solving process ends when you run out of resources, such as time, money or energy, not when some optimal or "final and correct" solution emerges. Herb Simon, Nobel laureate in economics, called this "satisficing"-stopping when you have a solution that is "good enough" (Simon 1969).

**3. Solutions to wicked problems are not right or wrong.**

They are simply "better," "worse," "good enough," or "not good enough." With wicked problems, the determination of solution quality is not objective and cannot be derived from following a formula. Solutions are assessed in a social context in which many parties are equally equipped, interested, and/or entitled to judge them, and these judgments are likely to vary widely and depend on the stakeholder's independent values and goal.

**4. Every wicked problem is essentially unique and novel.**

There are so many factors and conditions, all embedded in a dynamic social context, that no two wicked problems are alike, and the solutions to them will always be custom-designed and fitted. Rittel: "The conditions in a city constructing a subway may look similar to the conditions in San Francisco, say ...but the differences in commuter habits or residential patterns may far outweigh similarities in subway layout, downtown layout, and the rest." Over time one acquires wisdom and experience about the approach to wicked problems, but one is always a beginner in the specifics of a wicked problem.

**5. Every solution to a wicked problem is a "one-shot operation."**

Every attempt has consequences. As Rittel says, "One cannot build a freeway to see how it works." This is the "Catch 22" about wicked problems: you can't learn about the problem without trying solutions, but every solution you try is expensive and has lasting unintended consequences which are likely to spawn new wicked problems.

**6. Wicked problems have no given alternative solutions.**

There may be no solutions, or there may be a host of potential solutions that are devised, and another host that are never even thought of. Thus, it is a matter of creativity to devise potential solutions, and a matter of judgment to determine which are valid, which should be pursued and implemented.

**"When we are really honest with ourselves we must admit that our lives are all that really belong to us. So, it is how we use our lives that determines what kind of [people] we are. It is my deepest belief that only by giving our lives do we find life."**

**-Cesar E. Chavez**