

🌿 Rooted in Peace. Growing Through Connection. 🌿

**June 2026**

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## **A Word from NYSDRA's Executive Director**



As we move into the summer months, I am continually reminded that the strength of NYSDRA lies in its people—our members, our Community Dispute Resolution Center members, and the broader network of partners who carry this work forward each day. This issue highlights that collective impact in many forms: from the enduring legacy of leaders like Andrew Thomas, to the ongoing contributions of practitioners advancing the field through scholarship and innovation. Whether through research, training,

or direct service, each effort reflects a shared commitment to expanding access to conflict resolution and strengthening communities across New York State.

At the same time, the work of programs like the Community Mediation Service Corps (CMSC) reminds us that even in moments of uncertainty, our network remains resilient and responsive. The ability to adapt, continue serving, and look ahead with intention speaks to the foundation we have built together. As we plan for the 2026 conference, invite nominations for the PeaceBuilder Award, and encourage participation in NYSDRA committees, we also invite you to remain actively engaged in shaping the future of our field. Thank you for the work you do each day to promote understanding, equity, and meaningful pathways to resolution.

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# SAVE *the* DATE

## 2026 Annual Conference

**October 8 - 9, 2026**

**Day 1: Virtual | Day 2: Hybrid**  
**Crowne Plaza/Desmond Hotel (Albany, NY)**

Honoring 30 Years of the  
PeaceBuilder Award

 **Presented by Andrew Thomas** 



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**Spotlight on First Board President of NYSDRA:**

**Andrew Thomas**



**Andrew Thomas** was the first president of the New York State Dispute Resolution Association (NYSDRA) Board of Directors as well as a founding member. He was also a founding member of the National Association for Community Mediation (NAFCM) and served as its President for two years. In addition to having served as the Executive Director of the Center for Dispute Settlement in Rochester, a community organizer, a mediator, and a leader in social justice reform, Mr. Thomas has trained thousands of individuals to become mediators, facilitators and arbitrators for court ADR programs.

Andrew currently serves as a mediator for the United States Postal Service REDRESS program and is an active member of the Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR). Throughout his distinguished career, he has been recognized locally, statewide, and nationally for his leadership, professionalism, and commitment to community relations, human rights, social justice, and peacebuilding. His expertise has contributed to major publications, including [Designing Systems and Processes for Managing Disputes](#) (2018), and his work is featured in [America's Peacemakers: The Community Relations Service and Civil Rights](#) (2020). In 2022, Andrew received the American Bar Association Dispute Resolution Section's prestigious Frank E. A. Sander Award for innovative methods and extraordinary achievements in dispute resolution.

Given his foundational and enduring influence on NYSDRA, we are very pleased to announce that Andrew Thomas will be joining us on October 9th to present the PeaceBuilder Award during the 2026 Annual Conference luncheon.

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## Call for Andrew Thomas PeaceBuilder Nominations!



NYSDRA is pleased to announce that nominations are now open for the Andrew Thomas PeaceBuilder Award. We invite you to recognize individuals or organizations whose work reflects a deep commitment to advancing peace, justice, and community-based conflict resolution.

The award honors those who have:

- Promoted the welfare of society in support of peaceful communities
- Advocated for the peaceful resolution of conflict
- Fostered cooperation among social institutions
- Encouraged collaborative relationships in pursuit of peace and social justice
- Advanced justice and equality within communities
- Helped build inclusive environments where diversity is valued
- Inspired others to actively pursue the values of peace and social justice

We encourage you to take a moment to recognize the leaders and changemakers whose work continues to strengthen our communities.

Submit a nomination here: [PeaceBuilder Nomination Form](#)

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## NYSdra's Community Mediation Service Corps



During a year marked by uncertainty across AmeriCorps programs, NYSDRA's Community Mediation Service Corps (CMSC) remained a steady and vital presence in communities throughout New York State. At 11 host sites, 32 AmeriCorps members continued to show up—supporting 1,482 individuals, including 144 children, and facilitating 386 mediation and visitation sessions.

Behind these numbers are thousands of moments of connection, reflected in more than 28,000 minutes of direct service and over 8,500 hours dedicated to helping individuals navigate conflict and move forward.

What stands out most is not just the scale of the work, but the commitment behind it. Even as programs paused and resumed, CMSC members and supervisors adapted, stayed engaged, and continued to deliver high-quality services. That resilience now carries forward into the 2025–2026 program year, with returning members and partners reaffirming their belief in the program's impact. As CMSC evolves, it remains grounded in its purpose: expanding access to community-based conflict resolution and strengthening the network that makes this work possible.

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## CDRC Network News



Our thanks to **Chris Conklin of Child and Family Services Community Mediation Center in Buffalo** for sharing this inspiring example of partnership and mentorship in action....

*"At the end of January, Child and Family Services Community Mediation Center partnered with University at Buffalo Law Professor Steve Sugarman to host a Mediation Boot Camp for 18 law students and volunteer mediators. Through hands-on roleplays, participants built skills while connecting emerging mediators with seasoned professionals.*

*The impact continued beyond the training—six students went on to observe and co-mediate cases as part of their coursework, deepening their engagement with CMC's volunteer roster. The partnership has already sparked lasting interest, with one student expressing plans to join the volunteer team."*



*CDRC Network News* showcases local initiatives, partnerships, staff milestones, and other noteworthy developments from our Community Dispute Resolution Center (CDRC) members. Please send your information to [Submit Your News](#)

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## ADR Scholarship



### Tracy and Rowe Advance Practice-Focused Mediation Research

NYSDRA proudly celebrates NYSDRA Board members **Dr. Bernadette Tracy** and **Niki Lee Rowe** on the publication of their article, "Solution Focused Mediation," on *Mediate.com*.

Tracy and Rowe's article highlights how a solution-focused approach helps mediators guide clients toward envisioning desired outcomes rather than focusing on problems. By developing a shared future vision statement, mediators create a framework that unifies the process and supports collaborative resolution.

To access the full article, click [Solution Focused Mediation](#)



### Jones, Hobbs, and Kos Showcase New York's Leadership in ADR Research

We are also proud to recognize **Dr. Tricia S. Jones**, Professor at Temple University, **Daniel Kos**, Statewide ADR Coordinator of the New York State Unified Court System, and NYSDRA Executive Director **Theresa Hobbs** for their forthcoming article, "A New York State of Mind: A Dispute System Design Analysis of Conflict Coaching in a Statewide Alternative Dispute Resolution System, 2013–2025."

Awaiting publication in a special issue on conflict coaching initiatives in the International Association for Conflict Management's journal, *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*, this research examines how conflict coaching has been successfully integrated into New York's statewide ADR system, highlighting its role in expanding access to services, strengthening partnerships, and enhancing outcomes across diverse populations. The work offers valuable insights into how innovative practices can evolve within established systems to support more responsive and effective conflict resolution.



# ✦ Participation Opportunities ✦

## GET INVOLVED WITH NYSDRA

*Join a Committee — Shape the Future of ADR in New York State*

NYSDRA's committees are open to **CDRC staff, mediators, volunteers, and community members** — not just board members. If you care about conflict resolution, your voice belongs here.

### 📌 Advocacy Committee

Works to raise awareness, monitor legislation, and influence public policy in support of the CDRC network and the ADR profession. Engages policymakers, builds coalitions, and guides advocacy priorities statewide.

**Great for:** policy-minded practitioners, CDRC directors, community advocates

### 🗨️ Annual Conference Committee

Plans and executes NYSDRA's annual conference — from theme and speakers to schedule, sponsorships, and attendee experience. Helps ensure the event is engaging, accessible, and reflects the field's best work.

**Great for:** event planners, communicators, ADR practitioners, CDRC staff

### 🗺️ Strategic Planning Committee

Guides NYSDRA's long-term direction by developing and tracking strategic goals across network activation, advocacy, fundraising, and thought leadership. Helps translate vision into measurable action.

**Great for:** strategic thinkers, researchers, CDRC leaders, planners

### 💰 Fundraising Committee

Supports NYSDRA's financial sustainability by identifying funding opportunities, cultivating donor and sponsor relationships, and developing revenue strategies. Helps build the resources that make our work possible.

**Great for:** development professionals, business community members, connector types

#### ✦ Shape NYSDRA's direction

Your expertise and perspective directly influence how NYSDRA supports the network.

#### ✦ Connect across the state

Build relationships with practitioners, directors, and community leaders statewide.

#### ✦ Deepen your practice

Engage in strategic, hands-on work that expands your skills beyond the mediation room.

#### ✦ A path to board membership

Committee service is one of the best ways to grow into a board leadership role.

**Interested? We'd love to have you.**

Reach out to NYSDRA at [director@nysdra.org](mailto:director@nysdra.org) | [www.nysdra.org](http://www.nysdra.org) | (518) 687-2240

## Thank You to Our Partners!



### ADR Notable



## Upcoming NYSDRA Trainings and Support Events: June 2026 – September 2026

July 17



### **Special Education Dispute Resolution Center (SEDRC)**

- CDRC Special Ed Coordinators Quarterly gathering: June 3, 2026; September 2, 2026
- Care Coordinators, Care Design, Inc "The Benefits of Mediation for Special Education Disputes": June 18, 2026
- Special Education Learning Communities: August 12, 2026
- New York State Education Department Roster Special Education Mediators "Maintaining Excellence in Special Education Mediation" training: September 24, 2026

*Contact [info@osedisputeresolution.org](mailto:info@osedisputeresolution.org) or 1-855-RESOLVE for more information*



### **Lemon Law Arbitration Program**

- Lease Awards Calculations Training: June 16, 2026
- Quarterly Meeting for Arbitrators: July 28, 2026

*Contact [don@nysdra.org](mailto:don@nysdra.org) or (518) 687-2240 ext. 104*



### **Community Mediation Service Corps (CMSC)**

- Social Media Strategy & Outreach with Olivia Drouhaut: June 3, 2026
- ADR Career Pathways panel: June 17, 2026
- Trauma Informed Practices with Amber Russell (Part 2): July 22, 2026

*Contact [toni@nysdra.org](mailto:toni@nysdra.org) or 518-687-2240 ext. 105*



### **Early Intervention**

- CDRC Early Intervention Coordinators Quarterly gathering: August 4, 2026

*Contact [lynne@nysdra.org](mailto:lynne@nysdra.org) or 518-687-2240 ext. 106*





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