

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark blazer over a light-colored top, is shown from the chest up. She is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with trees and a building.

THE NEUTRAL CORNER

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Mission Statement

We publish *The Neutral Corner* to provide arbitrators and mediators with current updates on important rules and procedures within securities dispute resolution. FINRA Dispute Resolution Services' (DRS) dedicated neutrals better serve parties and other participants in the DRS forum by taking advantage of this valuable learning tool.

Follow Us on Social Media

Follow us on [Twitter/X \(@FINRA\)](#) and [LinkedIn](#) for the latest FINRA and DRS news.

Electronic Expense Reports Revisited

By Makenzie Holahan, FINRA Associate Regional Manager

On July 22, 2024, Dispute Resolution Services (DRS) launched a new expense reporting tool that allows arbitrators to submit expense reports through the [DR Portal](#).

Using the new expense report has several benefits. First, it makes entering and reviewing expense reports easier as expenses are clearly separated into specific spend categories. Second, arbitrators can track the status of their expense reports. Third, if there is an error, DRS staff will notify arbitrators immediately by rejecting and returning the expense report through the DR Portal where arbitrators can correct and return the form.

Submitting Expense Reports

To submit an expense report in the DR Portal, arbitrators should:

1. open the case associated with the expenses;
2. select the "Submit Documents" tab;
3. select "Arbitrator Expense Report" from the dropdown menu; and
4. click "Start."

Arbitrators can enter their expenses for the related case by selecting the types of expenses and entering the amounts. For example, expenses can include transportation, mileage, lodging and meals.

To ensure there are no delays processing the expense report, arbitrators should separate expenses by type and date and ensure they match the receipt totals. For example, if an arbitrator traveled to a hearing location for a two-day hearing and bought lunch each of the two days, the arbitrator should enter two separate expenses for “Mileage” and two separate expenses for “Meals-Lunch.” The DR Portal will compile these expenses on the same expense report and automatically calculate the mileage and totals for reimbursement. Arbitrators can upload receipts directly in the DR Portal.

DRS Review

After arbitrators submit their expense reports, staff will review them for completeness and accuracy. If there are any errors, staff will reject the report, highlight what errors need to be addressed and return it to the arbitrator for correction through the DR Portal. If staff rejects an expense report, arbitrators should update the existing expense report in the DR Portal. Arbitrators should not create a new expense report. Creating another expense report will cause delays in processing the reimbursement.

After DRS staff processes the expense report, arbitrators can track payments in the DR Portal by checking the “Payments” tab. Arbitrators may view the [User Guide](#) or contact their regional DRS office if they have any questions about submitting an expense report through the DR Portal. The [2024 Neutral Workshop](#) is also available for guidance on using the new expense report.

DRS and FINRA News

Arbitration Case Filings and Trends

2024 Year-End Statistics

[Arbitration case filings](#) in 2024 reflect a 27 percent decrease compared to cases filed in 2023 (from 3,382 cases in 2023 to 2,469 cases in 2024). Customer-initiated claims decreased by 16 percent in 2024 compared to cases filed in 2023.

In 2024, the following securities were most identified in customer arbitration cases (listed in order of decreasing frequency): common stock, corporate bonds, real estate investment trusts, mutual funds, private equities, options, annuities, structured products, 401(k)s, exchange-traded funds, limited partnerships, variable annuities, municipal bond funds, preferred stock and municipal bonds. The top two causes of action alleged in customer arbitration cases were breach of fiduciary duty and negligence.

Statistics through February 2025

[Arbitration case filings](#) from January through February 2025 reflect a five percent decrease compared to cases filed during the same two-month period in 2024 (from 414 cases in 2024 to 392 cases in 2025). Customer-initiated claims decreased by five percent through February 2025 as compared to the same time period in 2024.

Rule Amendments

FINRA Adopts Amendments to Rule 12800 (Simplified Arbitration) to Clarify and Amend the Applicability of the Document Production Lists

FINRA has amended the Code of Arbitration Procedure for Customer Disputes to clarify and, in some instances, amend the applicability of the Document Production Lists to simplified customer arbitrations administered under FINRA Rule 12800. The amendments are effective for arbitration cases filed on or after March 3, 2025.

Please see [Regulatory Notice 24-16](#) for more information.

FINRA Adopts Amendments to the Codes of Arbitration Procedure to Provide Non-Party Customers With a Copy of the Official Record of an Expungement Hearing

FINRA has amended FINRA Rule 13606 of the Code of Arbitration Procedure for Industry Disputes to provide that the Director of DRS will provide a copy of the official record of an expungement hearing held pursuant to FINRA Rule 13805, and any transcript if the recording is transcribed, to any non-party customers, upon request, who attend and participate in the expungement hearing, or who provide their position on the expungement request in writing. The amendments became effective on December 1, 2024.

Please see [Regulatory Notice 24-15](#) for more information.

Rule Filings

Proposed Rule Change to Amend the Codes of Arbitration Procedure to Make Clarifying, Technical and Procedural Changes to the Arbitrator List Selection Process

FINRA filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) a proposed rule change to amend the Codes of Arbitration Procedure to make changes to certain provisions relating to arbitrator list selection. On December 30, 2024, the SEC published a Notice in the *Federal Register* to solicit comments. The comment period expired on January 21, 2025. On March 11, 2025, FINRA filed a response to the comments.

On March 10, 2025, the SEC issued an order instituting proceedings to determine whether to approve or disapprove the proposed rule change. Comments are due by April 4, 2025, and rebuttal comments are due by April 18, 2025.

Please see [SR-FINRA-2024-022](#) for more information.

Proposed Rule Change to Amend the Codes of Arbitration Procedure to Accelerate the Processing of Arbitration Proceedings for Parties Who Qualify Based on Their Age or Health Condition

FINRA filed with the SEC a proposed rule change to amend the Codes of Arbitration Procedure to add new FINRA Rules 12808 and 13808 (Accelerated Processing) to accelerate the processing of arbitration

proceedings for parties who qualify based on their age or health condition. On December 26, 2024, the SEC published a Notice in the *Federal Register* to solicit comments. The comment period expired on January 16, 2025. On March 12, 2025, FINRA filed a response to the comments.

On March 12, 2025, the SEC issued an order instituting proceedings to determine whether to approve or disapprove the proposed rule change. Comments are due by April 8, 2025, and rebuttal comments are due by April 22, 2025.

Please see [SR-FINRA-2024-021](#) for more information.

Update to Business Mileage Rate

Effective January 1, the business standard mileage rate increased from \$.67 per mile to \$.70 per mile. Please review the [Reimbursable Expenses](#) page for more information about FINRA's reimbursement policy.

Register for the DR Portal Today

DRS strongly encourages arbitrators and mediators to register for the [DR Portal](#). It allows neutrals to:

- ▶ file case documents, including the electronic Oath of Arbitrator and Arbitrator Disclosure Checklist, the Initial Prehearing Conference Scheduling Order, general orders, dismissal and postponement orders, the Award Information Sheet and the Arbitrator Experience Survey;
- ▶ access information about assigned cases, including case documents, upcoming hearings and arbitrator payment information;
- ▶ schedule hearings;
- ▶ update profile information;
- ▶ view and print the Arbitrator Disclosure Report (ADR);
- ▶ update the last affirmation date on the ADR;
- ▶ submit expense reports; and
- ▶ review list selection statistics to see how often their name has appeared on arbitrator ranking lists sent to parties and how often they have been ranked or struck on those lists.

DR Portal registration is reflected on the ADRs that parties review when selecting arbitrators and mediators.

DR Portal: Did You Know?

DRS recently updated the DR Portal with the following enhancements:

1. Portal Messages will be automatically marked as “read” if you complete the associated action. For example, if you receive an email that a new document has been posted on the portal and you use the link in the email to go to the Documents tab and open the document, the portal message in your Messages inbox will be marked as “read.” The portal will automatically archive the message.
2. A “Role” column was added to the list of Upcoming Hearings and the Case Abstract, so arbitrators can easily see if they are the Chairperson or Panelist on their cases.
3. Two more hearing reminders for upcoming evidentiary hearings were added for arbitrators: (1) within 30 days and (2) within 14 days before the hearing date. These reminders are in addition to the existing 3-day reminder for all upcoming hearings.

For questions about logging into the DR Portal, please contact the FINRA Support Center at (301) 590-6500. If you have other questions about using the DR Portal, please contact the DR Portal Help Desk at drportalhelp@finra.org or (800) 700-7065.

2025 American Bar Association (ABA) Dispute Resolution Section Spring Conference: April 25 – 26, 2025

The ABA will hold its [Dispute Resolution Section Spring Conference](#) in Chicago, IL, and virtually. Attendees can enhance their neutral skills and negotiation skills as well as learn about creative ways to use alternative dispute resolution (ADR) and the role technology plays in ADR practice. DRS mediation administrators, Narielle Robinson and Mara Weinstein, will be participating on panels and welcome the chance to meet DRS neutrals in person. FINRA is proud to be a

partnering organization for this event and encourages arbitrators and mediators to attend. Please use the following discount code to receive the ABA member rate: **SDSPEC25**.

2025 FINRA Annual Conference: May 13 – 15, 2025

The [2025 FINRA Annual Conference](#) will take place in Washington, D.C. The Annual Conference provides practitioners, peers and regulators the opportunity to exchange ideas on today's most timely compliance and regulatory topics. This year, topics will include regulatory compliance, risk management, crypto asset developments, trends and threats in financial crimes, and the evolution of branch office inspections, among others.

2025 ABA Arbitration Training Institute: June 12 – 13, 2025

The ABA will hold its [Arbitration Training Institute](#) at Sherman & Howard/Taft in Denver, CO. This two-day comprehensive training in advanced arbitration skills covers every stage of the arbitration process from the perspective of neutrals, advocates and in-house counsel. As a partnering organization, FINRA encourages arbitrators to consider attending this unique program. Please use the following discount code to receive the ABA member rate: **POARB25**.

Mediation Update

Mediation Case Filings and Trends

2024 Year-End Statistics

In 2024, parties initiated 469 mediation cases, a decrease of 26 percent from 2023. DRS also closed 499 cases during this time. Approximately 87 percent of these cases concluded with successful settlements.

Statistics through February 2025

From January through February 2025, parties initiated 97 mediation cases, an increase of 24 percent from the same period in 2024. FINRA closed 89 cases during this time. Approximately 82 percent of these cases concluded with successful settlements.

Mediator Disclosure Updates

Mediators can update their profile at any time through the [DR Portal](#). Keeping mediator disclosure reports up to date—including the number of cases, case success rates and the types of cases mediated—helps parties during the selection process. References who can attest to a mediator’s skills and mediation style also help parties choose the most appropriate mediator for their case. Remember to include a cancellation policy if applicable.

Earlier this year, staff contacted all mediators on the roster with the yearly mediator questionnaire. This also gave mediators another opportunity to provide updates.

Become a FINRA Mediator

Do you have experience working as a mediator? Consider joining DRS’ mediator roster. Please email the [Mediation Department](#) for more information.

Questions and Answers

Navigating the DRS Website

Q: I am on the FINRA.org homepage, but I do not see the DRS information. How can I find the arbitration and mediation page on FINRA.org?

A: On [FINRA’s homepage](#), go to the “For Investors” tab and select “Dispute Resolution Services” from the dropdown menu. This will take you to the main “[Arbitration & Mediation](#)” page. Links on the left side of the page will take you to specific DRS topics. On the “Arbitration & Mediation” homepage, you will also find the “Log In To DR Portal” button.

For your convenience, you can bookmark this direct link to the DRS page: <https://www.finra.org/arbitration-mediation>.

Q: Where can I find the case forms and hearing scripts?

A: On the “[Arbitration & Mediation](#)” homepage, select “[Rules & Case Resources](#)” from the lefthand menu. On the “Rules & Case Resources page,” click “[Forms & Hearing Scripts](#)” from the “Case Resources” section of the page.

This page has scripts for different types of hearings (e.g., Initial Prehearing Conference Script – Three Member Panel, Hearing Procedure Script – Special Proceeding) and other useful hearing forms (e.g., Attendance List, Exhibits and Arbitrator Disciplinary Referral Form). Most orders, however, are accessible only on the DR Portal.

Q: Where can I find previous issues of *The Neutral Corner*?

A: On the “[Arbitration & Mediation](#)” homepage, select “[The Neutral Corner](#)” from the lefthand menu. On “The Neutral Corner” page, you can access issues from the past 10 years. Previous issues may contain articles on specific topics you are interested in. For example, we have published articles on artificial intelligence, electronic discovery, serving as a chairperson and more.

Q: Where can I find more information about the expungement process?

A: On the “[Arbitration & Mediation](#)” homepage, select “[Expungement](#)” from the lefthand menu. On the “Expungement of Customer Dispute Information” page, you can choose from several buttons with more information. For example, you can access related notices, FAQs and training. If you are assigned to a case involving expungement, we encourage you to review the resources on this page to prepare for the hearing.

Education and Training

2024 Neutral Workshop: Arbitrating Efficiently With the DR Portal

This [workshop](#) takes you through the DR Portal. Associate Principal Analyst, Victoria Mhilli, moderates a discussion with Senior Case Administrator, Cody Neftin, and FINRA arbitrator, Jo Colbert Stanley, highlighting best practices to make the most of the DR Portal. They review key arbitration forms, including the Profile Update Form and Award Information Sheet, and provide you with valuable resources for your next arbitration.

Arbitrator Disclosure Reminder

As a reminder, arbitrators should review their Arbitrator Disclosure Reports (ADRs) regularly to ensure all information is accurate and current. Arbitrators may not be aware, but DRS continually sends their ADRs to parties during the arbitrator selection process. Providing parties with the most current and complete information helps them make informed decisions when selecting their panel. Complete disclosures also minimize arbitrator challenges and delays to the case. Arbitrators should log in to the [DR Portal](#) to update their ADRs.

Last Affirmation Dates on ADRs

DRS enhanced ADRs by publishing the date that arbitrators last affirmed their accuracy. The affirmation date is displayed prominently at the top of the ADR that parties review during the arbitrator selection process. Parties may consider the affirmation date when making decisions about ranking and striking arbitrators.

Arbitrators can refresh the affirmation date by submitting an update form through the DR Portal or by submitting an Oath when assigned to a case. Even if there are no changes, arbitrators can update the affirmation date through the DR Portal.

If you need to register for the DR Portal or reactivate a dormant account, please send an email to the [Department of Neutral Management](#) to request an invitation. Please include "request portal invitation" in the subject line.

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