

**RURAL DEVELOPMENT  
EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY (EEO)  
DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINT PROCEDURES AND CONTACT INFORMATION**

**INITIATING THE EEO COMPLAINT PROCESS:**

Individuals who believe they have been discriminated against based on race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity and expression), national origin, age, disability, reprisal (for prior participation in an EEO activity or having opposed discrimination), political affiliation, sexual orientation, marital status, parental status, or genetic information, may participate in the EEO process without fear of coercion, restraint, interference, harassment, intimidation, or reprisal. Complaints of discrimination based on age will only be accepted from employees or applicants who are at least 40 years old at the time the alleged discriminatory act occurred, or the effective date of the personnel action.

**TIME LIMITS TO PROCEED IN THE INFORMAL EEO PROCESS:**

An aggrieved employee must initiate contact with an EEO official (EEO Officer, Specialist, or Assistant) to proceed with pre-complaint counseling within 45 CALENDAR DAYS of the matter alleged to be discriminatory OR, in the case of a personnel action within 45 CALENDAR DAYS of the effective date of the action. Individuals who wish to initiate the EEO complaint process must generally begin with the informal process at which time they will be given the option to elect between Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) or traditional EEO counseling.

**ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION:**

ADR refers to a variety of conflict resolution techniques used to assist individuals in resolving disputes. Mediation, the most popular ADR technique, employs the use of certified mediators (neutral third party) to help individuals engaged in conflict reach mutually satisfactory resolutions. If allegations are not resolved during mediation, the aggrieved employee will be issued a Notice of Right to File (NRF) a Formal Complaint of Discrimination.

**TRADITIONAL EEO COUNSELING:**

1. Counselor informs management and aggrieved of rights and responsibilities
2. Aggrieved elects between Traditional EEO counseling, or Mediation (ADR).
3. Counselor issues Notice of Right to File (NRF) a Formal Complaint of Discrimination, if the matter is not resolved during the informal EEO complaint process and prepares a counselors report.

**FORMAL COMPLAINTS OF DISCRIMINATION:**

If a complaint is not resolved during the informal complaint process the counselor will issue a Notice of Right to File (NRF) a Formal Complaint of Discrimination. A formal complaint of discrimination must be filed within 15 Calendar days from the date the aggrieved receives the NRF. A Complaint of Employment Discrimination Form will be provided with the NRF. Formal EEO complaints should be mailed to the USDA, Office of Adjudication, Employment Complaints Division Chief, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC, 20250-9440.

The EEO Staff is located at 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 1341, Washington, DC, 20250-0703, and can be contacted at 1-800-787-8821 or 202-692-0279 (fax).