

Scope of Work

The City of Racine Department of Community Safety defines the goal of this funding opportunity as supporting local community-centered, evidence-informed activities that enhance the safety and well-being of children, youth, and families throughout the City who are impacted by violence. Racine Neighborhood Watch (RNW) requests grant funds of \$25,000 to reestablish an innovative conflict resolution program providing free mediation services for City residents, emphasizing underserved populations and communities of interest.

The goal for RNW's Mediation Service program proposal is two-fold. One is to reinvigorate the mediation process and promote the program's availability, especially to counter conflict and reduce violence among neighbors and in neighborhoods. Second, the Executive Director will seek out, recruit, and train members of underserved populations (African American, Hispanic, and LGBTQ+) to serve as volunteer mediators to assist with conflict resolutions representative of the diversity of community members. RNW's Mediation Service takes a community-centered, community-sensitive approach aimed at intercepting violence before it occurs. The program ensures an effective process located in a neutral location where people in conflict can work toward resolution with the help of a neutral, non-judgmental, third-party mediator.

Mediation is facilitated negotiation that helps individuals or groups reach a settlement of issues in a peaceful, respectful manner. It remedies disputes effectively, expeditiously, and with

compassion. It incorporates effective communication, listening, and negotiation skills to facilitate problem-solving by disputants. It addresses solutions for apparent issues that lead to conflict and recognizes the needs of individuals that underlie and fuel conflict and possible violence. The benefits of mediation, whether the disagreement lies between neighbors and a barking dog, landlords and tenants, or those with small claims complaints, improved connections and resiliency between residents and neighborhoods, personal skill-building, and increased community safety outcomes—all building blocks for healthier and safer neighbors and neighborhoods.

RNW's Mediation Service program will incorporate evidence-informed strategies in its design.

Mediation, in its simplest terms and most universal terms, is a managed negotiation.

Specifically, it is a process in which an impartial third party (a mediator) facilitates communication and negotiation and promotes voluntary decision-making by the disputants. It is a powerful tool that allows neighbors to resolve disputes and differences through managed communication. Seventy to eighty percent of mediation cases are settled by the parties' mutual agreement. Research and best practices show the role of a mediator, as an impartial director for the dialog, is to clarify the feelings and issues of the two parties, control the process, and guide disputants in resolving their individual conflict.

To achieve the outlined objectives, RNW will create and launch new publicity campaigns. The Executive Director will participate in face-to-face outreach and volunteer mediator recruitment through speaking opportunities, participating in meetings, and networking with churches and

other groups and organizations. RNW will partner with Racine County Clerk of Circuit Court Amy Vanderhoeff. She will be a point of contact for disputants before they enter the court system, promoting RNW's free mediation service.

Qualifications and Experience

RNW has offered conflict resolution and mediation programs since 2003, when RNW brought the Conflict Resolution Center's mediation program under its umbrella. Between 2008 and 2011, with grant funding to employ five mediators, RNW collaborated with the Racine County Court system to provide upwards of 500 mediations annually.

The Executive Director has mediation experience. Susan Feehrer-Laack is a trained mediator. She earned a 40-hour General Training Certificate (4.0 CEU) through the University of Wisconsin-Madison Continuing Studies in April 2021. After her certification, she updated an existing 40-hour training course for mediators. She has experience as an educator, trainer, and teacher.

As an organization, RNW has developed a strong, 42-year proven track record of fostering community building between neighbors and law enforcement and engaging with development within neighborhoods – celebrating racial, ethnic, cultural, and economic diversity – through its programming and events. RNW helps neighbors establish and maintain Neighborhood Block Watch programs. Staff facilitates monthly meetings at seven COP Houses (located in historically impacted neighborhoods) where residents work with law enforcement to problem-solve area issues and concerns. RNW is the most consistent and accessible organization for neighbors to voice and address their concerns. The organization plays a collaborative role in crime and

violence prevention, partnering with neighbors and law enforcement to build community, positive working relationships, and proactive safety practices. RNW is a trusted resource.

Approach to Providing Services

Objectives of RNW's Mediation Service:

- Offer neighbors a safe and impartial setting in which to resolve conflicts.
- Facilitate positive discussions that encourage productive dialog between parties.
- Recruit two or three volunteer mediators representing diversity in the Racine community by September 30, 2025, to participate in the 38-hour volunteer mediator training. The goal is to secure additional funding to continue and expand services.
- Reduce risk factors found in unhealthy conflict leading to violence by providing a setting where individuals can be heard and respected and arrive at mutually agreed-upon resolutions.

RNW will promote awareness of and education about its Mediation Service:

- IN PRINT: Create, publish, and distribute educational brochures and flyers (English and Spanish) at the Racine County Court House, Community Centers, and Community Oriented Policing Houses and distribute flyers in diverse neighborhoods. RNW will use social media platforms and other outreach tools to connect with neighbors and support businesses.
- IN PERSON: Promote the program through speaking engagements at COP Houses, interviews with local media outlets, including radio station WRJN and public radio

station WGTD, “Racine and Me” Channel 58 (television), large public events such as First Fridays in Downtown Racine, African American and Hispanic churches and organizations, and LGBTQ+ social groups.

- **ADVERTISING:** Develop a campaign for media (physical and internet-based newspapers and radio) and Facebook; develop a YouTube channel for mediation promotion including short educational videos.

Staff will handle all administrative responsibilities, including contact/outreach to disputants, scheduling, tracking, filing, case closing, and monthly reports. RNW will begin Mediation Services at the RNW office in June. In this grant period, the Executive Director will facilitate at least 15 mediations: three in June and four in each month of July, August, and September.

How Funds Will Be Used

The budget document shows that the requested funds will be used to pay operating expenses associated with RNW’s proposed Mediation Service program. Approximately 60 percent of the budget will pay the salary and fringe benefits of RNW’s Executive Director. She will conduct mediations during the grant period while simultaneously recruiting new mediators to ensure program sustainability beyond 2025. She is qualified to train other mediators. She will be involved in that activity as additional mediators are recruited throughout the grant period with a view toward expanding the program in late 2025 and beyond.

Twenty-eight percent of the budget will be used to develop and disseminate materials to

promote the program in a variety of settings, including Neighborhood Watch and COP House meetings, community events, and RNW's social media pages. The materials will be available at the Racine County courthouse, City Hall, the COP houses, and other places of worship. Emphasis will be given to reaching previously overlooked and underserved community groups. Materials will emphasize the benefits of mediation as a means of reducing the potential for violence among neighbors as well as in the greater community and as an alternative to the often cumbersome process of filing suit in court. Some of the advertising budget will be used to create and purchase radio and newspaper advertising targeting minority communities.

The balance of the budget will be used to meet ordinary non-personnel-related operating expenses such as postage, liability insurance, and telephone/communications.

Prior Experience and Familiarity with Services

Susan began her tenure with RNW in January 2015 as Program Director. She is experienced in leadership, public relations, marketing, communications, and fundraising. She's held other non-profit executive and program director positions. She aligns activities to deliver creative solutions for community problems, such as the new Dog Walker Watch program launched in October 2024. She has a proven ability to build key relationships and partnerships.

RNW has built successful working relationships with members of a diverse community and numerous groups and organizations in its four decades including City of Racine police, first responders, governmental agencies and representatives, organizational leaders, and others.

RNW's mission to work with residents to create safe, friendly, and vibrant communities throughout the Racine community resonates with its crime and violence prevention education and programming, such as the Neighborhood Block Watch program.

Knowledge of the City of Racine

Having been born and raised here, Susan's deep-rooted connection to Racine instills a sense of trust and confidence in her ability to lead the program effectively. Her deep understanding of Racine's neighborhoods allows her to tailor mediation outreach efforts to the specific needs of different communities. Her childhood and youth were spent as a resident in the West Racine neighborhood community, giving her a unique understanding of the community's needs and dynamics.

As an organization, RNW has a rich and respected history with Racine's diverse community. Helping residents establish Neighborhood Block Watches has been the heart of the RNW's mission since its inception. Facilitating meetings for residents at COP Houses (located in underserved community neighborhoods) since the early 1980s has allowed RNW to cultivate and nurture personal, long-standing relationships with neighbors.

RNW brings community members together. For 35 consecutive years, RNW has coordinated National Night Out (NNO) events. NNO is a nationwide community-building event where neighbors and law enforcement come together under positive circumstances to "give crime and drugs a going away party." Neighbors are encouraged to turn on the porch lights, lock their

doors, and come together in a show of neighborhood spirit and camaraderie. The event is held on the first Tuesday in August. RNW coordinates about 40 activities, cookouts, carnivals, and events held in neighborhood blocks and at churches, community centers, and COP Houses. Nearly 5,000 individuals participate in National Night Out.