

THE NEUTRAL CORNER

VOLUME 1, 2026

What's Inside

New Rules to Accelerate Cases When Time Matters Most	1
FINRA Launches DR Portal Mobile App for Arbitrators	2
Keep Your Camera on During Virtual Hearings	3
DRS and FINRA News	3
Mediation Update	5
Questions and Answers	6
Arbitrator Disclosure Reminder	7

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.

New Rules to Accelerate Cases When Time Matters Most

By Hannah Yoo, Senior Principal Analyst, FINRA Case Administration and Staff Training

Effective March 30, 2026, new FINRA Rules [12808](#) and [13808](#) accelerate case processing for qualifying parties by, among other things, shortening certain deadlines under the Codes of Arbitration Procedure (Codes).

Here's what arbitrators need to know:

Who can request accelerated processing?

Parties may request accelerated processing if the requesting party:

- ▶ is at least 70 years of age at the time of the request; or
- ▶ certifies that they have received a medical diagnosis and prognosis and, based on that information, have a reasonable belief that accelerated processing is necessary to prevent prejudicing their interest in the arbitration.

When can parties request accelerated processing?

Parties can request accelerated processing when initiating an arbitration claim or filing an answer.

Who determines if a party's request complies with the requirements for accelerated processing?

The Director of Dispute Resolution Services (DRS) determines initial compliance. The panel decides any related motions filed later.

What party deadlines will be shortened?

If the Director of DRS determines that a request complies with the requirements for accelerated processing:

- ▶ Respondents must serve the Submission Agreement and answer within 30 days (from 45) of receipt of the statement of claim.
- ▶ Parties must respond to third-party claims with a Submission Agreement and answer within 30 days (from 45) of receipt of the third-party claim.
- ▶ Parties must return Arbitrator Ranking Forms within 10 days (from 20) after the Director of DRS sends arbitrator lists to the parties.
- ▶ Discovery in customer cases: Parties must respond to the Document Production Lists within 35 days of the answer due date (from 60), unless the parties agree otherwise. For other discovery requests, parties must respond within 30 days (from 60) of receipt of the discovery request, unless the parties agree otherwise.
- ▶ Discovery in industry cases: Parties must respond to discovery requests within 30 days (from 60) of receipt of the discovery request, unless the parties agree otherwise.

How will the panel know if accelerated processing applies to a case?

DRS will inform the panel.

What are the panel's obligations during a case if accelerated processing applies?

The panel must endeavor to render an award within 10 months of the date the Director of DRS determines accelerated processing applies. The panel must hold a prehearing conference to set discovery, briefing and motions deadlines, and schedule hearing sessions, consistent with meeting this 10-month timeframe.

What else should the panel consider during an accelerated processing case?

The panel should consider the expedited nature of the case when resolving discovery disputes and deciding postponement requests. Arbitrators should avoid postponements for personal reasons except for genuine emergencies and submit orders and rulings promptly.

Important: Parties are not required to disclose the details of their medical diagnosis or prognosis with the certification regarding an eligible health condition. Further, a party's health certification alone is not sufficient grounds to compel production of information concerning, or allow questioning about, the party's medical condition, diagnosis or prognosis. The panel should keep this in mind when reviewing discovery motions.

What if the Director of DRS denies a party's request for accelerated processing?

Parties may still ask the panel to consider factors such as age and health when scheduling hearings and setting deadlines. It is within the panel's discretion whether to grant such requests.

Bottom line, while managing accelerated processing cases may require additional attention, the panel's sensitivity to timing will make a significant difference.

FINRA Launches DR Portal Mobile App for Arbitrators

DRS has launched a new [DR Portal mobile app](#). The app extends the functionality of the web platform to your mobile device, enabling you to manage your cases anytime, anywhere.

Key Features

- ▶ Quick Sign In: Use Face ID, fingerprint or device PIN for enhanced security and convenience. No need to remember passwords on your mobile device.
- ▶ Case Documents: Access case documents on your mobile device.

- ▶ Message Management: Stay on top of case communications and messages.
- ▶ Mobile Alerts: Receive timely reminders for important deadlines and milestones.
- ▶ Scheduling Tools: Respond to hearing availability polls and scheduling requests.
- ▶ Zoom Integration: Join Zoom meetings directly from the mobile app.
- ▶ Award Processing: Review award drafts and digitally sign awards.
- ▶ Expense Reporting: Submit and track case-related costs using the integrated Arbitrator Expense Report.

Learn more about the app in this [short video](#).

Download the App

Search “DR Portal” in your device’s app store:

- ▶ iOS (Apple): Available in the [App Store](#)
- ▶ Android: Available in the [Google Play Store](#)



Need Help?

For assistance with the DR Portal app, contact the [DR Portal Help Desk](#) or (800) 700-7065.

Stay connected to your FINRA arbitration cases from anywhere. Download the DR Portal mobile app today.

Keep Your Camera on During Virtual Hearings

Arbitrators are expected to turn on their cameras when joining [Zoom hearings](#) and keep them on for the duration of prehearings and hearings (except during breaks).

Additional Expectations

- ▶ Dress professionally, as you would for an in-person hearing.
- ▶ Remain visible and stationary while on camera.
- ▶ Position your camera at eye level with your head

and shoulders centered in the frame.

- ▶ Ensure your background is neutral and free of clutter.
- ▶ Silence all devices (e.g., phones, tablets).
- ▶ Announce your departure if you need to leave temporarily or if you need to turn your camera off for any reason.
- ▶ Stay focused—avoid eating, checking phones or emails, handling pets or other multitasking during the session.
- ▶ Request breaks as needed to maintain focus throughout the proceeding.

Why This Matters

Maintaining trust and confidence in the arbitration process requires transparency. Parties should be able to see the panel throughout the hearing session, just as they would in person. Your visible presence reinforces the integrity and professionalism of FINRA arbitrations.

Panel Discretion

If other participants are not on camera, the panel can require video participation. The panel also has discretion to ask any participant to remove or cover distracting background items and disable virtual backgrounds.

DRS and FINRA News

Arbitration Case Filings and Trends

2025 Year-End Statistics

[Arbitration case filings](#) in 2025 reflected a five percent increase compared to cases filed in 2024 (from 2,469 cases in 2024 to 2,597 cases in 2025). Customer-initiated claims increased by three percent, and intra-industry claims increased by nine percent in 2025 compared to cases filed in 2024.

In 2025, the following securities, financial instruments, or investment types were most often identified in customer arbitration cases (listed in order of decreasing frequency): common stock, real estate investment trusts, options, private equities, mutual

funds, corporate bonds, exchange-traded funds, limited partnerships, annuities, structured products, 401(k)s, variable annuities, municipal bond funds, cryptocurrency and preferred stock. The top two causes of action alleged in customer arbitration cases were breach of fiduciary duty and negligence.

Statistics Through February 2026

FINRA received 428 [arbitration claims](#) from January through February 2026, reflecting a nine percent increase from the same period in 2025. Of the 428 claims filed, 292 claims were customer initiated, and 136 claims were intra industry. Customer-initiated claims went up by 15 percent, while intra-industry claims experienced a two percent decrease compared to the same period in 2025.

Regulatory Notice 26-06: FINRA Requests Comment on Modernizing FINRA Arbitration Rules, Guidance and Processes

FINRA published [Regulatory Notice 26-06](#) on March 2, 2026, seeking comment on key areas of concern relating to its arbitration forum. The *Notice* is intended to ensure the forum is fair and efficient for all users and seeks comment on FINRA arbitration generally and on a number of specific issues, including forum selection, punitive damages, motions to dismiss as well as arbitrator qualifications and training. Many of these issues have been discussed in connection with the forum for years and would benefit from additional input regarding modern practices and how the forum works today for participants.

To comment, please refer to the [Notice](#), which includes submission instructions using an online form, email or mail. Comments are due to FINRA by May 1, 2026.

Reminder: Participants May Not Record or Broadcast Hearings

Participants may not use electronic devices to record or broadcast the hearing. If the panel learns that a participant is unilaterally recording or broadcasting the hearing, the panel should call a recess and remind the parties that this type of recording is not permissible. If the panel is unsure of how to proceed, panelists

should reach out to the DRS case administrator assigned to the case for guidance.

Arbitrator Travel Policy Updates

Lodging and Related Expenses

Arbitrators may be reimbursed for lodging on the last night of the hearing if it is appropriate given the length of travel home. If arbitrators believe they will need lodging for the last night of the hearing, they must receive advance approval from FINRA.

Business Mileage Rate

Effective January 1, 2026, the mileage reimbursement rate increased from \$0.70 per mile to \$0.725 per mile.

Please review the [Reimbursable Expenses](#) page for more information about FINRA's reimbursement policy.

DR Portal News

Arbitrator Expense Report

On June 1, 2026, FINRA will remove the PDF and Excel versions of the Arbitrator Expense Report from the DRS website. They will be made available to arbitrators upon request. DRS has integrated the Expense Report into the DR Portal, and now the DR Portal App, to encourage all arbitrators to use the DR Portal as the most efficient and secure way to submit documents to DRS.

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, Arbitrator Expense Report and the Arbitrator Experience Survey;
- ▶ access information about assigned cases, including case documents, upcoming hearings and arbitrator payment information;
- ▶ request a hearing poll to 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. Email notifications have been improved for readability, making communications with parties and neutrals clearer and more effective.
2. The Oath of Arbitrator form has been updated to require disclosure of all social media accounts (personal, professional and private) regardless of public visibility. This enhancement ensures transparency and strengthens the integrity of the arbitration process.

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.

2026 American Bar Association (ABA) Dispute Resolution Skills Summit: April 15 – 16, 2026 (Virtual)

The ABA Dispute Resolution Section will host its first [Skills Summit](#) April 15 – 16, 2026. Attendees will explore practical strategies for teaching conflict management, navigating group disputes, communicating with clarity and inclusion, and presenting with confidence. 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: PARTNER26.

2026 FINRA Annual Conference: May 12 – 14, 2026

The FINRA [Annual Conference](#) will be held May 12 – 14, 2026, in Washington, DC.

The Conference provides practical guidance and critical insights on trending regulatory and compliance topics to enhance investor protection. Attendees can expect to learn how to prepare for regulatory changes, strengthen compliance practices and build their networks.

ABA Arbitration Institute: June 3 – 4, 2026 (Virtual)

This [program](#) brings together leading practitioners, scholars and neutrals to explore current developments and practical strategies in arbitration from both domestic and international perspectives. Through focused panels and interactive discussion, the program offers timely insights designed to strengthen advocacy, decision-making and professional practice in the arbitration field. Please use the following discount code to receive the ABA member rate: COLLAB26.

Mediation Update

Mediation Case Filings and Trends

2025 Year-End Statistics

In 2025, parties initiated 470 [mediation cases](#), nearly the same number filed in 2024 (469 cases). DRS closed 496 cases in 2025, with approximately 83 percent concluding with successful settlements.

Statistics Through February 2026

From January through February 2026, parties initiated 69 [mediation cases](#), a decrease of 29 percent from the same period in 2025. DRS closed 40 cases during this time, with approximately 75 percent concluding 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.

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

When a Party Fails to Appear at a Hearing

Q: A party has failed to appear at our scheduled evidentiary hearing. How should we proceed?

A: Under FINRA Rules [12603](#) and [13603](#), the panel may proceed with the hearing and render an award in a party’s absence if the party was properly notified of the time, date and place of the hearing. However, the panel should hold an executive session to gather information about why the party is absent and verify that proper notice was provided.

Ask FINRA staff to confirm:

- ▶ the non-appearing party received adequate notice of the hearing by indicating on the record all attempts made to notify the party, including dates and methods of service;
- ▶ whether any hearing notices or correspondence were returned as undeliverable; and
- ▶ for absent associated persons, whether the Central Registration Depository shows current employment in the securities industry and any updated contact information.

Ask the appearing party (on the record):

- ▶ whether they independently served notice to the non-appearing party (such as through a process server with delivery confirmation);

- ▶ whether they had any discussions with the non-appearing party about the arbitration; and
- ▶ whether they wish to proceed with the hearing or prefer to postpone.

The panel may proceed in a party’s absence when:

- ▶ the panel is satisfied that proper notice was given;
- ▶ there is evidence the non-appearing party was aware of the arbitration (e.g., prior correspondence, discussions or participation in earlier proceedings); and
- ▶ the appearing parties wish to go forward despite the absence.

The panel should postpone the hearing if:

- ▶ there is insufficient evidence of proper notice;
- ▶ the hearing notice was returned as undeliverable, and the party cannot be located; or
- ▶ the appearing party requests a postponement.

Important reminder: Even if you proceed, the appearing party must present sufficient evidence to support their claims. An award cannot be based solely on the other party’s failure to appear.

Expungement Request When a Customer Case Settles During the Hearing

Q: I recently served on a panel in a customer arbitration where the parties settled the case at the end of the hearing, so no award was issued. Before adjourning, the respondent associated person (AP) asked if the panel could still rule on their request for expungement of customer dispute information, which the AP filed in their answer. Can the panel rule on the expungement request at this point?

A: It depends on when the arbitration was filed.

For cases filed on or after October 16, 2023:

Under FINRA Rule [12805\(a\)\(1\)\(D\)](#), the panel shall not consider the AP’s request for expungement of customer dispute information if the arbitration closes other than by award.

The AP may file a request for expungement as a new claim under FINRA Rule [13805\(a\)](#) against the member firm where they were associated at the time the customer dispute arose, provided the expungement request meets the requirements of FINRA rules.

For cases filed before October 16, 2023: The panel may rule on the expungement request if the panel considered the appropriateness of expungement as part of the hearing on the merits.

If you have any questions about proceeding, please contact the DRS case administrator assigned to your case.

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

Each ADR displays the last affirmation date at the top of the document. This date indicates when the arbitrator last affirmed the accuracy and completeness of their disclosures. Parties may consider this 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 email the [Department of Neutral Management](#) to request an invitation. Please include “request portal invitation” in the subject line.

Directory

Richard W. Berry

Executive Vice President and Director of Dispute Resolution Services

Todd Saltzman

Senior Vice President and Deputy Director of Dispute Resolution Services

Katherine M. Bayer

Senior Director
East Region

Shannon Bond

Senior Director
Case Administration and Staff Training

Carolann Gemski

Senior Director
Central Region

Leslie Leutwiler

Senior Director
Neutral Management and Quality Control

Laura D. McNamire

Senior Director
West Region and Director of Mediation

Manly Ray

Senior Director

James Schroder

Associate Vice President
DR Product Management

Jisook Lee

Associate Director of Neutral Management and Editor of The Neutral Corner

FINRA Dispute Resolution Services Offices

East Region

FINRA Dispute Resolution Services
Brookfield Place
200 Liberty Street
New York, NY 10281
Phone: (212) 858-4200
Fax: (301) 527-4873
neprocessingcenter@finra.org

Central Region

FINRA Dispute Resolution Services
101 N. Wacker Dr., Suite 2200
Chicago, IL 60606
Phone: (312) 899-4440
Fax: (301) 527-4851
idwestprocessingcenter@finra.org

West Region

FINRA Dispute Resolution Services
300 S. Grand Avenue, Suite 1700
Los Angeles, CA 90071
Phone: (213) 613-2680
Fax: (301) 527-4766
esternprocessingcenter@finra.org

Editorial Board

Matthew Anderson

West Region

Khoi Dang-Vu

Central Region

Makenzie Holahan

East Region

Jennifer LaMont

Case Administration

Carissa Laughlin

Office of General Counsel

Cody Neftin

West Region

Mara Weinstein

Mediation

© Volume 1– 2026 FINRA. All rights reserved.

FINRA is a registered trademark of Financial Industry Regulatory Authority. MediaSource is a service mark of FINRA. The Neutral Corner is published by FINRA Dispute Resolution Services in conjunction with FINRA Corporate Communications. Send all correspondence to Jisook Lee, Associate Director of Neutral Management and Editor of The Neutral Corner:

FINRA Dispute Resolution Services
Brookfield Place | 200 Liberty Street New York, NY 10281
Or call (212) 858-3999.

No part of this publication may be copied, photocopied or duplicated in any form or by any means without prior written consent from FINRA. Unauthorized copying of this publication is a violation of the federal copyright law.