



Contact: Gehazi Whitehurst
636-362-3154
gehazi@commongroundpr.com

National Academy of Arbitrators Adopts Essential Course for Aspiring Labor Arbitrators

*“Becoming a Labor Arbitrator” course duplicates former FMCS program;
Prepares next generation of neutral arbitrators*

COURTLAND, N.Y. (July 23, 2025) – [The National Academy of Arbitrators](#) (NAA) will assume responsibility for the [Becoming a Labor Arbitrator \(BALA\)](#) course, formerly presented by the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS). FMCS had offered the BALA course for more than 25 years, providing vital training for aspiring labor arbitrators. With the agency’s future remaining uncertain, the NAA is stepping in to ensure continuity in the development of qualified neutrals. The first cohort under NAA’s stewardship will have orientation on October 16, 2025.

“The BALA course plays a crucial role in preparing the next generation of neutrals,” said Arthur Pearlstein, NAA member and longtime BALA faculty, who was FMCS Director of Arbitration for over a decade. “I’m proud to help carry BALA forward through the National Academy of Arbitrators.”

More than 2,000 individuals have completed the BALA course since its inception, with many going on to serve as respected labor arbitrators across North America. As demand grows for alternatives to litigation, [employment of arbitrators, mediators and conciliators is projected to increase 6 percent from 2023 to 2033—faster than the average for all occupations—according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.](#)

With more than 60 million American workers employed with arbitration clauses, thousands of labor disputes are arbitrated each year, avoiding strikes and maintaining workplace efficiency. BALA helps meet this need by preparing experienced professionals in labor relations to serve as effective, impartial decision-makers.

Course Overview

BALA is intended for labor-management practitioners with substantial experience in industrial and labor relations. The course offers comprehensive training in key areas such as:

- The law of arbitration
- Arbitration practice, scheduling, and pre-hearing procedures
- Conducting the hearing, framing issues, and handling witnesses and records
- Evidence
- Handling cases involving discipline/discharge and contract interpretation
- Determining appropriate remedies
- Award and opinion writing

- Ethics
- Building a practice and roster admissions

Interactive exercises—such as mock hearings and decision-writing workshops—will prepare participants for real-world arbitration settings.

Continuity of Instruction

The course will continue to use the same instructors, materials and format that made it successful under the FMCS. It will be led by longtime BALA instructors and former FMCS officials Pearlstein and Valerie Harragin.

Pearlstein has more than 25 years of experience as a neutral, law professor, and trainer of arbitrators and mediators. Harragin served FMCS for over 22 years and led the FMCS Institute for Conflict Resolution, where she provided training in negotiation, mediation, and conflict resolution, and administration of the BALA course.

Course Format and Application

The course begins with an orientation on October 16. Then, participants will begin the 4-week “asynchronous” portion of the course, during which they complete video and reading assignments and post to a discussion board on their own schedule with periodic deadlines. This portion of the course typically involves just a few hours a week. Starting on November 17, the “synchronous” portion of the course begins with live online instruction, discussion, and small group work each day through November 21 (11 a.m. – 5 p.m. Eastern Standard Time with multiple breaks, including a meal break).

Applicants should email a clear bio or resume detailing their labor relations experience under collective bargaining agreements, including roles, responsibilities, and dates held, to balanaarb@gmail.com. Accepted applicants will receive a letter of admission with registration and payment instructions.

The NAA anticipates that this course will receive the same recognition as the FMCS version. Discussions are ongoing with designating agencies to secure equivalent benefits for graduates, including preferential consideration for inclusion on arbitration rosters.

A key added feature of the NAA course is a shadowing program, allowing graduates to observe up to three cases with NAA arbitrators. Participants will draft a shadow award for each case, receiving full review and feedback from the arbitrator. This component, previously required by FMCS, enhances practical training and strengthens applicants’ portfolios for roster admission. The NAA strongly encourages all course graduates to participate.

About the National Academy of Arbitrators

The National Academy of Arbitrators is a professional organization with members in the United States and Canada. The Academy strives to strengthen the profession while advancing knowledge and understanding of labor and employment arbitration. For more information about the NAA or the BALA course, please visit <https://naarb.org/bala/>.

###