

RESOLUTION SYSTEMS INSTITUTE

2024

Annual Report

*Continuity
&
Change*

From the Board President

Dear Friends of RSI,

In 2024, RSI's 30th year of existence, the Board of Directors faced one of the most significant challenges in the organization's history: finding the right person to fill the shoes of the astute and dedicated Susan M. Yates, RSI's Executive Director since 1997.



We began the search in January with a long list of qualifications and some trepidation. Susan's wise leadership had set a high standard. So, we cast a wide net, promoting the job extensively, while also reaching out to RSI's ADR network across the country and urging them to reach out to *their* networks. It worked.

We received several promising applications — and by May we found who we were looking for, our new CEO: Heather Fogg.

RSI embraced the change and opportunity inherent in welcoming a new leader. We found inspiration in Heather's ambitious vision for RSI's future, and also recognized that Heather had expertise that would enable continuity in our mission and our existing projects. Even in her first six months of leadership, after joining RSI in June, Heather presided over some impressive achievements.

For example, under Heather's stewardship, in 2024:

- RSI not only continued to successfully administer our Kane County, Illinois, eviction mediation program, we secured funding from the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation to expand and improve the program to serve parties who have experienced domestic violence (DV). The plan called for designing a system to screen for domestic violence prior to mediations and, when DV had occurred, modifying mediations to promote the safety of the parties involved.
- Having completed the first phase of the ODR Party Engagement (OPEN) Project in early 2024 — developing and sharing tools to help courts communicate about online dispute resolution in a way that improves accessibility and promotes trust — RSI began work on Phase 2. With continued funding from the AAA-ICDR Foundation, RSI researchers worked with an inclusive designer and an accessibility evaluator to create prototype court communications to serve as examples for courts. To ensure these materials were accessible and user-friendly, our researchers got feedback from real users whose backgrounds resembled those of typical self-represented litigants.
- RSI completed the pilot phase of the Trust Project, observing small claims and eviction mediations and marking down mediators' communication behaviors, in a process known as coding, to study how mediator behaviors might affect parties' trust during mediation. With continued funding from the Rackham Foundation, we then expanded the project to work with additional courts and mediators.

The year 2024 was a landmark year for RSI — a year of change, certainly, and also one of continuity. RSI continued to administer a high-quality eviction mediation program, applying what we learned from participants' survey responses to our mediator trainings and our program procedures, and we continued to explore what makes court ADR most effective for parties and courts, sharing our findings and creating resources that support courts in making their own programs as effective as possible.

RSI is well positioned for our next phase of innovation and accomplishment. We are grateful to all who share and support our mission of strengthening access to justice by enhancing court ADR systems.

Sincerely,

Brian Roche
President, RSI Board of Directors

From the CEO

Dear Friends and Supporters of RSI,

As I reflect on RSI's 2024, I do so both as a new leader and as someone with a longtime investment in the ADR field and in RSI's work. In fact, you might say 2024 was a year of both continuity and change for me, personally — just as it was for RSI. I first heard about RSI years ago from a colleague at the Maryland Judiciary Mediation and Conflict Resolution Office. We were using RSI's research to inform our own studies and to better support court ADR programs across our state. I remember reading RSI's annual reports with appreciation. So today, helping create RSI's 2024 annual report feels like coming full circle. I find myself thinking of you, dear reader, with the hope that our work also serves you well and is as supportive to you as it has been to me.



RSI went through some big, first-in-our-history changes in 2024, yet some things remain very much the same: our drive, our passion and our mission to strengthen access to justice by enhancing court alternative dispute resolution systems. As RSI's new leader, I've spent much of the past several months listening, learning and working alongside RSI's incredible team. What I've seen reinforces my belief that RSI is uniquely positioned to lead with both rigor and heart — grounded in evidence and driven by a real commitment to transforming how people experience the civil justice system. In this report, I'm excited to share with you what I think of as the behind-the-scenes effort that goes into all RSI does, including the people whose valuable skills and knowledge make RSI the leader in ADR that it is. These are the dedicated people and their actions that make our work extraordinary. I'm so glad to be a part of this small and mighty group, and to share a deeper look at my growing experiences in working with such incredible colleagues.

Looking ahead, 2025 has already proved the wisdom in the saying that the only constant is change. We're building on the research of 2024, exploring new partnerships, and continuing to ask important questions about increasing access, effectiveness and impact in ADR. I'm honored to carry RSI's mission forward and energized by the possibilities ahead.

Thank you for being part of this work. Your support makes it possible for RSI to advance court ADR in real and lasting ways.

Warmly,

Heather V. Fogg
Chief Executive Officer

Change at the Top

Susan M. Yates holds the D'Alemberte Raven Award plaque beside then ABA Dispute Resolution Section Chair Ana Sambold.



Capping 27 Years of Savvy Leadership

After dedicating over 27 years to the astute stewardship of RSI, Executive Director **Susan M. Yates** stepped aside in mid-2024 to pursue new opportunities. Susan's final year with RSI was crowned by a well-deserved recognition, as the ABA Section of Dispute Resolution presented her its prestigious D'Alemberte Raven Award.

Planning a Bright and Bold Future for RSI

Heather V. Fogg became RSI's Chief Executive Officer in June, after a nationwide search and unanimous approval by RSI's Board of Directors. Heather joined RSI with an extensive background in court-connected ADR and research. Her expertise, enthusiasm and boundless curiosity bode well for the future of RSI. As Board President Brian Roche put it: "Heather has an impressive combination of hands-on experience with court ADR, a track record of successful leadership, and dedication to ADR research and evaluation. We feel secure that Heather is the right person to lead RSI through its next phase of innovation and accomplishment." Since her arrival, Heather has been expanding her knowledge of RSI's past and present projects, connecting with RSI's partners in the field, and considering potential avenues for RSI to increase its impact on access to justice.



Heather Fogg

BEHIND THE SCENES

Meeting the Team

Although RSI is based in Chicago, our small and mighty team works remotely from locations across the country. Thus it was a treat for us when new CEO Heather Fogg and longtime Director of Research Jennifer Shack flew in from Maine in October for an in-person Board meeting and a chance to meet up with the Chicago staff.



RSI staff, clockwise from front left: Brock Grinn, Heather Fogg, Christina Wright, Isabel Schmitz, Sandy Wiegand and Jennifer Shack. Staff members not in attendance were Jasmine Henry, Kiasha Henry and Stephen Sullivan.

Our Mission

Strengthening access to justice by enhancing court ADR systems

Our Board

Members

James J. Alfini

Hon. Robert Anderson (Ret.)*

Alyson Carrel

Hon. Morton Denlow (Ret.)

Hon. Nancy Katz (Ret.)*

Mitchell L. Marinello

Raven Moore

Terry Moritz

Brian Roche

Oladeji Tiamiyu

Nancy A. Welsh

* Leaving RSI in 2025



RSI benefited from the guidance of two new Board members in 2024: **Oladeji Tiamiyu**, Law Professor at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law, and **Nancy A. Welsh**, Law Professor and Director of the Aggie Dispute Resolution Program at Texas A&M University School of Law.

BEHIND THE SCENES

2024 CEO Search



Chicago area members of RSI's Board of Directors met in person, and others joined via Zoom, in June 2024 for Susan Yates' last meeting as Executive Director.

RSI's Board of Directors always plays an important role in RSI's work, and Board members were instrumental in helping find just the right person to take the helm at RSI in 2024. Board members hired the search firm Growing Your Team and worked with its CEO and lead strategist, Jamie Van Cuyk, to draft the job details and posting; shared the posting throughout their networks; interviewed candidates; and made numerous helpful recommendations. Board President **Brian Roche** and Board member **Alyson Carrel** were especially active in the process, with Alyson acting as a liaison with Jamie.

OPEN Project

The Problem: When individuals without lawyers are ordered to use online dispute resolution (ODR) in small claims cases, few know what it is or how to use it.

The Solution: To begin to fix that, RSI embarked on the ODR Party Engagement (OPEN) Project.

In 2024, RSI completed Phase 1 of the OPEN Project, including conducting focus groups across the U.S. to learn about the barriers self-represented litigants face to participating in ODR. We shared a **report on our findings**, along with free, downloadable tools for courts, on odr.aboutrsi.org:

- **Communicating Effectively about ODR: A Guide for Courts** provides recommendations for developing documents, websites and video tutorials for ODR that are easy to understand and use.
- The **Document Preparation Worksheet and Checklist** walks readers through the document prep process, from considering the audience to determining key content to include and the best way to communicate it. The interactive checklist provides a method to conduct a final review of the materials created.

Researcher **Stephen Sullivan** joined RSI in 2024 and leads the OPEN Project.



“There’s so many great benefits to this program that I can’t think of them all. This is something that I definitely would use.”

— Usability testing participant, after viewing RSI’s revamped court materials describing ODR

User testing showed that when people understand ODR, they want to use it.

Next, RSI began OPEN Phase 2.

Working with an inclusive designer, we created prototype court communication materials — a webpage, a notice document, an informational video and an interactive guide. We user-tested them across the U.S., and found that participants became excited about the prospect of ODR being available to them. In contrast with real court materials they had previously encountered, they found RSI’s model materials to be simple to follow and understand.

Plans for 2025? Official rollout of the final models, and opportunities for courts to get technical support from RSI tailored to their communications needs.

Trust Project



From left, Rackham Foundation's Ava Abramowitz, RSI Director of Research Jennifer Shack and Behavior Analysis Trainer Kenneth Webb gave a presentation on the early findings of RSI's Trust Project at the American Bar Association Section of Dispute Resolution 2024 Spring Conference in April 2024.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Key Partners

RSI would like to thank the Center for Conflict Resolution (CCR), RSI's Kane County Eviction Mediation Program staff, and all the mediators who participated in the Trust Project.

CCR staff worked with RSI to recruit their mediators and to design a party recruitment process. They also recruited parties for us and scheduled mediation observations.

The Question: How might behaviors during mediation affect parties' trust?

The Research Method: Behavior Analysis

In mid-2024, RSI completed the pilot phase of the Trust Project, research into how mediator behaviors might affect parties' trust during mediation. During this exploration phase, our researchers observed a total of 22 eviction and small claims mediations, coding mediators' communication behaviors.

Generously funded by the Rackham Foundation, the Trust Project is based on behavior analysis (BA), an observational research method that "codes" (labels and organizes) communication behaviors into relevant categories and connects them to desired outcomes. This method has been used successfully in negotiations and sales. BA examines the particular behaviors used, as well as the sequences of behaviors that occur, to determine their effects on specific desired outcomes.

In late 2024, RSI began working with additional mediators to observe more mediations and expand our dataset. We also partnered with a technical consultant to begin creating an app to simplify the process of coding mediator behaviors.

Eviction Mediation

New Staff & Roles

RSI's Kane County Eviction Mediation Program gained a staff member in 2024, as **Kiasha Henry**, who had been a mediator with the program for three years, became the Program Assistant. Kiasha conducts participant intake, refers people to appropriate services, and performs data entry. **Brock Grenn** was promoted to Program Coordinator, where they handle case management, scheduling and facilitating mediations, and working with the court to ensure program compliance. **Christina Wright** was promoted to Program Manager and provides guidance to the team, assesses mediator training needs and plans mediator meet-ups, and works with the court to improve the program.



**Christina
Wright**



**Brock
Grenn**



**Kiasha
Henry**

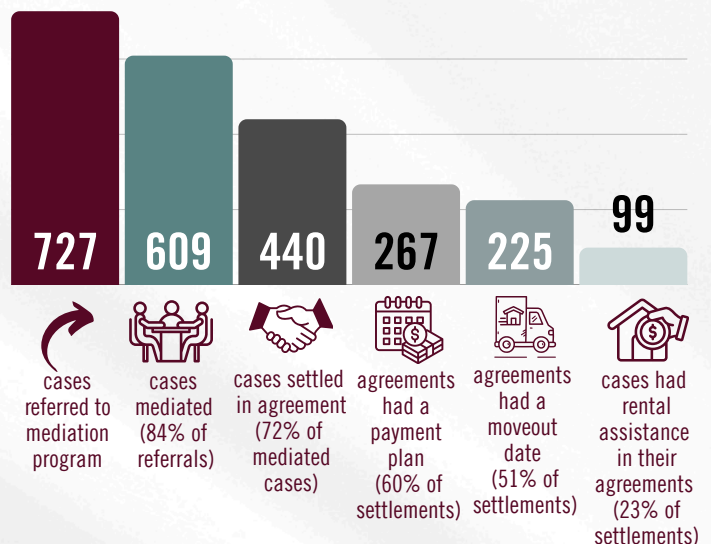
"This program is a life preserver to a drowning person. Thank you."

— Kane County Eviction Mediation participant

Better Serving Survivors

RSI is grateful to the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation (IEJF) for the generous funding that has enabled us to administer and evaluate the Kane County program. In late 2024, we were excited to receive notice of funding through a separate IEJF grant to help us expand and improve the program to better serve parties who have experienced domestic violence (DV). Funding would be used for training on trauma-informed practices, domestic violence survivor awareness and sensitivity, and to implement a DV screener for use prior to mediation.

2024 Kane County Eviction Mediation Snapshot

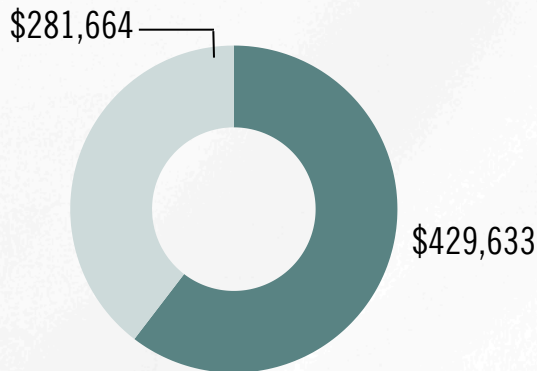


FOLLOW RSI'S BLOG FOR UPDATES

Learn more about the Kane County Eviction Mediation Program on RSI's **Publications** page, and keep up with new developments on our **Just Court ADR blog**.

2024 Finances

Revenue

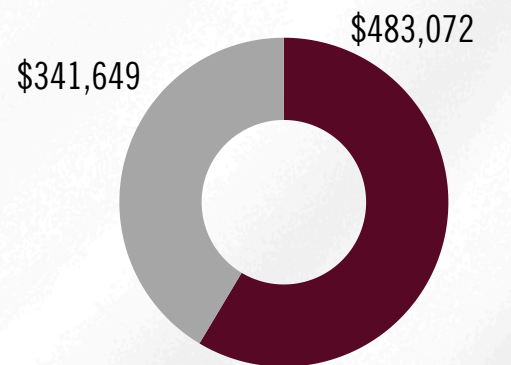


Program Services



General Operating Support

Expenses



Program Services



Management & General

Milestone Ahead

Throughout 2024, RSI has navigated significant change while also being buoyed by elements of continuity. Among the latter: dedication to our mission, and the continued support and engagement of our friends and colleagues in the ADR world.

In 2025, RSI turns 30 years old! We are excited to celebrate our milestone “pearl” anniversary, and we’re grateful to all who have helped make it possible.



The Perfect Gift?

If RSI’s work over the past 30 years has been valuable to you, please support us with a donation.

You can do so at aboutrsi.org/donate. RSI is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.

All contributions are tax-deductible as allowed by law. Thank you!

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RSI staff pictured
(left to right, from
back row):
Heather Fogg,
Sandy Wiegand,
Jennifer Shack,
Stephen Sullivan,
Jasmine Henry,
Christina Wright,
Kiasha Henry and
Brock Grenn.
Not pictured:
Isabel Schmitz.