

Steps for Filing an Arbitration Request

1. Arbitration facilities are provided for Board/Association Members. However, only certain types of arbitrations (as described on page 146, Section 44 of the NAR Code of Ethics and Arbitration Manual, 2023) can be addressed through this process. Subsection (a), paragraph (1) requires mandatory use of arbitration facilities. Subsection (a), paragraphs (2) and (4) allow for voluntary use of arbitration facilities. No arbitration facilities are provided for subsection (a), paragraphs (3) and (5). Additionally, no arbitration facilities will be allowed absent signed arbitration agreements from both parties.
2. The obligation to participate in arbitration contemplated by Article 17 includes the obligation of REALTOR® (principals) to cause their firms to arbitrate and be bound by any award.
3. Please read the Arbitrable Matters According to Article 17 of the Code of Ethics.
4. To file an Arbitration Request, please complete go to <https://gar-o-casepro.azurewebsites.net/arbitration> to submit your Arbitration request. You will be able to upload all of your documentation at this time as well.
5. You are also required to pay a \$250 filing fee. You may choose to submit the fee via check mailed to my attention at the address below, or online. IN ORDER TO SUBMIT PAYMENT ONLINE, you must request an invoice via email to codeofethics@garealtor.com. You will then receive another email with an invoice and link to submit the fee online. **Please note that this \$250 filing fee must be paid prior to the case moving forward to the Grievance Panel.**
6. Once your Arbitration request has been received, you will be notified by email. The Georgia Association of REALTORS® has at least one scheduled Grievance meeting per month. You will be notified of the findings and the next step in the process within 48 hours of the meeting being held. If the circumstances giving rise to the arbitration request are subject of civil litigation, the request will be held in abeyance until these matters have been resolved.
7. All parties in an arbitration are required to attempt mediation through the Georgia REALTORS®. If the parties are unable to resolve the dispute through mediation, then the arbitration request will be pushed forward to a hearing. Should the parties settle their dispute during mediation, then all parties would be returned their \$250 filing fee.

Please contact the Legal Affairs Department at codeofethics@garealtor.com with any questions.

- (5) What is the advantage to naming both a REALTOR® (principal) and his firm as respondents in an arbitration request?

Naming a REALTOR® (principal) as respondent lets the complainant know who will appear at the hearing, and naming the firm as respondent increases the chances of collecting any resulting award.

- (6) If a REALTOR®'s firm is named as the respondent in an arbitration request and refuses to arbitrate, who can be named as respondent in a complaint alleging that Article 17 has been violated?

Any REALTOR® (principal) who holds membership locally or who enjoys MLS participatory rights through the association can be named as respondent.

- (7) If only a REALTOR®'s firm is named as respondent in an arbitration request, who is served with notices?

Any REALTOR® (principal) in the firm may be served with notices.

(Revised 11/11)

Section 44. Duty and Privilege to Arbitrate

- (a) By becoming and remaining a member and by signing or having signed the agreement to abide by the bylaws of the Board, every member, where consistent with applicable law, binds himself or herself and agrees to submit to arbitration (and to mediation if required) by the Board's facilities all disputes as defined by Article 17 of the Code of Ethics and, as set forth in the provisions of this Manual, all disputes with any other member, as defined, under the following conditions. In addition, REALTOR® principals who participate in a Board's MLS where they do not hold Board membership, or nonmember brokers and nonmember licensed or certified appraisers who participate in the Board's MLS, having signed the agreement to abide by the Board's Multiple Listing Service rules and regulations binds himself or herself and agrees to submit to arbitration by the Board's facilities. The duty to submit to arbitration continues in effect even after membership lapses or is terminated, provided that the dispute arose while the respondent was a REALTOR® or an MLS Participant. *(Amended 11/11)*

Mandatory types of arbitration

- (1) Every REALTOR® of the Board who is a REALTOR® principal, every REALTOR® principal who participates in a Board's MLS where they do not hold Board membership and every nonmember broker or licensed or certified appraiser who is a Participant in the Board's MLS shall have the right to invoke the Board's arbitration facilities in any dispute arising out of the real estate business with a REALTOR® principal in another real estate firm or with that firm (or both), or nonmember broker/appraiser or their firm (or both) who is a Participant in the Board's MLS. REALTOR®

nonprincipals and REALTOR ASSOCIATE®s who are affiliated with either the complainant or the respondent and have a vested financial interest in the outcome have the right to be present throughout the proceedings and to participate but are not considered to be parties. *(Amended 11/22)*

- (2) A client of a REALTOR® principal may invoke the arbitration facilities of the Board in a business dispute with a REALTOR® principal or the REALTOR®'s firm (or both) arising out of an agency relationship or legally recognized non-agency relationship, provided the client agrees to be bound by the arbitration. In the event of such request and agreement the Board will arbitrate the dispute subject to the provisions of **Part Ten**, Section 45. A REALTOR® principal may also invoke arbitration against his client but no arbitration may be held without the client's voluntary agreement to arbitrate and to be bound by the decision. *(Amended 11/17)*

Voluntary types of arbitration

- (3) REALTOR® and REALTOR ASSOCIATE®s who are or were affiliated with the same firm shall have the same right to invoke the arbitration facilities of the Board, provided each party voluntarily agrees to the arbitration in writing and the Board finds the matter properly subject to arbitration in accordance with the provisions of **Part Ten**, Section 45 of this Manual. This privilege as stated applies to disputes arising when the parties are or were affiliated with the same firm, irrespective of the time request is made for such arbitration. *(Amended 11/95)*
- (4) A REALTOR® principal may invoke the arbitration facilities of his Board with a nonmember broker, provided each party agrees in writing to the arbitration and provided the Board finds the matter properly subject to arbitration in accordance with the provisions of **Part Ten**, Section 45 of this Manual. However, it shall be optional with the member as to whether he will submit to a claim to arbitration with a nonmember broker who is not an MLS Participant. A nonmember broker who is not an MLS Participant or nonmember salesperson may invoke the arbitration facilities of the Board of REALTOR®s in cases where they believe they have an arbitrable dispute with a REALTOR®. Under these circumstances, REALTOR®s are not required to agree to or participate in arbitration. *(Amended 11/12)*
- (5) Business disputes between a REALTOR® principal and a customer of the REALTOR® principal may be arbitrated by the Board if a written contractual relationship has been created by a REALTOR® principal between a customer and a client and provided all parties to the dispute (i.e., the customer and the REALTOR®) agree in writing to arbitrate the dispute. *(Amended 11/95)*

- (b) Where mandatory arbitration (and mediation if required by a Board) is consistent with applicable state law, the Code of Ethics, Article 17, requires only that disputes arising out of the real estate business between REALTOR® " . . . associated

Arbitrable Matters According to Article 17 of the Code of Ethics

Not all real estate transaction disputes are arbitrable by the association. In order for a matter to be arbitrable by the REALTOR® organization, the dispute must fall under one of the following categories according to Article 17.

1. **Article 17:** In the event of **contractual disputes or specific non-contractual disputes** as defined in Standard of Practice 17-4 between REALTORS® (principals) associated with different firms, arising out of their relationship as REALTORS®, the REALTORS® shall mediate the dispute if the Board requires its members to mediate. If the dispute is not resolved through mediation, or if mediation is not required, REALTORS® shall submit the dispute to arbitration in accordance with the policies of the Board rather than litigate the matter.
2. **Specific Non-Contractual Disputes (as defined by Standard of Practice 17-4)**
 - a. **Where a listing broker has compensated a cooperating broker and another cooperating broker subsequently claims to be the procuring cause of the sale or lease.** In such cases the complainant may name the first cooperating broker as respondent and arbitration may proceed without the listing broker being named as a respondent. When arbitration occurs between two (or more) cooperating brokers and where the listing broker is not a party, the amount in dispute and the amount of any potential resulting award is limited to the amount paid to the respondent by the listing broker and any amount credited or paid to a party to the transaction at the direction of the respondent. Alternatively, if the complaint is brought against the listing broker, the listing broker may name the first cooperating broker as a third-party respondent. In either instance the decision of the hearing panel as to procuring cause shall be conclusive with respect to all current or subsequent claims of the parties for compensation arising out of the underlying cooperative transaction. (Adopted 1/97, Amended 1/07)
 - b. **Where a buyer or tenant representative is compensated by the seller or landlord, and not by the listing broker, and the listing broker, as a result, reduces the commission owed by the seller or landlord and, subsequent to such actions, another cooperating broker claims to be the procuring cause of sale or lease.** In such cases the complainant may name the first cooperating broker as respondent and arbitration may proceed without the listing broker being named as a respondent. When arbitration occurs between two (or more) cooperating brokers and where the listing broker is not a party, the amount in dispute and the amount of any potential resulting award is limited to the amount paid to the respondent by the seller or landlord and any amount credited or paid to a party to the transaction at the direction of the respondent. Alternatively, if the complaint is brought against the listing broker, the listing broker may name the first cooperating broker as a third-party respondent. In either instance the decision of the hearing panel as to procuring cause shall be conclusive with respect to all current or subsequent claims of the parties for compensation arising out of the underlying cooperative transaction. (Adopted 1/97, Amended 1/07)

- c. **Where a buyer or tenant representative is compensated by the buyer or tenant and, as a result, the listing broker reduces the commission owed by the seller or landlord and, subsequent to such actions, another cooperating broker claims to be the procuring cause of sale or lease.** In such cases the complainant may name the first cooperating broker as respondent and arbitration may proceed without the listing broker being named as a respondent. Alternatively, if the complaint is brought against the listing broker, the listing broker may name the first cooperating broker as a third-party respondent. In either instance the decision of the hearing panel as to procuring cause shall be conclusive with respect to all current or subsequent claims of the parties for compensation arising out of the underlying cooperative transaction. (Adopted 1/97)
- d. **Where two or more listing brokers claim entitlement to compensation pursuant to open listings with a seller or landlord who agrees to participate in arbitration (or who requests arbitration) and who agrees to be bound by the decision.** In cases where one of the listing brokers has been compensated by the seller or landlord, the other listing broker, as complainant, may name the first listing broker as respondent and arbitration may proceed between the brokers. (Adopted 1/97)
- e. **Where a buyer or tenant representative is compensated by the seller or landlord, and not by the listing broker, and the listing broker, as a result, reduces the commission owed by the seller or landlord and, subsequent to such actions, claims to be the procuring cause of sale or lease.** In such cases arbitration shall be between the listing broker and the buyer or tenant representative and the amount in dispute is limited to the amount of the reduction of commission to which the listing broker agreed. (Adopted 1/05)

Please note what is not included as arbitrable: including disputes between an agent and his/her broker over commissions owed under an independent contractor agreement, disputes between two agents belonging to the same brokerage, and disputes between two listing agents pursuant to a closed listing with a seller or landlord.

RECAP: In order to push an arbitration request forward for a mandatory hearing, the request must be either a **contractual** dispute between two REALTOR® brokerages or fall under one of the five specific non-contractual scenarios. When reviewing an arbitration request, the Grievance Panel should be able to specify on which grounds the arbitration request is being pushed forward for a mandatory arbitration hearing.

Appendix I to Part Ten

Arbitrable Issues

Article 17 of the Code of Ethics provides:

In the event of contractual disputes or specific non-contractual disputes as defined in Standard of Practice 17-4 between REALTORS® (principals) associated with different firms, arising out of their relationship as REALTORS®, the REALTORS® shall mediate the dispute if the Board requires its members to mediate. If the dispute is not resolved through mediation, or if mediation is not required, REALTORS® shall submit the dispute to arbitration in accordance with the policies of the Board rather than litigate the matter.

In the event clients of REALTORS® wish to mediate or arbitrate contractual disputes arising out of real estate transactions, REALTORS® shall mediate or arbitrate those disputes in accordance with the policies of the Board, provided the clients agree to be bound by any resulting agreement or award.

The obligation to participate in mediation and arbitration contemplated by this Article includes the obligation of REALTORS® (principals) to cause their firms to mediate and arbitrate and be bound by any resulting agreement or award. (Amended 1/12)

Part Ten, Section 43, Arbitrable Issues, in this Manual provides in part:

*As used in Article 17 of the Code of Ethics and in **Part Ten** of this Manual, the terms “dispute” and “arbitrable matter” refer to contractual issues and questions, and certain specific non-contractual issues and questions outlined in Standard of Practice 17-4, including entitlement to commissions and compensation in cooperative transactions, that arise out of the business relationships between REALTORS®, and between REALTORS® and their clients and customers, as specified in **Part Ten**, Section 44, Duty and Privilege to Arbitrate. (Revised 11/96)*

Part Nine, Section 42, Grievance Committee’s Review and Analysis of a Request for Arbitration, provides, in part, in subsection (b):

If the facts alleged in the request for arbitration were taken as true on their face, is the matter at issue related to a real estate transaction and is it properly arbitrable – i.e., is there some basis on which an award could be based?

Despite the guidance provided in the above-referenced sections of the *Code of Ethics and Arbitration Manual*, questions continue to arise as to what constitutes an arbitrable issue, who are the appropriate parties to arbitration requests, etc. To provide guidance to Board Grievance Committees in their review of arbitration requests, the Professional Standards Committee of the National Association provides the following information.

Arbitration by Boards of REALTORS® is a process authorized by law in virtually every state. Arbitration is an economical, efficient, and expeditious alternative to civil litigation. Jurists, including the former U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger, have endorsed arbitration as a method of reducing the litigation backlog in the civil courts.

To conduct arbitration hearings, Boards of REALTORS®, acting through their Grievance Committees and Professional Standards Committees, must have a clear understanding of what constitutes an arbitrable issue. An arbitrable issue includes a contractual question arising out of a transaction between parties to a contract in addition to certain specified non-contractual issues set forth in Standard of Practice 17-4. Many arbitrations conducted by Boards of REALTORS® involve entitlement to compensation offered by listing brokers through a multiple listing service or otherwise to cooperating brokers acting as subagents, as agents of purchasers, or in some other recognized agency or non-agency capacity. Frequently, at closing, the listing broker will be paid out of the proceeds of the sale and will direct that a disbursement be made to the cooperating broker who the listing broker believes was the procuring cause of the sale. Subsequently, another broker who may have been previously involved in the transaction will file an arbitration request claiming to have been the procuring cause of sale, and the question arises as to who is the proper respondent. (Revised 11/96)

In our example, assume that the listing broker is Broker A, the cooperating broker who was paid is Broker B, and the cooperating broker who was not paid, but who claims to be the procuring cause of sale, is Broker C. It is not unusual for arbitration requests filed by one cooperating broker to name another cooperating broker as the respondent. This is based on the assumption that the monies the listing broker paid to Broker B are unique and that the listing broker’s obligation to compensate any other broker is extinguished by the payment to Broker B, irrespective of whether Broker B was the procuring cause of sale or not. However, the mere fact that the listing broker paid Broker B in error does not diminish or extinguish the listing broker’s obligation to compensate Broker C if a Hearing Panel determines that Broker C was, in fact, the procuring cause of sale. (Revised 11/96)

Does this mean that a listing broker is always potentially obligated to pay multiple commissions if a property was shown by more than one cooperating broker? Not necessarily. When faced with Broker C’s arbitration request, the listing broker could have initiated arbitration against Broker B, requesting that the Hearing Panel consider and resolve all of the competing claims arising from the transaction at the same time. Professional Standards Policy Statement 27, Consolidation of arbitration claims arising out of the same transaction, provides:

When reviewing requests for arbitration, Grievance Committees should try to ensure that all appropriate parties are named as complainants or respondents. If it appears that there may be

related claims involving other parties arising out of the same facts, the Grievance Committee may suggest to either the complainant or respondent (or both) that they may wish to request arbitration with additional respondents or third-party respondents so that all related claims may be resolved through a single arbitration hearing. Upon motion by either the complainant or the respondent, an arbitration request may be amended to include any additional appropriate parties, or separate arbitration requests may be filed naming additional parties, so that all related claims arising out of the same transaction can be resolved at the same time. (Revised 11/92)

A listing broker may realize, prior to the closing of a transaction, that there may be more than one cooperating broker claiming compensation as the procuring cause of sale. In such instances, to avoid potential liability for multiple compensation claims, the listing broker, after the transaction has closed, can initiate an arbitration request naming all of the potential claimants (cooperating brokers) as respondents. In this way, all of the potential competing claims that might arise can be resolved through a single arbitration hearing. *(Revised 11/96)*

There is also an alternative avenue of arbitration available to REALTORS® involved in disputes arising out of cooperative real estate transactions. Standard of Practice 17-4 recognizes that in some situations where a cooperating broker claims entitlement to compensation arising out of a cooperative transaction, a listing broker will already have compensated another cooperating broker or may have reduced the commission payable under a listing contract because a cooperating broker has expressly sought and/or chosen to accept compensation from another source, e.g., the seller, the purchaser, etc. Under the circumstances specified in Standard of Practice 17-4, the cooperating brokers may arbitrate between themselves without naming the listing broker as a party. If this is done, all claims between the parties, and claims they might otherwise have against the listing broker, are extinguished by the award of the arbitrators. Similarly, Standard of Practice 17-4 also provides for arbitration between brokers in cases where two (or more) brokers each have open listings and each claims to have procured the purchaser. Since the determiner of entitlement to a commission under an open listing is generally production of the purchaser, arbitration between the two (or more) “open” listing brokers resolves their claims against the seller. This open listing scenario is to be distinguished from the situation in which two (or more) listing brokers each have exclusive listings and each claim entitlement to a commission pursuant to their respective listing agreements. Because exclusive listing agreements generally provide for payment of a commission if the listed property is sold—whether through the listing broker’s efforts or not—each listing broker could have a legitimate, enforceable right to a commission from their client. Thus, Standard of Practice 17-4 does not obligate listing brokers to arbitrate between themselves when both (or all) have independent claims to commissions based on their respective exclusive listing agreements. *(Amended 5/02)*

In reviewing requests for arbitration, it is important that Grievance Committees not take actions that could be construed as rendering

decisions on the merits. For example, a Grievance Committee should not dismiss an otherwise arbitrable claim simply because Grievance Committee members believe the respondent would undoubtedly prevail in a hearing. On the other hand, an arbitration request that cites no factual basis on which a Hearing Panel could conceivably base an award should not be referred for hearing. A party requesting arbitration must clearly articulate, in the request for arbitration, facts that demonstrate a contractual relationship between the complainant and the respondent, or a relationship described in Standard of Practice 17-4, and an issue that could be the basis on which an arbitration award could be founded. *(Revised 11/96)*

Another question that frequently arises with respect to arbitration requests is whether the fact that the listing broker was paid out of the proceeds of the closing is determinative of whether a dispute will be considered by a Hearing Panel. Initially, it should be noted that the Arbitration Guidelines (Appendix II to **Part Ten**) provide that an arbitrable issue involving procuring cause requires that there have been a “successful transaction.” A “successful transaction” is defined as “a sale that closes or a lease that is executed.” Some argue that if the listing broker is not paid, or if the listing broker waives entitlement to the commission established in the listing contract, then there is nothing to pay to the cooperating broker and, thus, no issue that can be arbitrated. This is an improper analysis of the issue. While the listing broker needs the consent of the seller/client to appoint subagents and to compensate subagents, buyer agents, or brokers acting in some other recognized agency or non-agency capacity, the offer to compensate such individuals, whether made through the multiple listing service or otherwise, results in a separate contractual relationship accepted through performance by the cooperating broker. Thus, if the cooperating broker performs on the terms and conditions established by the listing broker, the fact that the listing broker finds it difficult to be paid or, alternatively, waives the right to be paid, has no bearing on whether the matter can be arbitrated but may have a direct impact on the outcome. Many cooperative relationships are established through MLS and the definition of the MLS provides, in part: *(Revised 11/97)*

While offers of compensation made by listing brokers to cooperating brokers through MLS are unconditional, a listing broker’s obligation to compensate a cooperating broker who was the procuring cause of sale (or lease) may be excused if it is determined through arbitration that, through no fault of the listing broker and in the exercise of good faith and reasonable care, it was impossible or financially unfeasible for the listing broker to collect a commission pursuant to the listing agreement. In such*

*Compensation is unconditional except where local MLS rules permit listing brokers to reserve the right to reduce compensation offers to cooperating brokers in the event that the commission established in a listing contract is reduced by court action or by actions of a lender. Refer to **Part One**, G. Commission/Cooperative Compensation Offers, Section 1, Information Specifying the Compensation on Each Listing Filed with a Multiple Listing Service of a Board of REALTORS®, *Handbook on Multiple Listing Policy. (Adopted 11/98)*

instances, entitlement to cooperative compensation offered through MLS would be a question to be determined by an arbitration Hearing Panel based on all relevant facts and circumstances including, but not limited to, why it was impossible or financially unfeasible for the listing broker to collect some or all of the commission established in the listing agreement; at what point in the transaction did the listing broker know (or should have known) that some or all of the commission established in the listing agreement might not be paid; and how promptly had the listing broker communicated to cooperating brokers that the commission established in the listing agreement might not be paid. (Amended 11/98)

Still another common question is whether a REALTOR® (often a cooperating broker with an arguably-arbitrable claim) can thwart the process by remaining silent for one hundred eighty (180) days and then bringing a lawsuit against another REALTOR® (often the listing broker). As noted previously, arbitration requests must be filed within one hundred eighty (180) days after the closing of the transaction, if any, or within one hundred eighty (180) days after the facts constituting the arbitrable matter could have been known in the exercise of reasonable diligence, whichever is later. REALTORS® cannot reasonably be expected to request arbitration in circumstances where they have no reason to know that a dispute with another broker or firm even exists. Under these circumstances, a listing broker with no prior knowledge of a dispute would have one hundred eighty (180) days from receipt of notice of a lawsuit to invoke arbitration with the other broker. *(Adopted 11/13)*

The foregoing are by no means all-inclusive of the consideration that must be taken into account by a Grievance Committee in determining whether a matter will be arbitrated. However, they are some of the common questions raised with respect to arbitrable issues, and this discussion is provided to assist Grievance Committees in their important role in evaluating arbitration requests. *(Adopted 4/91)*

Non-Arbitrable Issues that Can be Mediated as a Matter of Local Determination

As stated above, an arbitrable issue includes a contractual question arising out of a transaction between parties to a contract, in addition to certain specified non-contractual issues set forth in Standard of Practice 17-4. Arbitration proceedings should be limited to these issues, and Boards of REALTORS® should not arbitrate other types of claims. Examples of non-arbitrable issues include:

- tortious interference with business relationships
- tortious interference with a contractual relationship
- economic duress
- intentional infliction of emotional distress
- other tort claims, such as libel/slander
- employment claims, other than commission disputes
- fraud/misrepresentation claims
- property claims, both real and personal

In addition, Section 53 of the *Code of Ethics and Arbitration Manual* limits the award in an arbitration proceeding to the amount in dispute and so an arbitration award will not include punitive damages, attorney's fees, or interest, unless the agreement between the parties specifically provides for such damages and the award is permitted by state law.

Associations may, but are not required to, provide mediation services for disputes of the type listed above. *(Revised 5/13)*