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GUIDE

The Modern Operating Model for High-Performing Arbitration Organizations

INTRODUCTION

The best arbitration organizations share more than strong neutrals who skillfully manage complex matters. They are simply well-run. Documents are accessible and move without friction. Communication is consistent. Counsel and neutrals know what to expect, and the organization delivers on that expectation every time.

For many ADR firms and associations, that standard is harder to achieve than it sounds. Most have grown their administrative practices organically, layering email threads on top of shared drives, adding workarounds as caseloads increase, and managing exceptions one by one. The result is a set of informal processes that function well enough most of the time but create real risk and real cost when they do not.

This guide offers a practical framework for building something better. It is organized around four pillars of operational excellence and is designed to be useful, whether you run a large national association, a regional ADR firm, or an independent practice. The goal is not operational perfection. It is deliberate, measurable improvement in the areas that matter most.



Ready to jump in? Download our
High-Performing Arbitration Organization
Implementation Checklist.



WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

The Four Pillars of a High-Performing Arbitration Organization

Before diagnosing what's not working, it helps to have a clear picture of what you're building toward. The following framework describes what a high-performing arbitration organization looks like across four operational capabilities. These are not aspirational ideals reserved for large institutions. They are achievable operating standards that organizations of any size can work toward methodically.



How do these capabilities translate to better business outcomes and a better experience for all parties involved?

Digital Enablement and Secure Infrastructure. Documents never travel as email attachments. Every filing lands simultaneously in the hands of counsel, the neutral, and the case manager through a single controlled portal. Access is permission-based and set at the start of each matter, so the right people see the right information and no one else does. When a case closes, records are retained and destroyed according to a defined protocol, and there is an audit trail to prove it.

Elevated Client Experience. Every matter launches the same way: a professional kickoff message, clear contacts, and immediate access to the case portal. Counsel never has to chase down a document or wonder who to call. Neutrals log in once and see all of their active matters in a single docket view. Deadlines and documents are in one place, and the experience is consistent whether the matter involves two parties or twenty.

Efficiency-Driven Cost Savings and Growth. Staff time is spent on judgment and service, not on routing documents and resending emails. The number of manual touches per case is tracked and declining. Case managers know exactly who is responsible for each matter, and counsel and neutrals always know who to reach. As caseload grows, the organization absorbs it without a proportional increase in administrative overhead.

Operational Readiness Across ADR Matters. Every case follows the same lifecycle, from intake through closeout, regardless of matter size or complexity. Each stage has a defined owner, a checklist, and a clear signal that it is complete. Protocols do not vary based on who is running the case. The organization reviews its own operations on a regular cadence, identifies patterns, and improves over time.

These four pillars are not independent of one another. Secure infrastructure makes a better client experience possible. A consistent client experience builds the reputation that attracts both counsel and top-tier neutrals. And operational readiness is what allows an organization to sustain all of it as volume grows and matters become more complex.

A Common Pattern

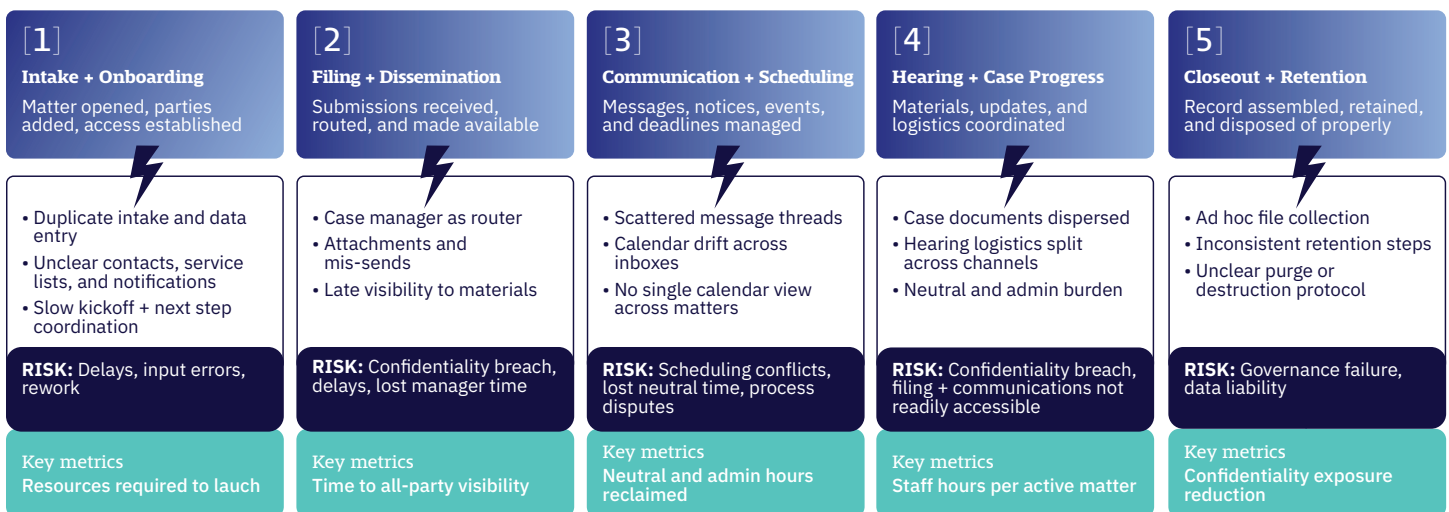
Organizations that perform well across all four pillars treat operations not as overhead but as a core part of their value proposition.

THE FRICTION MAP

Where Most ADR Organizations Actually Are

The gap between what good looks like and what most organizations experience comes down to friction: the small inefficiencies, manual steps, and informal workarounds that accumulate across the lifecycle of a case. Most of it is invisible until something goes wrong.

The five stages below represent the most common points where arbitration administration breaks down. Each one carries a distinct set of risks, and most organizations experience friction in several of them simultaneously.



The friction map shows where ADR organizations typically lose time, duplicate labor, or create avoidable confidentiality and service risk.

A few of these stages deserve particular attention:

Filing and dissemination is where confidentiality risk concentrates. When documents arrive by email and are forwarded manually, the chance of a misdirected send is real and consequential. According to the Verizon Data Breach Investigations Report, misdirected emails accounted for 13.5% of all confirmed data breaches studied in a single year. In arbitration, where proceedings are private by nature and confidentiality is a core professional obligation, a single mis-send can carry significant reputational and legal consequences.

Communication and scheduling friction is often invisible to leadership but felt acutely by neutrals. When a neutral has to search through email threads to locate a hearing date or confirm a recent filing, that is time diverted away from the work itself. Across a full docket of active matters, the cumulative and cognitive burden is significant, and it directly affects how neutrals perceive the organization they are affiliated with.

Closeout is where governance risk concentrates. Without a defined destruction protocol, case records accumulate indefinitely. Organizations that cannot demonstrate how and when records were disposed of face data liability exposure that is entirely avoidable with the right process in place.

Email and Security





Nearly 40% of law firms reported experiencing a security breach in a recent survey, and the average cost of a data breach in professional services now exceeds \$5M (IBM, 2024). For arbitration organizations, the exposure is compounded by the private nature of the proceedings. Unlike litigation, where much of the record is public, in arbitration confidentiality is the point. Email is not designed to protect it.

MATURITY MODEL

Where Does Your Organization Stand?

Most organizations do not operate at the same level across every dimension. A firm that is highly disciplined about digital infrastructure may still have informal closeout practices. An organization known for excellent neutral relationships may have no consistent measurement of staff time per case. Understanding where you are is the first step toward knowing how to improve.

The model below maps our four dimensions according to operational maturity from **Level 1**, which is largely ad hoc and email-driven, to optimized at **Level 4**, where processes are structured, measurable, and continuously improving. Most ADR organizations find themselves at Level 1 or 2 on at least one dimension.

	Level 1: Ad Hoc	Level 2: Defined	Level 3: Controlled	Level 4: Optimized
Digital Enablement + Secure Infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case files live in email inboxes and shared drives No consistent access control Data purge is informal or nonexistent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic secure file storage in place Some permissions managed manually Retention policy exists but isn't consistently enforced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role-based access configured at case launch Audit trail exists for key disseminations Closeout process is defined 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governance is systematic and auditable Access policies are standardized across all matters Retention and destruction protocols are consistently followed
Elevated Client Experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parties rely on email threads and scattered files Deadlines and versions get confused Neutrals manage their own workarounds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some centralization of shared folders, group calendars Communication and tracking remain fragmented Service expectations exist informally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single, consistent place for documents, messages, and deadlines Single login and docket for neutrals Standard case kickoff templates and response time expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experience is institutional grade Friction is minimized for counsel and neutrals Multi-party coordination is smooth and predictable The organization is known for service quality, not just outcomes
Efficiency-Driven Cost Savings + Growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heavy manual routing; no visibility into staff time required by case Frequent rework and fire drills Case management varies by person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Core steps are repeatable Exceptions are common but managed Some templates in use Staff capacity is informally tracked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workflows are defined and templated Capacity and document touches are managed intentionally Clear points of contact and case manager roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workflow is operationalized with service levels Manual steps are minimized or automated where appropriate Time per active case declining; more staff time spent on judgment work
Operational Readiness Across ADR Matters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No documented case lifecycle Protocols vary by matter type, size, or who's running Closeout is ad hoc Little to no operational measurement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A basic case lifecycle is documented; most matters follow it Closeout steps exist but aren't always completed Basic activity reporting in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standard lifecycle is followed consistently across matter types Closeout protocol is enforced Metrics guide management: cycle times, rework rate, responsiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operations continuously improve Metrics drive staffing decisions, process changes, and quality controls The organization can take on more volume or more complex matters without adding headcount

Use this model to make an honest assessment of where your organization sits today across each pillar. The goal is not to reach Level 4 everywhere at once. Pick the dimension where the risk is highest or the friction is most visible and build momentum from there. One deliberate improvement, consistently applied, changes the baseline for everything that follows.

Your Implementation Checklist

The operating model below translates each pillar into a set of concrete actions. For each pillar, we provide a checklist for how to improve your organization's operating capability. Use this as a working document: assess your current state against each pillar, identify your gaps, and prioritize the changes that will reduce friction and improve service reliability the quickest.

1. Digital Enablement and Secure Infrastructure

- ✓ Eliminate email attachments for case documents
- ✓ Manage all filings and submissions through a controlled portal
- ✓ Set role-based access permissions at case launch for counsel, neutrals, and case managers
- ✓ Build a case launch checklist with parties, service list, access permissions, and notification settings confirmed before go-live
- ✓ Standardize dissemination protocols, with simultaneous delivery to all parties, logged with audit trail and no manual routing
- ✓ Create a closeout workflow, including step-by-step record assembly, award delivery, retention period, and destruction sign-off

2. Elevated Client Experience

- ✓ Define and share client-facing service commitments, e.g., time-to-visibility and response windows
- ✓ Assign a service owner - one person accountable for service standards, escalation, and client experience
- ✓ Create a case kickoff communication template with access, contacts, and next steps, every time
- ✓ Set response time standards for case managers, by urgency tier, for replies to neutrals and counsel
- ✓ Build a neutral ease-of-use standard with one docket, one login, no email chains for scheduling
- ✓ Document an escalation path - who a neutral or party contacts when something goes wrong, and by when it is resolved

3. Efficiency-Driven Cost Savings and Growth

- ✓ Count document touches per case to track how many times staff manually handle, route, or resend a document, then reduce it
- ✓ Define clear case management roles for every matter, with clear accountability from intake through closeout
- ✓ Establish a primary point of contact for each matter, so counsel and neutrals should never wonder who to call
- ✓ Set time-to-visibility targets from filing to all-party access; define it, measure it, and report it
- ✓ Track average time spent per case; if it is not declining over time, friction has not been solved
- ✓ Conduct a quarterly operations review, with cycle times, rework incidents, and neutral feedback reviewed on a regular cadence

4. Operational Readiness Across ADR Matters

- ✓ Document a standard case lifecycle from intake through closeout, where every stage has an owner, a checklist, and a completion signal
- ✓ Clarify neutral coordination responsibility for scheduling, docket updates, and access, and make sure that is communicated at case launch
- ✓ Create a closeout and data governance protocol, including award delivery, record retention period, and destruction sign-off
- ✓ Define your access control policy for who can see what at each case stage, with permissions set at launch
- ✓ In quarterly operations reviews, identify how to transfer high performance across matter types
- ✓ Track three operating metrics: resources required to launch, neutral time reclaimed, and time to all-party visibility

MEASUREMENT

Five Metrics Worth Tracking

Operational improvement is difficult to sustain without something to measure. The five metrics below give you a clear and practical picture of whether your changes are working. They are simple enough to track without specialized tools and meaningful enough to inform real decisions about staffing, process design, and service commitments.

Metric	What It Tells You
Resources required to launch	How many staff hours and steps does it take to open a new matter? This number is your baseline for efficiency, and the goal is to reduce it over time.
Time to all-party visibility	From the moment a document is filed to the moment all parties can access it: how long does that take? Define a target, measure against it, and close the gap.
Neutral and admin hours reclaimed	How much time per week do your neutrals spend on administrative tasks rather than substantive work? Tracking this over time shows whether friction is actually being reduced.
Staff hours per active matter	If this number is not declining as your operations improve, the friction has not been solved. It is one of the clearest signals that workflow changes are working.
Confidentiality exposure reduction	Track the volume of email attachments sent and the number of access-control incidents per quarter. A sustained downward trend means your infrastructure changes are holding.

CALL TO ACTION

Operations as a Competitive Advantage

The arbitration organizations pulling ahead right now are not always the ones with the largest panels or the longest track record. They are often the ones that are easiest to work with. Counsel choose providers where access is straightforward, documents are secure, and communication is consistent. Neutrals affiliate with organizations that handle administration professionally and respect their time. Both of those outcomes flow directly from operations.

A seamless technology experience is now a baseline expectation. Counsel and neutrals arrive with that expectation already set by every other professional platform they use.

The Difference

The best arbitration organizations free their neutrals and counsel to focus on what they do best: the practice of law, the exercise of judgment, and the resolution of complex disputes. The ones that fall short burden their best people with administration instead.

The framework in this guide is a starting point, not a finish line. Start with the pillar where the gap between where you are and where you want to be is most visible. Make a change, measure what happens, and build from there. Over time, the compounding effect of better operations shows up in the things that matter most: service quality, strong neutral relationships, and the confidence of counsel who keep coming back.