Mock Mediation Case: Scholarship Prototype

GENERAL FACTS

The Flood Warning Project

Seventeen-year-old Jordan Flores joined the Mesa Innovation Lab, an after-school program where students can use tools, technology, and guidance to develop their own projects. After Jordan's neighborhood experienced flooding twice in three years, Jordan began working on a low-cost device designed to alert people when water levels rise in normally dry washes.

Over the next four months, Jordan wrote software, tested sensors, and helped build a working prototype. Lab director Avery Bell provided technical guidance, and other lab volunteers assisted with parts of the project. The lab supplied approximately $850 in equipment and materials, while Jordan spent many evenings and weekends working on the device and traveling to testing locations.

Who Does the Project Belong To?

When Jordan joined the lab, Avery provided a standard membership form stating that the lab could photograph and display projects created there. The form did not address ownership of inventions or who had the right to enter a project in a competition.

As the flood warning device developed, Jordan and Avery sometimes referred to it as "our project" when speaking with visitors. They never discussed exactly what that meant or how Jordan's work and the lab's contributions would be credited if the project received outside attention.

Jordan planned to enter the device in the Arizona Young Inventors Award, a competition that includes a $20,000 college scholarship. The application deadline is in two weeks.

The Grant Announcement

On April 8, Avery sent Jordan a link to an announcement stating that the Mesa Innovation Lab had received a $40,000 grant to further develop "its flood warning prototype." The announcement named Avery as the project lead. Jordan was included in a list of student volunteers but was not specifically identified as the student who had worked extensively on the device.

The grant proposal included photographs of the prototype and a diagram Avery had redrawn from Jordan's project notebook. The grant money has not yet been released.

Avery maintains that the proposal was submitted under the lab's name because the funder accepts applications only from organizations and because the lab provided equipment, materials, guidance, and assistance during development. Jordan believes the lab took credit for an invention they primarily developed and that Avery unfairly represented the device as a lab project rather than Jordan's own work.

Concerns About the Prototype

Jordan asked Avery to correct how their role was described and to confirm that Jordan could use the prototype to apply for the Young Inventors Award. Avery agreed that Jordan deserved greater recognition but raised concerns about demonstrating the device before additional testing could be completed.

During a recent test, one of the sensors produced an inconsistent reading. Jordan believes the problem is minor and can be resolved before the competition deadline. Avery believes a device intended to warn people about potentially dangerous flooding should undergo additional testing before being publicly demonstrated.

The Dispute

The disagreement has affected Jordan's relationship with the lab. Jordan has stopped attending, and Avery has paused plans to demonstrate the prototype as part of the grant project.

Jordan wants appropriate recognition for their work, access to the prototype and project materials, and the opportunity to apply for the scholarship before the deadline. Avery wants the grant project to move forward, everyone's contributions to be represented accurately, and concerns about the prototype's reliability to be addressed.

With the scholarship deadline approaching, Jordan has initiated mediation against Avery and the Mesa Innovation Lab, seeking recognition as the device's primary inventor and permission to use the prototype for the competition. Avery maintains that the lab and its volunteers made important contributions to the project and that additional testing is necessary before the device can be demonstrated.