

Guidelines for
Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)
Grant Recipients

Department of Family Administration
Administrative Office of the Courts
Maryland Judiciary

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Department of Family Administration
Programs Division
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Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Grants

The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program was authorized to operate in Maryland, subject to approved Rules and Guidelines, by the 1989 adoption of Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article §3-830. The Annotated Code of Maryland states that the role of the Court Appointed Special Advocate is to:

- Provide the court with background information to aid the court in making decisions in the child's best interest; and
- Ensure that the child is provided appropriate case Start-Up and services.

CASA grants are intended to support these programs, which are designed to ensure that children are provided a CASA volunteer, as appropriate, to serve their individual needs and promote a safe, permanent placement as timely as possible.

A. Application Process

1. Application, Review and Award

1.1 Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA)

The NOFA and grant application will be published in the Maryland Registry and posted to the DFA's website by early February of each year. This document will outline the requirements for funding, define the funding term and provide instructions for submitting an application.

1.2 Eligibility

The DFA awards two types of CASA grants: CASA Start-Up Grants and CASA Grants.

- a. To be eligible to receive a CASA Grant, an applicant must be a:
 - i. State or local government administering a CASA program, or
 - ii. Non-profit organization administering a CASA program, or
 - iii. Institution of higher education administering a CASA program

AND, the program must also:

- i. Be a member in good standing of the National CASA Association and be in compliance with NCASAA standards*;
- ii. Be a member in good standing of the Maryland CASA Association and in compliance with Maryland CASA standards;
- iii. Be in compliance with all CASA Rules & Guidelines (found at www.courts.state.md.us/family/grantadmin.html);
- iv. Demonstrate the ability (i.e. experience and expertise) to

provide the service (NOTE: Qualifications of all new Program Directors must be submitted to the Administrative Office of the Courts prior to budget approval and release of funds);

- v. Demonstrate adequate internal financial controls to properly administer grant funds; and
- vi. For CASA programs who have received AOC funding in the prior year, submit all required reports and documentation prior to submitting an application for funding in a subsequent year.

**All programs must submit a copy of their most recent Certificate of Compliance from the National CASA Association annually with their grant application.*

b. To be eligible to receive a one-time CASA Start-Up Grant, an applicant must be a state or local government, or non-profit organization, or institution of higher education in a jurisdiction where there is not presently an established and active CASA program, but where one is being planned. The program must demonstrate that they are working in conjunction with the Maryland CASA Association when starting a program for a jurisdiction.

c. “Pass-Through” Prohibited

The DFA only awards funds directly to the eligible grantees described in subsection (a) of this section. Grantees are not permitted to pass through or sub-award funds to another organization (even if the second organization would be eligible to apply for funds under subsection a.).

1.3 Funding Decisions

a. Priorities

Priority is given to the continuation of projects currently funded through the DFA CASA Grants who have a proven track record of success.

b. Grant Review

Grant applications will be reviewed by a committee. The Committee shall consist of Judiciary Staff and the Executive Director of the Maryland CASA Association, and may include other subject matter experts as deemed beneficial by the Department of Family Administration’s Executive Director.

c. Award Determination

CASA Grants:

- i. The DFA's ability to award funds is contingent upon the provision of funds by the Maryland Judiciary budget as allocated by the Maryland General Assembly.
- ii. Awards will be determined using the *Guidelines for Funding Maryland CASA Programs* found in Appendix A of this document. As outlined in that model, the CASA grant award is a sum of three possible awards:
 1. Capacity Award – based on the average number of volunteers in the program who were assigned to and serving children.
 2. Needs Award – based on the number of children in foster care in the counties served by the program and other factors illustrating need described in the Grant Application.
 3. Performance Award – based on the program's ability to fulfill the tenants of the *Ten Point Performance Model for MD CASA Programs* found in Appendix A of this document.
- iii. The review committee will make funding recommendations in accordance with the *Guidelines for Funding Maryland CASA Programs*. Final award determinations will be made by reconciling the recommendations of the review committee with the funding available.

CASA Planning/Start-Up Grants:

The review committee will review all requests and make funding recommendations based on the need in the community, the strength of the program, and the program's potential for future sustainability. Final award determinations will be made by reconciling the recommendations of the review committee with the funding available.

1.4 Award Notification

Grantees will be notified of their grant award through an Award Letter signed by the Chief Judge of the Maryland Court of Appeals. Letters will be issued prior to the start of the funding period.

B. Grantee Requirements

1. Finalizing the Award

To accept and finalize the grant award, applicants are required to complete the following documentation and submit it to the DFA before the start of the funding period:

- a. A Signed Grant Agreement

Each applicant will be required to sign a Grant Agreement signed by the DFA's Executive Director and provided with their Award Letter. That Agreement will indicate that the grantee agrees to abide by the terms of funding outlined in the DFA's Grant Guidelines and outlined in the Agreement.

b. A Signed Adjusted Budget

Upon the request of the DFA, applicants will be required to submit an updated budget reflecting a spending plan based on the actual grant award. This revised budget must be signed by the program's authorizing official. A signed copy of the budget will be returned to the grantee upon approval of the DFA's Executive Director.

c. A Completed & Signed Financial Information Form

The grantee is required to designate a fiscal authority; the individual who will receive payments for the grant. Grantees will be provided a form to complete and submit prior to the start of the funding period designating the project's fiscal authority. This form will need to be signed by the fiscal authority and will include the address to which payments will be sent and other financial information needed for processing of payments.

d. Other documents may be required upon request of the DFA. Any additional documents that will be required for finalization of the award will be specified in the Award Letter. (This may include, but is not limited to: updated personnel, procurement or travel policies and updated W-9 forms).

New Grantees must provide the following additional documentation:

- a. Proof of non-profit status (when applicable)
- b. Completed W-9 form
- c. Copies of Personnel and Procurement Policies
- d. Other documents may be required upon request of the DFA. Any additional documents that will be required for finalization of the award will be specified in the Award Letter. (This may include, but is not limited to: updated personnel, procurement or travel policies and updated W-9 forms).

2. Reporting

2.1 Program & Statistical Reporting

- a. Programs must use a formal data tracking system such as the *CASA Outcomes Measurement and Evaluation Tool (COMET)* or the *CASA Efforts to Outcomes (ETO)* performance management system

for data collection purposes. Other data systems may be authorized upon written request to the DFA. Programs are required to report on progress toward specific project goals and to provide statistical information on a quarterly and annual basis.

b. Specific program and statistical reporting requirements, including required reporting forms, will be provided to grantees by email prior to the start of the funding period. Reporting forms will be cumulative Excel Workbooks.

2.2 Financial Reporting

a. Programs are required to provide signed expenditure reports and requests for payment on a quarterly basis. These documents must be submitted by the due dates outlined below, even if the grantee did not expend any funds during the quarter.

b. Specific reporting requirements, including required reporting forms, will be provided to the grantee by email early in the funding period. Reporting forms will be cumulative Excel Workbooks personalized for each grantee.

2.3 Submission Requirements

All reports (financial and program/statistical) must be submitted electronically to the DFA, emailed to DFAGrants@mdcourts.gov by the due dates outlined below. Hard copies with original signatures must also be received by the dates below. When a due date falls on a weekend or holiday, reports are due the next business day.

<u>Reporting Period</u>	<u>Report Due Date</u>
1 st Quarter (July 1 thru Sept 30)	October 15
2 nd Quarter (Oct 1 thru Dec 31)	January 15
Annual (Calendar Year) Report	January 31
3 rd Quarter (Jan1 thru Mar 31)	April 15
4 th Quarter (April 1 thru June 30)	July 15

Partial or incomplete reports will not be accepted. Reports submitted on forms other than those provided by the DFA for FY15, will not be accepted.

2.4 Use of Information

Information collected from the quarterly and annual reports will be used to monitor funded programs and assist the DFA in determining if the program is meeting its stated goals and objectives. Additionally, the AOC reserves the right to use this data in statistical reports, annual reports, and other publications for general distribution.

3. Funds

3.1 Fiscal Authority

The grantee is required to designate a fiscal authority, the fiscal contact who will receive payments, for the grant. Grantees will be provided a form to complete and submit prior to the start of the funding period designating the project's fiscal authority as described above in section B.1.c.

3.2 Funding Cycle

The DFA awards CASA grants on the state's fiscal year cycle. Grants awarded for Fiscal Year 2015 will support program needs from July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015. All funds must be expended within this time period.

3.3 Distribution of Funds

- a. All funds will be paid on a *reimbursement basis* only. Grantees must submit a timely financial expenditure report, program report and request for payment form each quarter reflecting funds actually expended during the quarter for which the program is seeking reimbursement. The DFA may request documentation of expenditures if deemed necessary.
- b. The DFA will withhold payments in the event that the grantee has failed to comply with the grant requirements.
- c. The DFA may change funding amounts at any point in the funding period if the funds available to the DFA are reduced.

3.4 Unspent Grant Funds

Grantees must project unspent or unobligated funds no later than June 15th. All grantees will be provided a "Fourth Quarter Estimate" form in their financial reporting workbooks to use to submit this projection. Grantees must expend all grant funds by the end of the fiscal year in which they were awarded.

3.5 Matching Fund Requirement

- a. CASA grantees must provide a 100% match for their total CASA grant award. Up to 25% of the match can be in-kind with the remaining 75% being cash match.
 - i. Cash Match is defined as the direct outlay of funds by the grantee or a third party to support the project.
 - ii. In-Kind Match is defined as consisting of contributions of time and/or services of current staff members, supplies, space,

etc., made to the project by the grantee or others working directly on the project.

b. CASA programs must maintain documentation of all match reported, both in-kind and cash match. Documentation of in-kind match should show how the value of the contribution was derived. Grantees are also responsible for maintaining the needed back-up documentation to verify their valuations of in-kind costs. These documents may be reviewed on site visits and will be reviewed periodically by the Judiciary's Internal Audit Department.

c. Waiver: At the discretion of the grantor, matching fund requirements can be waived for start-up programs or for good cause upon consideration of the DFA's Executive Director. Programs that have not received a waiver and do not meet the match requirement may be subject to a reduction of their grant award by the amount of the unmatched portion. Programs that experience a financial hardship during the funding period that will impact their ability to meet the match requirement should provide a written explanation of that hardship and request a waiver or modification of their match requirement in advance of the submission of their final reports.

3.6 Direct vs. Indirect Costs

a. CASA grantees may request funding for direct costs associated with their project.

Direct Costs are defined as those readily assignable to a particular project.

*Travel is an allowable direct cost where such travel will provide a direct benefit to the project and the traveler is an employee of the grantee.

b. Non-court CASA grantees may request funds to support indirect costs with appropriate justification and when those indirect costs total no more than 10% of the total direct costs of the project.

Indirect costs are those costs of an organization that are not readily assignable to a particular project, but may be necessary to the operation of the organization and the performance of the funded project.

Please Note: Court grantees may *not* request funds to support indirect costs and county grantees may not request administrative fees associated with the administration of the grant.

3.7 Grant Modifications

a. Modifying the Grant Award

The DFA may modify a grantee's award during the grant period dependent upon availability of funds. When a modification to a grantee's award is made by the DFA after the funding period has started, the grantee may be required to submit a signed Request for Budget Modification spreadsheet contained in each grantee's financial workbook reflecting the change in allocation of the funds. In instances when budget revisions are substantial, the DFA may require a grantee to submit a full revised budget.

b. Modifying the Grant Budget

Grantees may modify their original approved budget during the grant year. Some, but not all deviations from the original budget require advanced approval from the DFA.

1. When to submit a Modification Request

- A. A Modification Request must be submitted if the total of all funds being modified is equal to 10% or more of the grant award or \$5,000 or more, whichever amount is LESS.

Example 1: Grant award is \$20,000. Grantee seeks to modify in the amount of \$2,500. A Modification Request must be submitted even though the modification is less than \$5,000 because \$2,500 is 12.5% of the grant award amount.

Example 2: Grant award is \$85,000. Grantee seeks to modify in the amount of \$5,100. A Modification Request must be submitted even though the modification is less than 10% of the grant award because this modification is more than \$5000.

- i. When the modification meets the criteria in A., a Modification Request is required regardless of whether funds are being moved within a budget category or between budget categories.
- ii. The \$5,000 or 10% amount is per modification; it is not cumulative. Therefore if a grantee submits more than one modification request over the course of the grant period, those requests do not need to be added-up.

Example: Grant award is \$40,000. If a grantee modifies their budget by \$2,000 in Q1 and \$3,500 in Q2, a Modification Request is NOT required even though the total of both modifications is more than \$5,000 and greater than 10%.

- B. A Modification Request must be submitted if a grantee is adding a new line item that was not part of the original budget. Whenever a grantee seeks to charge costs to the grant that were not approved as part of the original budget, regardless of amount, a Modification Request is required.
- C. The DFA reviews all grant expenditures to ensure the grantee is in compliance with Judiciary requirements and to ensure that expenditures are made in furtherance of the purpose for which the grant was awarded. The DFA may request further justification of expenditures in any circumstance where the purpose of the expenditure or modification is not clear, even when a formal Modification Request is not required by this policy.
- D. CASA Grantees do not need to submit a Modification Request to modify match.

2. Submission of a Modification Request

- A. All requests to modify the grant budget must be submitted using the “Modification Request” form found in each grantee’s financial reporting workbook.
- B. In addition to the dollar amounts to be modified, every request must also include an explanation of how and why funds are being reallocated. This can be included on the Modification Request form (justification column) or in a separate document submitted along with the form.
- C. Modification Requests can be submitted at any time during the grant year and should be submitted prior to the grantee incurring expenditures that deviate from the approved budget.
- D. Modification Requests must signed and submitted by regular mail (sent to 2009-A Commerce Park Drive, Annapolis, MD 21401) and by email (sent to DFAGrants@mdcourts.gov).

c. Modifying the Purpose of the Grant

Any grantee requesting a modification of the purpose of the grant must submit a written request providing an explanation for the change. The grantee may not expend grant funds for activities related to the change of purpose until the grantee receives written approval from the Executive Director of the DFA authorizing the change.

4. Accounting and Business Requirements

4.1 Personnel and Payroll Records

All grantees must follow their organization's payroll, personnel, and time and attendance policies for each position provided for by these grants. These policies must be in writing. Upon request, grantees must provide a copy of those policies to the DFA.

4.2 Procurement

- a. All grantees must abide by their organization's procurement and financial policies in expending grant funds. These policies must be in writing. Grantees must provide a copy of these policies to the DFA upon request.
- b. Grantees that do not have an established written procurement policy must develop one as a condition of their award. The Department of Family Administration will provide technical assistance to grantees as requested.
- c. Goods and/or services purchased with grant funds shall remain in the ownership and liability of the grantee, and the grantee shall assume responsibility for all routine equipment maintenance and/or replacement costs.
- d. Grantees that use grant funds for contractual services must notify potential contractors that funds for the project originated from a Maryland Judiciary grant and that the terms and conditions which accompany that grant award are part of the contract.
- e. Grantees may not use grant funds to contract with any individual or entity that has been "debarred" by the Judiciary's Department of Procurement and Contract Administration.

4.3 Financial Accounting Requirements

Programs are required to establish and maintain financial accounting systems and records to accurately account for funds. Minimally, they should conform to the National CASA Minimum Recommended Internal Financial Control Procedures.

a. Reconciliation

Programs must reconcile their accounts on a regular basis, prior to submitting expenditure reports and requests for payment to the DFA.

b. Independent Audit

- i. An "independent audit" is generally defined as:

A systematic review of the accuracy and truthfulness of the accounting records of a particular individual, business, or organization conducted by an outside Certified Public Accountant (one not employed by the firm being examined) according to generally accepted auditing standards for the purpose of expressing an opinion as to whether the statements are a fair presentation in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles.

ii. If requested by the DFA, programs will be required to have independent audit conducted.

iii. Programs with awards greater than \$25,000 must have an independent audit conducted tri-annually (once every three years).

iv. New grantees with awards greater than \$25,000 must complete an independent audit by the close of the first full year of funding. The Executive Director of the DFA may make exceptions to this requirement for new, independent start-up programs.

v. A copy of this audit report must be submitted to the DFA.

c. Grant funds are subject to any additional terms and conditions issued by the Administrative Office of the Courts upon award of grants and specified in the award letter or grant agreement. Grants may be terminated if any terms or conditions are violated, or if adequate progress toward project goals is not demonstrated.

d. Grantees must maintain full and accurate records of all financial transactions and accounts related to the grant-funded project for a minimum of three years after the grant period ends, and until audited. This includes request for payment and receipts for expenses incurred, and timesheets for any salaries paid for with grant funds. These are subject to review by the DFA, the Judiciary Grants Coordinator, and/or the Judiciary Internal Audit Department, at any time.

5. Grantee Monitoring and Review

5.1 Program Monitoring & Site Visits

DFA staff will review submitted reports to evaluate the grantee's progress towards meeting their stated goals and objectives. Staff will follow-up with grantees as needed to gather additional information and assess performance. Follow-up may be made by phone and in person (through site visits). The site visits will be designed to ensure compliance with the grant guidelines and evaluate the project in terms of its stated goals and

objectives. Site visits may also include a fiscal review of grantee/project expenditures.

5.2 New Positions or Programs

- a. All new positions and/or programs supported by a DFA CASA grant award must commence within 90 days of the beginning of the funding period or other projected start date as indicated in the grantee's budget. If the project is not operational within that time frame, the grantee must report the steps taken to initiate the project, the reason for the delay, and the expected start date.
- b. Qualifications of all new Program Directors must be submitted to the DFA.
- c. Grantees can request an extension of this 90 day period by submitting a written explanation for the need for the cause for delay and need for extension. All requests must be received prior to the expiration of the 90 day period.
- d. Failure to implement new positions or projects within this 90 day period or to obtain an extension from the DFA may result in a cancellation or delay of fund distribution.

5.3. Advisement of Judiciary Audits

In addition to monitoring by DFA staff, grant recipients may be subject to periodic audits by the Judiciary's Internal Audit Department. Upon accepting a grant award, grantees agree to provide any authorized representative of the Judiciary's Internal Audit Department access to and the right to examine all records, papers, books, and documents related to the Judiciary grant.

6. Acknowledgement of Support & Notice Requirement

- a. All CASA Grantees agree that any publication (written, visual or sound) issued by the Grantee describing projects funded in whole or in part with Maryland Judiciary Grant Program funds shall contain the following statement: "This project is supported by a CASA Grant from the Maryland Judiciary, Administrative Office of the Courts, Department of Family Administration."
- b. The DFA also requests notification from grantees of any events (e.g. trainings, outreach events, volunteer appreciation events, etc.) that occur as a result of DFA grant funds received.

7. Policy against Discrimination

a. Participants in the program and CASA volunteers will be treated without regard to race, color, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, gender, political or religious opinion or affiliation, physical or mental disability, or age.

8. Contact Information

a. Grantees are responsible for ensuring that the DFA is provided with accurate contact information for their program. This includes an email address, as the DFA sends many important grant announcements by email.

b. Unless otherwise indicated, all communications with the DFA should be directed to:

Connie Kratovil-Lavelle, Director
Department of Family Administration
Programs Division
Administrative Office of the Courts
2009-A Commerce Park Drive
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
Phone: 410-260-1580
Fax: 410-974-5577

or by email to: Kelly.Franks@mdcourts.gov

APPENDIX A

Guidelines for Funding Maryland CASA Programs

Guidelines for Funding Maryland CASA Programs

Issued: February 2013

Department of Family Administration
Administrative Office of the Courts
Maryland Judicial Center
580 Taylor Avenue, 2nd Floor
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Guidelines for Funding Maryland CASA Programs

CASA Awards will be determined based on the recommendations of the CASA Grant Review Committee. The Committee will make award recommendations after a thorough review of each program’s application packet.

The application packets shall include the following documents:

1. Grant Application (including a proposed budget & budget detail, letter(s) of support, and strategic & diversity plans*)
2. Q3 Quarterly Program Report Narrative (illustrating progress toward current fiscal year’s stated goals)
3. Annual Calendar Year Report
4. Performance Monitoring Summary
5. Letter(s) of Support

**Programs are not required to have Strategic & Diversity Plans, but those who have created these plans should submit them with their grant application.*

Calculating the Award

Each CASA program’s award will be based on three possible components: capacity funding, needs based funding and performance funding.

Part 1 – CAPACITY Award

The applicant must report the number of volunteers that were assigned and serving children on the first day of the prior 4 quarters. (Q1, Q2, Q3 of current fiscal year & Q4 of prior fiscal year.) This is data must match the data submitted on the quarterly reports or the applicant will be required to correct the application.

An average of the four quarters is calculated and that figure determines at what *capacity level* the program is operating. Subject to the availability of funds, programs receive a base grant associated with that level.

Levels	# Volunteers	# Supervisors Needed (FTEs)	Base Funding*
1	1-20	.5 - .75	\$20,600
2	21-35	.75 - 1.25	\$25,235
3	36-50	1.25 – 1.75	\$44,805
4	51-80	1.75 – 2.75	\$69,010
5	81-110	2.75 – 3.75	\$91,670
6	111-140	3.75 – 4.75	\$114,330
7	141-170	4.75 – 5.75	\$136,990
8	171+	5.75+	\$159,650

** Subject to the availability of funds.*

Part 2 – NEEDS Award

As a result of careful analysis, the Department of Family Administration has determined that the number of children in foster care in the jurisdictions served is indicative of greater need. Programs in higher need counties may receive additional funding to enhance their ability to serve a larger number of children.

Needs Level (# of children in foster care)	Potential Needs Based Funding*
700+	\$20,000
600+	\$17,500
500+	\$15,000
400+	\$12,500
300+	\$10,000
200+	\$7,500
100+	\$5,000
50+	\$2,500
Less than 50	\$1,250

** Subject to the availability of funds.*

Programs who believe other factors make the area they serve a higher need area can describe those factors in the Grant Application and the Committee will determine whether those needs warrant additional funding.

Ongoing Needs Based Funding

In determining the amount of needs based funding in future years, the Committee will thoroughly evaluate whether past needs based funding resulted in a demonstrated increase in service.

Part 3 - PERFORMANCE Award

The Performance award will be determined by the Review Committee after evaluating each grantee's application packet using the Ten Point Performance Model for Maryland CASA Programs. (Outlined at the end of this document.) The application packet will not receive a score, but the reviewers will provide recommendations for funding. Subject to the availability of funds, the performance award may be limited to a maximum of \$10,000.

Matching Fund Requirement

Maryland CASA programs must continue to provide a one hundred percent match for their total CASA grant award. Both cash (at least 75%) and in-kind (no more than 25%) may constitute match. Matching fund requirements may be waived for start-up programs, at the discretion of the Administrative Office of the Courts.

The Ten Point Performance Model for CASA Programs in Maryland

- 1. Strive to meet the needs of children in the child welfare system.**
- 2. Train high quality volunteers.**
- 3. Meet the court's needs.**
- 4. Collaborate with other organizations inside and outside the jurisdiction to achieve good results for children.**
- 5. Provide a committed, caring presence for each child and ensure children receive needed services.**
- 6. Maintain a high quality program structure.**
- 7. Demonstrate organizational efforts to be culturally competent and sensitive.**
- 8. Advocate for children to reach permanency.**
- 9. Heighten public awareness of the needs of children in the child welfare system.**
- 10. Follow the Standards for Local CASA/GAL Programs established by the National CASA Association.**

APPENDIX B

Maryland CASA Program Performance Standards

MARYLAND CASA PROGRAM PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Revised: April 2008

**Department of Family Administration Administrative Office
of the Courts Maryland Judicial Center
580 Taylor Avenue, 2nd floor
Annapolis, Maryland 21401**

MARYLAND CASA PROGRAM PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

1. AUTHORITY FOR THE CASA PROGRAM

The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program was authorized to operate in Maryland, subject to these performance standards, by the adoption, in 1989, of Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article § 3-830 of the Annotated Code of Maryland.

2. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF VOLUNTEER AND STATUS IN THE COURT PROCEEDING

The Annotated Code of Maryland states that role of the Court Appointed Special Advocate is to:

1. Provide the court with background information to aid the court in making decisions in the child's best interest; and
2. Ensure that the child is provided appropriate case Start-Up and services.

The CASA volunteer is considered a friend of the Court and does not have party status. The volunteer is considered an agent of the court and is appointed at the judge's discretion to represent the child's best interest. Volunteers are not represented by an attorney but should be provided access to legal counsel by the program.

3. PROGRAM OPERATION

CASA Programs shall be administered by a director who has been selected by the local entities who are sponsoring the CASA program and approved by the Administrative Office of the Courts. The minimum requirements for this appointment are:

1. A master's degree in the field of social work, psychology or child welfare-related field of study, or a bachelor's degree and an equivalent number of years of child welfare and/or non-profit management experience.
2. A minimum of 5 years experience in the field of child abuse and neglect.
3. A minimum of 2 years experience in administration or supervision.
4. Demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the juvenile court system and the needs of abused and neglected children.
5. Knowledge of fundraising/development.

All supervisory staff shall have the following minimum qualifications:

1. Bachelor's degree in the field of social work, psychology or other clinically-oriented discipline.

2. A minimum of 2 years experience in the field of child abuse and neglect.
3. A minimum of 1 year experience in supervision of volunteers/staff is preferred.
4. Demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the juvenile court system and the needs of abused and neglected children.

4. PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The program director shall establish and maintain a structure designed to facilitate the recruitment, screening, training, and supervision of CASA volunteers by:

1. Developing and implementing an annual volunteer recruitment plan, including such strategies as meeting with relevant organizations for the purpose of recruiting their membership for volunteers and soliciting the print, radio and TV media to aid in this recruitment. Special efforts shall be made to recruit individuals who reflect the characteristics of the community of which they will be serving minimally, and, optimally, reflect the diversity of the children served.
2. Developing and implementing an application and screening process whereby applicants will be appropriately selected to participate in a pre-service training program.
3. Designing and conducting a pre-service training program that will educate the applicants about the following:
 - a. History of CASA;
 - b. Roles and Responsibilities of a CASA and program procedures; and the role of all the relevant agencies and professionals in the child welfare and juvenile court systems;
 - c. Cultural Awareness;
 - d. Dynamics and Incidence of Child Abuse and Neglect;
 - e. Child Development and Permanency Start-Up;
 - f. Laws Affecting Children;
 - g. Communication and Information Gathering;
 - h. Juvenile Court System;
 - i. Advocacy Skills;
 - j. Court Report Writing;
 - k. Confidentiality requirements.

4. Establishing a procedure with the local Department of Social Services for screening CASA applicants for past allegations of child abuse and/or neglect.
5. Designing and implementing a supervisory process whereby CASAs will receive frequent and complete feedback of their CASA activities by:
 - a. Permitting no more than a 30 to 1 ratio of active CASA volunteers to supervisor. (Note: It is recognized that during the initial developmental stages of CASA programs, due to a temporary shortage in funding, this ratio may not always be met by a CASA program.)
 - b. Establishing and implementing a regular in-service training schedule designed to increase the CASAs' understanding of the dynamics of the population they are serving and consequently enhance their service provision.
6. Establishing either an Advisory Board and/or Board of Directors for the purpose of overseeing the operation of the program and/or providing technical assistance. The membership of an advisory board should include representation from agencies affected by this program but should be made up, primarily, of representatives of the corporate community and the private sector. Boards of directors must have the above representation.

5. REQUIREMENTS FOR VOLUNTEER SCREENING AND SELECTION

The program director shall ensure that applicants meet minimal qualifications prior to certification as a CASA. A CASA must:

1. Be twenty-one years of age or older;
2. Complete an application;
3. Successfully complete the required 30-40 hours of CASA pre-service training;
4. Successfully complete a pre-training screening interview and post-training interview/assessment by the CASA staff;
5. Observe a juvenile court hearing(s);
6. Provide three positive character references;
7. Pass a criminal background check and be found to have not been convicted of or currently charged for the commission or attempt to commit: Murder; Child Abuse; Rape; Child Pornography; Child Abduction; Kidnapping of a Child; or a Sexual Offense as defined under the Criminal Law Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland, §§ 3-305-30308, or any other charge that poses a threat to the safety and/or well-being of a child, indicates poor judgment and/or threatens the credibility of the program;

8. Pass a child abuse registry clearance conducted by the local Department of Social Services (if available);
9. Pass a driving record check conducted by the Motor Vehicle Administration, indicating no more than two points. Prospective volunteers who choose not to transport must still comply with the MVA check. Anyone whose driving record exceeds the above limit may be accepted with the provision that they not transport, however careful consideration must be given to the type, frequency and circumstances of the violations;
10. Provide car insurance information regarding the amount and type of coverage or sign a waiver stating he/she will not transport the child. Programs shall make volunteers aware of the liability issues involved in transporting children;
11. Commit to a minimum of one year service to the program;
12. Sign an oath of confidentiality;
13. Not be employed in a position and/or otherwise involved with an agency that might result in a conflict of interest on the part of the CASA volunteer;
14. Volunteers shall be officially appointed as a CASA via swearing in and/or specific order of the court.

6. TRANSFERS WITHIN THE STATE

CASA volunteers moving to another county or city within the state that has a CASA program shall be subject to the same screening process conducted for other applicants before being allowed to serve as a CASA volunteer in that county or city. The volunteer may be required to attend any or all units of the pre-service training, as determined by the program to which the applicant has applied before being allowed to serve as a CASA.

7. AUTHORITY FOR APPOINTMENT OF COURT-APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE AND CASE ASSIGNMENT PROCESS

The CASA Program is authorized by an official Order of the Court, at the judge's discretion, to assign a volunteer to a child's case. Volunteers should be assigned at the earliest stages of the court proceedings and shall remain involved in their assigned cases until dismissal by official Order of the Court. Volunteers who terminate from their assigned cases prior to the conclusion of the court proceedings shall be replaced by the CASA program with other volunteers as soon as possible. A volunteer shall remain appointed to the case until the child is placed in a safe, permanent home or the appointment order is rescinded by the judge or the case is otherwise closed by the court.

Upon reviewing a case assignment, the Court-Appointed Special Advocate shall:

1. Review the Court Order and the case history;

2. Review the Juvenile Court File;
3. Meet with the CASA staff to develop the CASA Case Plan;
4. Schedule and attend appointments with relevant parties;
5. Complete required CASA forms and documentation;
6. Maintain the confidentiality of any and all information received on behalf of the child.

8. COURT-APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE RECORDS AND SUPERVISION

Upon beginning a case assignment, the Court-Appointed Special Advocate shall:

1. Maintain and submit at least monthly a CASA Contact Log, indicating the date, amount of time spent, and type of all CASA contacts.
2. Maintain and submit monthly a record of travel expenses incurred on the Expense Reimbursement form provided if program provides reimbursement and the CASA desires reimbursement of said expenses.
3. Provide to the Director or staff supervisor a court report, using the Court Report Format, for the assigned case to ensure timely submission to court and parties, according to court procedure.
4. Attend quarterly, individual, face-to-face supervisory meetings, as scheduled by the CASA staff.
5. Complete a minimum of 12 hours of in-service training each year.

9. VOLUNTEER DISMISSAL FROM PROGRAMS

The program director may dismiss a volunteer from the program when the volunteer:

1. Takes action without program or court approval which:
 - a. Endangers the child;
 - b. Is outside the role or powers of the CASA;
 - c. Violates a program policy, court rule, or law, or;
 - d. Contravenes program or court direction.
2. Fails to adequately perform a responsibility as a CASA.
 - a. Fails to maintain regular contact with the program office regarding CASA activities as

defined by the individual program; and

b. Fails to maintain regular contact with the assigned child and/or family as defined by the individual program.

3. Falsifies the volunteer application, misrepresents facts during the screening process, or commits an act which results in a substantial alteration of his/her qualifications as a CASA.

10. COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN COURT-APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE AND THE CHILD

Communications between a child and a CASA are not privileged. A CASA shall not assure the confidentiality of such communications. Incidents of abuse or neglect disclosed by a child, or otherwise discovered by a CASA, in addition to the original allegation, or after a finding has been reached and treatment services begun, shall be immediately reported to the local Department of Social Services and the program staff.

11. LIABILITY

Volunteers have limited protection from liability while carrying out their responsibilities according to the CASA role, per Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article §3-830. Programs must carry all appropriate forms of liability insurance for the protection of volunteers, staff, board members and the organization.

12. RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER CASA PROGRAMS, MARYLAND CASA ASSOCIATION AND NATIONAL CASA ASSOCIATION

An organization may not operate a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) program in the State of Maryland without being approved by the Administrative Office of the Courts. CASA programs must belong to and actively participate in the Maryland CASA Association, a statewide network of CASA programs, and are eligible for technical assistance and other benefits of membership. CASA programs must also be recognized by the National CASA Association as a CASA program. CASA programs must abide by any established Maryland and National CASA Association protocols regarding the recruitment of prospective volunteers and fund raising to prevent impeding other programs' efforts and those of the state and national organizations. CASA programs are not authorized to conduct home studies or evaluations of any kind at the request of other jurisdictions within or outside the state.