



## **Special Conditions for FY21 Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Grants**

### **1. Overview of the Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program**

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.

The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), through Juvenile and Family Services (JFS), awards CASA grants 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.

### **2. Eligibility**

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

#### **A. CASA Grant Eligibility**

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 (Appendix B);
- iii. 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);
- iv. Demonstrate adequate internal financial controls to properly administer grant funds; and
- v. 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; and
- vi. Be in compliance with all Grant Conditions (found at <http://www.mdcourts.gov/procurement/grants/>);

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

## B. CASA Start-Up Grant Eligibility

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. Programs interested in applying for a CASA Start-Up Grant must contact JFS in advance of the CASA application due date.

## 3. Award Determination

### A. CASA Grants

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 the components outlined below:

- i. Current Capacity – based on the average number of volunteers in the program who were assigned to and serving children in the most recent four quarters.
- ii. Jurisdictional Needs - based on specific needs or challenges presented by the county(s) served, including serving more than one county, and/or a program's demonstrated need to increase the program's ability to serve more children.
- iii. 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.

The CASA grant review committee will make funding recommendations in accordance with the *Guidelines for Funding Maryland CASA Programs*. Final award recommendations will be made by reconciling the recommendations of the review committee with the funding available. The final funding determination will be made by the State Court Administrator after consultation with the Assistant Administrator for the Programs Division and Juvenile and Family Services.

### B. 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 recommendations will be made by reconciling the recommendations of the review committee with the funding available. The final funding determination will be made by the State Court Administrator after consultation with the Assistant Administrator for the Programs Division and JFS.

## 4. Matching Fund Requirement

### A. Cash vs. In-Kind Match

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. Documentation Required**

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 JFS's 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.

### **5. Funding Period**

JFS awards CASA grants on the state's fiscal year cycle. Grants awarded for Fiscal Year 2021 will support program needs from July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021. All funds must be expended within this time period.

### **6. Accepting and Finalizing the Award**

By the end of May, funded applicants will receive a "Notice of Intent to Fund" email from JFS. This email will contain instructions for accepting and finalizing the grant award including any further requirements or conditions of the award. Grantees are required to complete the requirements within two weeks, unless otherwise indicated.

All CASA grantees will be required to submit the documents listed below, including, but not limited to:

1. Completed and Signed Award and Acceptance Form
2. Completed Final Budget (with Matching funds listed)
3. Diversity Plan

Grantees who fail to provide the required documents before the start of the funding period (July 1) may have their grant award rescinded.

### **7. Reporting**

#### **A. Program & Statistical Reporting**

1. Programs must use a formal data tracking system such as the OPTIMA performance management system for data collection purposes. Other data systems may be authorized upon written request to JFS. Programs are required to report on progress toward specific project goals and to provide statistical information on a quarterly and annual basis.

2. 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. Partial or incomplete reports will not be accepted.

**B. Financial Reporting**

1. Programs are required to provide signed expenditure reports and grant invoices 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.

2. Specific reporting requirements, including required reporting forms, will be provided to the grantee by email early in the funding period.

**C. Report Submission Requirements**

All reports (financial and program/statistical) must be submitted electronically to JFS, emailed to [DJFSGrants@mdcourts.gov](mailto:DJFSGrants@mdcourts.gov) by the due dates outlined 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 <sup>st</sup> Quarter (July 1 thru Sept 30)	October 15
2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter (Oct 1 thru Dec 31)	January 15
3 <sup>rd</sup> Quarter (Jan1 thru Mar 31)	April 15
Estimate of Remaining Funds	June 15
4 <sup>th</sup> Quarter (April 1 thru June 30)	July 15

**8. Grant Monitoring**

**A. Programmatic**

JFS will continuously evaluate program performance and progress toward meeting stated goals and objectives throughout the funding period. This evaluation will be conducted by JFS staff and will include a review of evaluations conducted through Maryland CASA Association’s (MD CASA’s) quality assurance process.

1. JFS 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 will be made by phone, email and in person through site visits. The site visits will be designed to ensure compliance with the grant guidelines, verification of submitted data, and review progress toward the project’s stated goals and objectives and performance measure.

2. In addition, JFS will also rely on Maryland CASA’s evaluation of each program to determine the program’s level of compliance with the Maryland CASA Standards (Appendix B). As outlined in section 2. above, compliance with the Maryland CASA Standards is a requirement for a program to be eligible for Judiciary funding. All grantees are expected to be compliant with the Maryland CASA Association’s quality assurance process. This includes participating fully in the evaluation process by providing timely responses to requests for information and allowing the MD CASA staff to have access to program records and files as needed to complete their evaluation. \*

*\*The confidentiality rules (MD Code Cts & Jud. Proc. §§ 3-810(b) & 3-827) provide a specific exception for CASA. JFS considers Maryland CASA staff as "CASA." Programs that have concerns may request copies of the screening and clearances of the MD CASA staff person conducting the evaluation from MD CASA. They are also free to request that the MD CASA staff person conducting the evaluation sign the program's confidentiality statement.*

**B. Financial**

JFS staff will review submitted financial reports to evaluate the grantee's spending and progress toward meeting their stated goals and objectives. During one quarter per funding period, grantees will be required to submit back-up documentation of expenditures being invoiced and match being reported. Notice of this random financial check will be provided at the close of the quarter for which documents are being requested. Site visits will be conducted when the financial review raises a concern.

**C. Audit**

All grantees funded by the AOC are subject to audit by the AOC's internal auditors. These audits will occur once every three to five years.

**9. Contact Information**

**A. Grantee Contacts**

Grantees are responsible for ensuring that JFS is provided with accurate and up-to-date contact information for their program. JFS sends all grant information by email.

**B. JFS Contact Information**

All email communications with JFS should be sent to: [DJFSGrants@mdcourts.gov](mailto:DJFSGrants@mdcourts.gov).

Questions:

Pen Whewell, Grants Specialist: 410-260-1262

Kelly Franks, Program and Policy Manager: 410-260-1722

## APPENDIX A

### Guidelines for Funding Maryland CASA Programs

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**Juvenile and Family Services  
Programs Division  
Administrative Office of the Courts**

*Issued: February 2013  
Updated: December 2019*

# Guidelines for Funding Maryland CASA Programs

CASA Awards will be determined based on 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 must include the following documents:

1. Grant Application (includes a proposed budget & budget justification, and letters of support\*)
2. Performance Monitoring Summary
3. Documentation of Compliance from the National CASA Association

## 1. Calculating the Award

Each CASA program's award will be based on the total of three (3) possible funding components: capacity, jurisdictional needs, and performance.

### A. Part 1 – CAPACITY Award

The Capacity Award is based on the current capacity of the program. Capacity is determined by calculating the average number of volunteers assigned to and serving children over the prior four quarters. Staff at JFS will provide programs with a document including these figures, which represent the number of volunteers who were assigned and serving children on the FIRST day of the prior four quarters (*April 1, 2019; July 1, 2019; October 1, 2019; January 1, 2020*).

Subject to availability of funds, programs will be awarded \$1,000 per volunteer. When calculating the capacity award, the actual amount is used. Neither the average number of volunteers, nor the funding amount should not be rounded. *Example: Program has an average of 35.75 volunteers; Capacity Award would be  $35.75 \times \$1000 = \$35,750$*

### B. Part 2 - JURISDICTIONAL NEEDS Award

A Jurisdictional Needs Award may be provided to support programs that can demonstrate the following:

- A higher level of need. The Review Committee will evaluate this description and determine the amount to be awarded. *Example: A program that serves a large number of transition-aged youth may incur greater training and supervision costs.*
- A need for additional funding to increase the program's ability to serve more children. This additional funding is subject to availability of funds and is generally awarded to a limited number of programs.
- Service to multiple jurisdictions. Programs will be required to provide a description of the additional expenses the program incurs as a result of serving multiple counties. The Review Committee will evaluate this description and determine the amount to be awarded.

Subject to the availability of funds, award amounts in this section will be determined on a program by program basis.

### C. 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 reviewers will base funding recommendations on their evaluation of the packet.

The amount of funding available for the performance award is dependent on the funds allocated by the General Assembly to support CASA grants.

### 2. 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**

**JUVENILE AND FAMILY SERVICES  
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE MARYLAND CASA ASSOCIATION**

**PROGRAMS DIVISION  
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS**

**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:

- A. Provide the court with background information to aid the court in making decisions in the child's best interest; and
- B. 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:

- A. 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.
- B. A minimum of 5 years experience in the field of child abuse and neglect.
- C. A minimum of 2 years experience in administration or supervision.
- D. Demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the juvenile court system and the needs of abused and neglected children.
- E. Knowledge of fundraising/development.

All supervisory staff shall have the following minimum qualifications:

- A. Bachelor's degree in the field of social work, psychology or other clinically-oriented discipline.
- B. A minimum of 2 years experience in the field of child abuse and neglect.
- C. A minimum of 1 year experience in supervision of volunteers/staff is preferred.
- D. 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:

A. 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.

B. Developing and implementing an application and screening process whereby applicants will be appropriately selected to participate in a pre-service training program.

C. Designing and conducting a pre-service training program that will educate the applicants about the following:

- i. History of CASA;
- ii. 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;
- iii. Cultural Awareness;
- iv. Dynamics and Incidence of Child Abuse and Neglect;
- v. Child Development and Permanency Start-Up;
- vi. Laws Affecting Children;
- vii. Communication and Information Gathering;
- viii. Juvenile Court System;
- ix. Advocacy Skills;
- x. Court Report Writing;
- xi. Confidentiality requirements.

D. Establishing a procedure with the local Department of Social Services for screening CASA applicants for past allegations of child abuse and/or neglect.

E. Designing and implementing a supervisory process whereby CASAs will receive frequent and complete feedback of their CASA activities by:

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.)

Establishing and implementing a regular in-service training schedule designed to increase the CASA's understanding of the dynamics of the population they are serving and consequently enhance their service provision.

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:

- A. Be twenty-one years of age or older;
- B. Complete an application;
- C. Successfully complete the required 30-40 hours of CASA pre-service training;
- D. Successfully complete a pre-training screening interview and post-training interview/assessment by the CASA staff;
- E. Observe a juvenile court hearing(s);
- F. Provide three positive character references;
- G. 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;
- H. Pass a child abuse registry clearance conducted by the local Department of Social Services (if available);
- I. 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;

- J. 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;
- K. Commit to a minimum of one year service to the program;
- L. Sign an oath of confidentiality;
- M. 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;
- N. 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:

- A. Review the Court Order and the case history;
- B. Review the Juvenile Court File;
- C. Meet with the CASA staff to develop the CASA Case Plan;
- D. Schedule and attend appointments with relevant parties;
- E. Complete required CASA forms and documentation;
- F. 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:

- A. Maintain and submit at least monthly a CASA Contact Log, indicating the date, amount of time spent, and type of all CASA contacts.

B. 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.

C. 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.

D. Attend quarterly, individual, face-to-face supervisory meetings, as scheduled by the CASA staff.

E. 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:

A. Takes action without program or court approval which:

- i. Endangers the child;
- ii. Is outside the role or powers of the CASA;
- iii. Violates a program policy, court rule, or law, or;
- iv. Contravenes program or court direction.

B. Fails to adequately perform a responsibility as a CASA.

- i. Fails to maintain regular contact with the program office regarding CASA activities as defined by the individual program; and
- ii. Fails to maintain regular contact with the assigned child and/or family as defined by the individual program.

C. 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.