



Special Conditions for FY26 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 planning 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 in compliance with Maryland CASA Program Performance Standards (Appendix A);
- 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;
- 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](#).

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. 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 are a sum of the components of the CASA Funding Formula are outlined in [Appendix B](#).

The CASA grant review committee will review the data associated with the components above and the information provided in the application to make funding recommendations. Final award recommendations will be made by reconciling the review committee's recommendations 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 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.

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.

5. Non-Disclosure Agreement Requirement

A. Purpose

By the nature of their work, CASA programs have access to confidential information. It is the Judiciary's responsibility to ensure the confidentiality of that information is preserved.

B. Documentation Required

1. Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) signed by the program's Authorized Representative.
2. The Exhibit 1 attachment to the NDA should include the names of any person or entity who may have access to confidential information. This generally includes staff, volunteers, and any other funders or entities who require access to confidential information. The individuals listed on Exhibit 1 are not required to sign an NDA but must sign a confidentiality agreement with the organization. Those agreements do not need to be submitted to the AOC but need to be available upon request. An updated Exhibit 1 is required quarterly.

6. Funding Period

JFS awards CASA grants on the state's fiscal year cycle. Grants awarded for Fiscal Year 2026 will support program needs from July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026. All funds must be expended within this period.

7. 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. Completed and Signed Non-Disclosure Agreement.

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who fail to provide the required documents before the start of the funding period (July 1) may have their grant award rescinded.

8. 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. 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. As detailed in the Judiciary's [General Conditions](#), grants are awarded on a reimbursement basis. Therefore, reports and invoices must only reflect actual grant expenditures incurred during the quarter.

Expenditure reports and invoices 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 progress/statistical) must be submitted by the due dates outlined below.

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

**When a due date falls on a weekend or holiday, reports are due the next business day.*

9. Modifications (Amendments)

Modifications to the grant budget must be made in compliance with the terms outlined in the Judiciary's [General Grant Conditions](#) and the additional terms outlined below.

Per page 4, #10 of the General Grant Conditions:

A. Budget Amendments

i. Unless otherwise directed by the Special Conditions for the grant program, grantee expenses may vary from the approved budget provided that the variance does not exceed the total amount budgeted for the category by more than 10% or \$10,000 (whichever is less) and does not include any new line items not previously included in the approved budget. Grantees are required to submit a budget amendment request for pre-approval of any expenditures that would exceed this threshold.

ii. Grantees must request pre-approval to add new budget line items regardless of the amount.

iii. Expenditures that do not comply with the adjusted or approved budget will not be authorized for payment.

When a preapproval is required for a budget modification, grantees must complete “Modification Request” tab of their financial workbook and submit the request by emailing the entire workbook to DFJSGrants@mdcourts.gov.

10. Mid-Year Grant Award Modifications (Supplements)

JFS may make mid-year grants upon request, dependent upon availability of funds. Requests may be submitted in response to a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) or upon consultation with JFS staff.

11. Grant Monitoring

A. Programmatic

JFS will evaluate program performance and progress toward meeting stated goals and objectives throughout the funding period. This evaluation will be conducted by JFS staff.

JFS staff will review submitted reports and follow-up with grantees as needed to gather additional information and assess performance. Follow-up will be made by phone, email, virtual meeting, 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.

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.

12. 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 grant documents* and staff contact changes should be submitted to:

DFJSGrants@mdcourts.gov.

**Includes but not limited to: Reports, Award and Acceptance Documents, Modification Requests, Supplemental Requests, NDAs, Exhibit 1 updates, etc.*

Questions:

For report submission, status, or other general issues:

Pen Whewell, Grants Specialist II

Pen.Whewell@mdcourts.gov or 410-260-1262

For financial reporting questions:

Tene' Boyd, Grants and Financial Coordinator

Tene.Boyd@mdcourts.gov or 410-260-3452

For supplemental fund requests or allowable cost questions:

Kelly Franks, Senior Program Manager, Grants & Services

Kelly.Franks@mdcourts.gov or 410-260-1722

For progress reporting forms:

Jovonne Lewis, Family & Courts Evaluations Manager

Jovonne.Lewis@mdcourts.gov or 410-260-3521

For site visits or other monitoring issues:

Karen Thomas, Grants & Services Analyst

Karen.Thomas@mdcourts.gov or 410-260-1267

For status of payment or FCCIP Grants:

Sonia Holland, Grant Specialist II

Sonia.Holland@mdcourts.gov or 410-260-1427

APPENDIX A

Maryland CASA Program Performance Standards



MARYLAND CASA PROGRAM PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Juvenile and Family Services
Administrative Office of the Courts
Revised November 2024

Maryland CASA Program Performance Standards

1. **Mission:** Support the Maryland Judiciary’s mission to provide fair, efficient, and effective justice for all by advocating for the needs of children in the child welfare system.

- Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)
 - are qualified community volunteers appointed by the court;
 - give the court information to help it make decisions in the child’s best interests;
 - make sure that the child receives appropriate services.
- A CASA is a friend of the court or the court’s agent; CASAs are not a party in the case. Judges use discretion to appoint a CASA to represent the child’s best interest.
- CASA programs are authorized to operate in Maryland subject to these performance standards. (See Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article [§ 3-830](#) of the Annotated Code of Maryland, 1989.)

See pp. 13-15 of Standards for Local CASA/GAL Programs – 2020 from National CASA/GAL Association (National Standards)

2. **Guiding Principles:** Advocate for children to reach permanency.

- Embrace the importance of family preservation and reunification.
- Acknowledge disproportionality and implicit bias and take steps to minimize/eliminate them.
- Collaborate with organizations inside and outside of the program’s service area to achieve results.

See pp. 16-18 of National Standards

3. **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI):** Demonstrate organization-wide efforts to be culturally competent and sensitive.

- Recruit staff and volunteers who reflect the demographics of the community being served.
- Align staff and volunteers to reflect the diversity of the children served.
- Develop, implement, and update annual DEI plans that include regular training of staff, board members, and volunteers.
- Engage with the Maryland CASA network to foster successful DEI practices.

See pp. 19-21 of National Standards

4. **Ethical Conduct:** Avoid conflicts of interest; preserve confidentiality.

- CASA volunteers (aka “CASAs”) sign an oath pledging to safeguard confidential information.

- CASAs report to the Department of Social Services (DSS) and to program staff any new allegations of child of abuse or neglect. (Communications between a child and their CASA are not privileged; CASAs cannot promise confidentiality.)
- CASAs may not work for or be involved with an agency that may be perceived as posing a conflict of interest.
- CASAs have limited liability protection (See Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article [§3-830](#)). Programs are required to carry enough liability insurance to protect volunteers, staff, board members, and the organization.

See pp. 22-26 of National Standards

5. Program Operations: Maintain a high-quality program structure.

- Develop and implement an annual volunteer recruitment plan.
- Establish a procedure for screening program staff and CASA volunteers for allegations of child abuse and/or neglect every four (4) years.
- Obtain three (3) or more references for staff and CASA applicants.
- Develop/implement 30 hours of pre-service training to educate volunteers.
- Assign CASAs at the earliest stages of a court case.
- Remain involved in assigned cases until dismissed by court order or until the child is placed in a safe, permanent home.
- Prioritize replacement of volunteers who leave their case before it has closed.
- Hire experienced supervisory staff with:
 - Bachelor's degrees;
 - At least two (2) years' experience in the field of child abuse and neglect;
 - At least one (1) year of experience supervising staff (preferred); and
 - Knowledge of the juvenile court system (preferred).
- Prohibit supervisors from acting as child advocates as part of their employment. Only volunteers may be child advocates.
- Prohibit staff or volunteers from performing custody evaluations or home studies.
- Develop written policies:
 - Mission statements
 - Strategic plans
 - Risk management plans
 - Succession planning for key staff.
- Establish a diverse Advisory Board (for programs operating under a larger organization) and/or a Board of Directors (for stand-alone organizations). Governing Boards should include members who bring a range of skills, backgrounds, and knowledge to support the program in fulfilling its mission.

See pp. 27-36 of National Standards

6. Program Management: Provide leadership and responsible stewardship of resources.

- The CASA program director is responsible for day-to-day operations and overall program administration.
- Program director qualifications:
 - Education/training in a related field;
 - A master's degree; or
 - A bachelor's degree and five years of experience in a related field.
 - Management skills (two years of experience in administration or supervision);
 - Knowledge of the juvenile court system and needs of abused and neglected children;
 - Demonstrated experience in fundraising/development.
- Manage financial resources prudently.

See p. 36-44 of National Standards

7. Personnel Management: Maintain and follow written human resources policies.

- Maintain written policies, including:
 - Job descriptions,
 - Succession plan for key staff,
 - Grievance protocols.
- Provide orientation for new staff including DEI training and completion of pre-service training within 60 days of hire.
- Evaluate staff performance at least annually.

See pp. 45-51 of National Standards

8. Volunteer Administration: Train high-quality volunteers to provide a committed, caring presence for each child.

a. Screening

- Applicants must:
 - be 21 or older;
 - complete an application;
 - successfully complete pre-training screening;
 - pass a national criminal background check (no convictions/current charges for a felony or misdemeanor involving a sex offense, child abuse or neglect, or related acts that would pose risks to children or the program's credibility).
 - pass a child abuse registry check through the Department of Social Services (DSS) in all states in which the applicant has lived in the past seven (7) years.
 - have no more than two (2) points on their driving record and provide proof of insurance. (Applicants with more than two (2) points may be accepted at the discretion of the program if they do not transport children.)
 - provide three (3) character references.

- complete 30-40 hours of pre-service training within six (6) months of acceptance;
- observe a juvenile court hearing.

b. Training & Appointment

- Require pre-service training to educate applicants.
- Volunteers are officially appointed as a CASA via swearing in and/or specific court order and commit to a minimum of one year of service.
- Implement in-service training schedules so that CASAs complete at least 12 hours of training each year.

c. Supervision

- Implement a supervision process with no more than 30 CASA volunteers per supervisor.
 - Require quarterly, individual face-to-face supervisory meetings;
 - Require contact logs detailing every child/CASA visit and collateral contacts;
 - Require court reports on the assigned case at least every six months, or more frequently as dictated by the court's hearing schedule.
- Screen and train volunteers transferring from another CASA program.
- Dismiss volunteers who:
 - Take an action without approval which endangers the child, violates policy/rule/law, or contravenes program or court direction.
 - Fail to adequately perform a responsibility as a CASA.
 - Fail to maintain regular contact with program and/or child.
 - Provide false or misleading statements or information during the screening process.

See pp. 52-62 of National Standards

9. Public Education: Heighten awareness about what children in the child welfare system need.

- Develop and implement a written plan for public information, outreach, and education.
- Work in partnership with National and the Maryland CASA network for cohesive branding.

See pp. 63-65 of National Standards

10. Data: Maintain quality records.

- Collect accurate data for reporting to the national and Maryland CASA associations, and to the Maryland Judiciary.
- Maintain records for each staff member, volunteer, and child.
- Create written procedures on
 - keeping, destroying, and returning confidential case records,
 - the release of volunteers,
 - public information, outreach, and education.

See pp. 66-68 of National Standards Lists of records required: staff pp.51; volunteer pp. 62; child pp. 67

11. Network Requirements: Follow standards established by the Judiciary, and Maryland and National CASA.

Programs must:

- Comply with the requirements under Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article [§3-830\(b\)\(3\)](#);
- Actively participate and collaborate with the Maryland CASA program network;
- Maintain membership and adhere to all standards, polices, and agreements of National CASA.

See pp. 69-71 of National Standards

APPENDIX B

Components of the CASA Funding Formula

Components of the CASA Funding Formula

Blue are calculated using data collected from the programs quarterly.

Yellow are at discretionary awards based on information provided in the application.

1. Maintaining Current Capacity Levels: Supervisor Salaries

This component of the formula is intended to provide funds to support 50% of the salary costs for volunteer supervisors being paid at market rate*. It is based on the current capacity of the program (# of volunteers serving children on the last day of the quarter divided by 30).

**In 2021, we reviewed statewide salaries and determine the market rate. Each year, this rate is increased based on rate of increases provided to Judiciary staff. The FY25 rate is \$61,375.*

2. Children Served

The component of the formula provides funding based on the average number of children assigned to a volunteer over the past four quarters (FY23 Q4, FY24 Q1, Q2, & Q3). The amount provided per child will vary based on the funds allocated for CASA by the General Assembly.

3. Diversity Equity & Inclusion (DEI)

Programs will receive an overall score of 0-10, based on the average of three scores: 1) Effort/Engagement; 2) Progress/Achievement; 3) Application Review. A set dollar amount will be set for each point; that amount varies based on funds allocated for CASA by the General Assembly.

4. Program Growth

In this section of the formula program growth is calculated by taking the total number of volunteers assigned to their first case in during FY24 Q4, FY25 Q1, Q2, & Q3 and subtracts the total number of volunteers who left the program during this time period. The amount provided per volunteers gained during the year (growth) will vary based on the funds allocated for CASA by the General Assembly.

5. Growth Plan

This funding is based on the growth plan detailed in the program's application. The amount of funding available is based on the funds allocated for CASA by the General Assembly. Depending on the need expressed by the programs statewide and the amount of funding available, it is likely that not every program will receive the growth plan funds requested.

Multi-jurisdictional Bonus

Programs who serve more than one county are eligible for a multi-jurisdictional bonus to offset some of the administrative burden caused by serving more than one county. This bonus is calculated by taking the number of volunteers assigned on the last day of Q3 divided by the number of counties served to get the average number of volunteers per county. That number is then multiplied by the set funding amount.