

HIGHLY EFFECTIVE STANDARDS REVIEW PRELIMINARY REPORT

Alaska CASA

Anchorage, AK

December 7, 2021



Court Appointed Special Advocates
Guardians ad Litem
FOR CHILDREN

NATIONAL CASA/GAL ASSOCIATION

OVERVIEW OF ORGANIZATION

State Org Name: Alaska	State Director: Joy Petrie
Year Established: 1987	State Director Hire Date: March, 2018
Structure of state organization: Publicly Administered	Number of staff: Five (four program coordinators and one grant project coordinator)

Mission

Alaska CASA is a network of programs around the state that recruit, screen, train and support adults in the community to serve as court appointed special advocate (CASA) volunteers.

Alaska CASA speaks up for children who've been abused or neglected by empowering our community to volunteer as advocates for them in the child welfare system.

Network Composition

Alaska CASA was created in 1987 under the auspices of the Alaska Office of Public Advocacy (OPA) and remains in the OPA today. According to state statute, whenever in the course of Children in Need of Aid (CINA) cases it appears to the court that the welfare of a child will be promoted by the appointment of an attorney to represent the child, the court may make the appointment. If it appears to the court that the welfare of a child in the proceeding will be promoted by the appointment of a guardian ad litem (GAL), the court shall make the appointment. Appointment of a GAL or attorney shall be made under the terms of § 25.24.310.

Court appointed special advocate (CASA) volunteers are not mentioned in state statute.

Alaska Court Rules state that the court shall appoint a GAL in all CINA proceedings as soon as possible after the CINA petition is filed. The appointment shall continue through all phases of the CINA proceeding unless the court orders otherwise.

The court shall appoint counsel, pursuant to Administrative Rule 12, for a child when the court determines that the interests of justice require the appointment of an attorney to represent the child's expressed interests.

In Alaska the child is provided a GAL by OPA. GALs are paid child advocates and can be attorneys or lay individuals. If available, a CASA volunteer is assigned to the child as soon as possible. The CASA volunteer teams with the GAL to provide best interest advocacy for the child. The CASA volunteer does the groundwork for the GAL, and that the GAL handles the legal issues.

The CASA volunteer works in tandem with the GAL who is supervised by an OPA attorney. The CASA volunteer executes the following roles: investigate, facilitate, monitor and advocate. The volunteer makes a report to the court which is presented through the GAL.

There are currently four local CASA offices in Alaska; Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau and Palmer. Because the CASA program in Alaska is a statewide, state administered program, all of the local CASA offices report up to Alaska CASA which is under the OPA. The four local CASA offices serve 11 of 30 counties. Local offices reported serving 295 children who have experienced abuse or neglect through the advocacy of 104 volunteers in 2020, who volunteered 5,725 hours that same year.

According to 2020 data, roughly 54% of Alaska children served by the local CASA offices identified as American Indian/Alaska Native, 27% of identified as White, and 10% as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Fifty-eight percent were age 12 and under and 26% of children were age 6 and under. The program served 52% male and 48% female children.

Alaska CASA has a support organization, Friends of Alaska's Children in Care (FACC). The organization was formerly Friends of Alaska CASA and about three years ago transitioned away from being a formal auxiliary of Alaska CASA for a number of reasons, one being the impending National CASA/GAL standards for auxiliary programs.

HIGHLY EFFECTIVE STANDARDS REVIEW PROCESS

Summary of Process

National CASA/GAL Association's Quality Assurance (QA) process is focused on developing all levels of our network (national, state and local) to be highly effective. Through the Highly Effective Standards Review Process (HESRP) for publicly administered state organizations, National CASA/GAL explores and learns about state CASA/GAL offices' alignment with *Standards for State CASA/GAL Organizations*

State reviews are led and facilitated by the National CASA/GAL Association staff and partners. The reviews include a document review and analysis; an analysis of data and surveys; an onsite (or virtual) visit with the administrative authority and state office staff, a board/governance meeting observation (if applicable); and interviews with staff from the local CASA/GAL offices, representatives of the organization's auxiliary (if applicable) and external stakeholders.

Review Period –

“Virtual’ Onsite Review Dates* – August 31 and September 1, 2021

*Due to social distancing dictates during the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person sessions were conducted via virtual videoconferencing.

People Interviewed

Name	Affiliation/Title
STATE DIRECTOR	
Joy Petrie	State Director
Anita Alves	Administrative Authority, Lead Attorney GAL
STATE ORGANIZATION STAFF	
Rebecca Griffin	Grant Project Coordinator
LOCAL OFFICE STAFF	
Hilary Poole, Anne Udry and Jaclyn Cabales and former program coordinator, Sarah Hanson	Panel of local office staff
EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS	
N/A	Legislative
Honorable Suzanne Cole	Magistrate Judge, Third Judicial District, Anchorage, Alaska
Kim Swisher	Deputy Director, Alaska Office of Children's Services
N/A	Auxiliary Board Chair (if applicable)
N/A	Auxiliary Director (if applicable)
Kimberly Barnett	Friends of Alaska's Children in Care

National CASA/GAL Association Review Team

Review Team Role	Name/Title
Team Lead/State Director and Staff Interviewers	Paige Beard and Sally Erny
Document Reviewer	Liz Damski
Local Office Staff Interviewers	Paige Beard and Sally Erny
Stakeholder Interviewers	Diane Nunn and Sally Erny

HIGHLY EFFECTIVE REVIEW PILLAR 1

Pillar 1: Mission and Values

Operates in alignment with the mission and values of the National CASA/GAL Association and adheres to and ensures the integrity of the Core Model in state organizations and local programs

1. State organizations will adhere to the National CASA/GAL Core Model

Summary

The state CASA director has a good understanding of the Core Model and consistently shares it with her program coordinators/supervisors. It has been added to the new staff orientation and is discussed at every staff meeting.

All background screening is processed by a member of the Office of Public Advocacy staff with each office responsible for processing their own volunteers. If an issue is discovered, it is discussed with the state director.

All volunteer information is recorded in CASA Manager.

The state CASA director has oversight of the training and meets regularly with program staff to share how they are delivering the pre-service volunteer training. There is an annual pre-service training calendar with each office conducting their training separately. The state director facilitates at least one session of each training for each office and attends swearing in ceremonies. Over the past year, the local offices have held statewide virtual training due to the pandemic with breakout sessions for each office. The staff debriefs after each session. If a volunteer is dismissed from training, the staff will consult with the state CASA director prior to dismissal.

In Alaska, the CASA volunteers and GALs work together on recommendations for the best interest representation with the GAL providing the legal representation and legal process work. There is currently not a volunteer GAL model in place but OPA is looking into it. Neither the staff GALs nor the lay GALs are required to be an attorney. Non-attorney GALs can do opening statements and ask questions. Each office has at least one Attorney GAL who supervises the staff and lay GALs.

The state CASA director does not train judges on the Core Model but judges understand it as they understand the role of the GAL. Most interaction with the judiciary is done by the local coordinators. A panel of judges is featured every other year at the state GAL/CASA Conference.

The lead GAL attorney (administrative authority) does mention the Core Model and the CASA volunteer in all training she does about and with the GALs. The Alaska judges are very aware of the CASA program, are supportive, and speak highly of their work. One judge interviewed noted that she would like to see CASA volunteers be a little less timid. She thinks there should be more training on how they should speak up in court. She thinks it is important for them to speak up and provide information to the court. She also thinks that judges should be better trained on how to ask questions of the CASA volunteers and of youth who appear in court. This judge stated that she thinks CASA volunteers know the family better than anyone. She likes when they serve as a squeaky wheel. She also thinks they serve a great purpose in working with older youth, and she would like them to maintain contact with the youth after they leave the system.

The state CASA director is a member of the Court Improvement Program (CIP), which has held presentations over the years around the CASA program. She is also involved with the Tribal State collaboration and state court collaboration.

The state CASA director monitors assignments of CASA volunteers to assure they are serving abuse and neglect cases (CINA cases). According to 2020 data reported to National CASA/GAL, 54% of Alaska children served by the local CASA offices identified as American Indian/Alaska Native. The local CASA offices utilize CASA Manager as their case management software.

The state CASA program operates under the Office of Public Advocacy (OPA) in the Child Advocacy Section, working out of the Anchorage GAL office. The CASA program would like to be independent from the GALs; changing the organizational structure so the CASA program is a stand-alone and equal to the GAL. The program describes the current status as a state of transition and there is a good deal of development within the agency. The CASA program is strongly supported in the state.

There is work being done to increase funding from the Alaska legislature, so all positions and offices are solid and not at risk of losing funding.

Recommendations

- Share Core Model description with judges and others. Also include in the Strategic Communications document.

Pillar 1: Mission and Values

Operates in alignment with the mission and values of the National CASA/GAL Association and adheres to and ensures the integrity of the Core Model in state organizations and local programs

2. State Organizations will adhere to the Role of the State Organization and respect and support the Role of National CASA/GAL and the Role of the Local program

Summary

The state CASA director oversees all CASA activities for the state. She is working on sustainable funding for the CASA offices and plans to clarify a separate and distinct role for CASA volunteers in the state.

The state CASA director provides technical assistance and training to the four CASA offices; overseeing operations but conducts no formal quality assurance process of the local offices. The state CASA director and CASA staff are currently reviewing the National CASA/GAL Local Program Standards as a group. There is no local fundraising.

The state CASA director formerly served on the National CASA/GAL Tribal Leadership Council when she was a local program coordinator.

Pillar 1: Mission and Values

Operates in alignment with the mission and values of the National CASA/GAL Association and adheres to and ensures the integrity of the Core Model in state organizations and local programs

3. Has a written mission statement consistent with the mission of National CASA/GAL Association

Summary

The state CASA director is currently working with the CASA staff to finalize a revised mission statement. The staff believe everything they do should come from their mission statement. During a recent retreat they worked on a new draft mission statement – based on training the state CASA director received from a University of Georgetown instructor through a National CASA/GAL professional development opportunity.

The state CASA director is developing a procedure to incorporate an annual review of the mission statement as well as other policies slated for a three-year review. A vision statement is under development.

Requirements

- Submit Mission Statement to National CASA/GAL and update on website

Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review mission statement annually and make sure to incorporate it into their work daily.
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Pillar 1: Mission and Values

Models organizational values of integrity, transparency, inclusion, trust, respect and continuous learning and improvement

4. Has written values

Summary

The state organization has written values with plans to review and update in by staff June 2021.

Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide updated values to National CASA/GAL and ensure values are incorporated into day-to-day operations and decision making as well as organizational materials.
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HIGHLY EFFECTIVE REVIEW PILLAR 2

Pillar 2: Leadership

Leads the organization effectively through a strong partnership with the governing body

5. Has regular meetings with and opportunities for input from the governing body with agreed upon deliverables

Summary

The state CASA director reports to the lead GAL attorney (administrative authority) and meets regularly but with no set schedule. The state CASA director also attends monthly GAL meetings as well as monthly OPA meetings. All policies are reviewed by the lead GAL attorney. The OPA director and deputy director oversee the lead GAL attorney and have contact with the state CASA director for all programmatic issues; meeting quarterly and as needed. The OPA agency is under the Department of Administration with sections specific to legal issues (the Child Advocacy Section includes the CASA program) The state CASA program has been under OPA since its start in 1987; initiated by GALs who wanted CASA volunteer support. Written notes are kept from all meetings between the state CASA director and the lead GAL attorney and OPA staff. Every year after submitting the National CASA/GAL Annual Survey, the results are shared with OPA. Goals are then made and reviewed with the grant project coordinator. Staff see a need for a strategic plan.

Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a Strategic Plan using, among other information, data from the National CASA/GAL Annual Program Survey
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Pillar 2: Leadership

Leads the organization effectively through a strong partnership with the governing body

6. State Director carries out the roles and responsibilities as defined within the job description that includes core competencies for a State Director as evidenced by an annual performance evaluation

Summary

The state CASA director's job description was developed over the years by OPA based on viewing other states' job descriptions and examples from National CASA/GAL. The state CASA director follows the State of Alaska guidelines for evaluation with a performance review every two years as required by State of Alaska (after initial first year) completed by lead GAL attorney. The evaluation is based on the job description and overall work, reviewing goals and setting new goals. There has been a delay since the last review due to family leave for the state CASA director. Staff noted the job description has evolved as the director has taken on more responsibilities, but the document has not been updated/revised to reflect what she should be doing with judiciary and building champions for the CASA program.

There are no surveys provided to local CASA offices although the state CASA director did receive feedback from CASA staff and volunteer interviews during a recent study, *Supporting and Expanding Statewide CASA Programs*.

The state CASA director has participated in professional development opportunities including a National CASA/GAL series with the University of Georgetown. The State of Alaska has recently developed new offerings for professional development while also encouraging attendance at the National CASA/GAL conference and participation in National CASA/GAL virtual trainings. The National CASA/GAL workshops are the most applicable to staff needs with participation in at least 12 hours/year. The state CASA director attends all the Anchorage office quarterly trainings for GALs. Training is part of the weekly discussions with staff. Although there is no formal process in place now, staff are working to formalize development plans for staff specific to training for their positions. The state does require IT training. Local staff training provides opportunity to grow in their roles/leadership.

The state CASA director has five direct reports (4 program coordinators and a grant projects coordinator).

The lead GAL attorney (administrative authority) has a good understanding of the state CASA director's role because of her previous experience with the CASA program and knowledge of GAL work. The state CASA director was hired to update the structure of the CASA office and make it sustainable and compliant with National CASA/GAL Standards. The state CASA director reports to the lead GAL attorney, who confers with the OPA directors before approving grant projects, media requests and other relevant activities.

The CASA program follows the State of Alaska process for performance evaluations. For the first five years of employment evaluations are completed annually and every two years after five years of employment. Performance reviews include job related goals for the coming year and information around work habits.

Recommendations

- Update performance evaluations to reflect all job responsibilities

Pillar 2: Leadership

Demonstrates commitment to and implementation of development of the governing body and staff

7. Facilitates the development and progression of staff through training and leadership opportunities

Summary

The local CASA program coordinators reported discussing their professional development training needs in their weekly 1:1 meeting with the state director. They shared that the state CASA director works to approve

everything she can find the money to send them too. A big priority for them is to attend the National CASA/GAL conferences.

The staff are offered opportunities for training around the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) through the Child Welfare Academy. More than 50% of children in custody are Native American/Alaskan Native. There are many ICWA Specialists in the state. Staff also have taken part in National CASA/GAL trainings around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Recommendations

- Have a written professional development plan for all CASA program staff and develop a mechanism to track professional development training for each staff member.

Pillar 2: Leadership

Demonstrates commitment to and implementation of development of the governing body and staff

8. Facilitates the development of the governing body

Summary

The local coordinators are very familiar with each other's roles with each able to substitute for each other during the CASA volunteer pre-service virtual training. On-boarding has become more formalized and teamwork between the staff is emphasized.

The state director keeps the GAL director as well as OPA director and deputy director up to date on CASA program goals and activities. There is also a comprehensive orientation, including information of the CASA program, for relevant OPA staff.

Pillar 2: Leadership

The organization is equitable, inclusive and reflects the diversity of the community it serves

9. Adopts and implements an ongoing, written plan to track, evaluate and guide diversity of its Board (nonprofit organizations only), staff and volunteers in order to reflect the demographics of the community it serves

Summary

The State of Alaska Equal Employment Opportunity Program's (EEO) utilization report to OJP looked at the Office of Public Advocacy (OPA). The report did not reveal any underutilized categories except for white males and identified a need for policies on diversifying the work force. The state CASA director has focused on a diversified staff with six members: three White, one Alaska Native, and two mixed race.

The state CASA director would like the DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) plan to focus on change within the organization and the need to increase diversity of staff, volunteers and lay GALs. This is difficult in rural Alaska where there are high populations of Alaska Native people. Native American/Alaska Native volunteers prefer to focus on helping children and less on the courts.

There are no formalized plans in place but staff are developing DEI plans now.

The current staff/volunteer training for DEI utilizes what is available from National CASA/GAL and other resources within the state. In the past, the Knowing Who You Are diversity training was modified to Alaska data but the approach has changed and is no longer a requirement for staff. The *Ground Water Analysis* training and

poverty simulation training offered by National CASA/GAL was recommended. CASA staff participated in a two-day workshop on DEI that was sponsored by the Child Welfare Academy.

Alaska CASA is recognized for valuing diversity, but efforts have not improved recruiting results. There have been good conversations with tribal courts to improve better diversity of advocates while also growing tribal court involvement.

Recommendations

- Develop a DEI plan that includes recruitment goals for a diversified staff and volunteer corps and tracks progress on the plan.
- Update DEI plan at least every three years.
- Offer regular training on disproportionality, cultural competence and continuing impacts of racism and other forms of discrimination.

Pillar 2: Leadership

The organization is equitable, inclusive and reflects the diversity of the community it serves

10. Engages and provides services to individuals equitably regardless of race, color, ethnicity, pregnancy, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, marital status, age, disability, genetic information or other differences

Summary

The State of Alaska adheres to ADA regulations. The State of Alaska manages all discrimination policies and claims and there have been no complaints within Alaska CASA.

The state CASA director is working on a DEI plan for staff/volunteers that will include training requirements.

ADA compliance is handled by the State of Alaska.

In 2020, the Child Welfare Academy did a 2-day workshop on DEI that was attended by CASA staff. A DEI workshop is always included at the Annual GAL/CASA conference. The conference will be held this year with child welfare, GALs, tribal representatives, and foster parents in November 2021.

Pillar 2: Leadership

Partners in National CASA/GAL and local CASA/GAL activities

11. Participates in National CASA/GAL and local CASA/GAL activities

Summary

The state CASA director received the new state CASA director training from a National CASA/GAL staff member and participates in National CASA/GAL monthly state director meetings, sharing information with local office staff. All National CASA/GAL communication is forwarded to local CASA offices and there is a standing agenda item about National CASA/GAL information during all weekly staff meetings. All staff retreats include National CASA/GAL specific discussions.

The state CASA director has attended the state directors' meetings held at the annual conferences. All the CASA staff have access to the National CASA/GAL website portal. The monthly volunteer newsletters developed by individual office staff and the quarterly newsletters from state CASA director's office include National CASA/GAL information. The information also goes to GALs and anyone who signs up for the newsletter via website.

The state CASA director responded to Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) requests from National CASA/GAL and met with other state directors about developing strong CASA programs to serve tribal courts. The state director was a member of the Tribal Leadership Council when she was a local program coordinator.

The state CASA director manages all membership renewals and data reporting to National CASA/GAL including the six-month report and annual survey.

The state director involved representatives of National CASA/GAL in their Office for Victims of Crime grant sustainability planning.

HIGHLY EFFECTIVE REVIEW PILLAR 3

Pillar 3: Funding, Legislation and Presence

Partners with National CASA/GAL to impact federal legislation and appropriations

12. Responsive to National CASA/GAL regarding federal legislation and/or appropriations *(if allowed by administrative authority)*

Summary

The state CASA director was responsive to recent requests from National CASA/GAL to interface around the reauthorization of CAPTA. She is limited in working with state government representatives but there are no restrictions on federal interaction although any requests need to be approved by the OPA director. The OPA director reached out to Senators Murkowski and Sullivan to inform them of the impact of changes to CAPTA on Alaska and how changes could negatively impact the GAL and CASA program.

Pillar 3: Funding, Legislation and Presence

Partners with National CASA/GAL on national funding opportunities that benefit the CASA network

13. Responsive to National CASA/GAL regarding national private and public funding opportunities *(if allowed by administrative authority)*

Summary

There have been no private funding requests to Alaska CASA from National CASA/GAL.

Any plans for applying for federal funding are shared with National CASA/GAL.

The state CASA director seeks out opportunities for funding and submits them to the OPA director for approval before any submissions.

Alaska CASA did receive an Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) local/state grant around substance use disorder. Sally Erny of National CASA/GAL was a member of the OVC/BJA advisory group working with grantees. Becky

Griffin and Sally interacted on the grant and two staff members at National CASA/GAL participated in the OVC grant sustainability site visit.

Pillar 3: Funding, Legislation and Presence

Operates on a statewide basis and is a recognized partner in state-level decision making and is a leader in advancing child welfare legislation that supports the mission

14. Seeks to participate in state-level decision making

Summary

The state CASA program does engage in state level relationships and local coordinators work with their local jurisdictions. The state CASA director participates in several groups including the Children’s Justice Task Force and Court Improvement Program.

The state CASA director obtains specific local information from local offices to share with state level groups in order to represent the statewide perspective of CASA. She is in regular communication with the local program coordinators and very aware of their needs.

There is no activity around state legislation as they are a state agency. If the CASA staff want to pursue legislative action, they work with OPA to determine if what they are asking for is a state OPA priority. Only the OPA Senior Staff can propose legislative changes.

Statutes read that a GAL is assigned to every CINA case and the OPA seeks to assign a CASA to every case when a volunteer is available.

Pillar 3: Funding, Legislation and Presence

Obtains, maximizes and leverages state funding support

15. Builds relationships with state agencies, legislators (if allowed by administrative authority) and the judiciary to support opportunities for funding

Summary

The recent study, *Supporting and Expanding Statewide CASA Programs*, will help the OPA director in his legislative request regarding and in communicating needs of the CASA program. The general budget for OPA identifies three CASA staff positions with OPA covering general expenses. The FACC and other funding sources cover other expenses

The state CASA program has a Strategic Communications Plan that covers various topics and audiences. It looks at how the program communicates, who are the players to communicate with and what information needs to be communicated. There has not been much activity around public awareness.

The FACC recently changed to support youth more broadly, not just children served by the CASA program. This support organization continues to provide mini grants for the CASA program including paying for the needs of children and families, mileage for volunteers, conferences and training.

The state CASA program is comfortable with their working relationship with FACC but are concerned that they raise money in the name of the CASA program but is not earmarked only for CASA activities. They are watching to see the success of the first auction to be held without the use of CASA name.

There is an agreement with FACC that is based on block funds/finances; specifically what FACC will pay for. There may be some discussion about creating a true CASA program auxiliary that exists only to serve the CASA program needs as defined by the program.

According to FACC, in recent years Alaska CASA has not used all of the available funds they have offered and this is a concern. They are also concerned about the decrease in the number of CASA volunteers and children served when the need remains great and funding and staffing have increased.

FACC expresses a strong commitment to the CASA program and a good working relationship. They believe they could be more of a resource if asked and although they have frequent contact with the program, they do not feel an integral part.

Any increases in state funding are requested by the OPA director who determines what the needs are and then makes a request to the legislature on behalf of the larger OPA agency.

The state CASA office is working on building a case for support.

Recommendations

- Assess the relationship with FACC and explore more ways to benefit from the support and/or assess the need for an auxiliary only for the CASA program.

Pillar 3: Funding, Legislation and Presence

Obtains, maximizes and leverages state funding support

16. Seeks state funding

Summary

Currently the state CASA program operates under the OPA budget which manages all state funding requests. Alaska CASA has received National CASA/GAL Core Model and Mentoring grants and grants from OVC – Opioid Impacted Youth (extended through June 2023) and through Alcohol Sales Tax. The CASA staff are currently exploring an option to apply for Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds this year. The Criminal Justice Office manages the VOCA funds.

OPA Funding has shown a decrease because they recently put the Anchorage and Juneau staff positions under grants and took them out of the OPA budget. Overall, with the state funds and grants, the CASA budget has increased.

Recommendations

- Explore additional sources of funding to further strengthen the organization and recruit, screen, train and activate more CASA volunteers.

Pillar 3: Funding, Legislation and Presence

Secures sustainable, adequate, and diverse financial resources

17. Has adequate resources to meet current state organization operations and a grant sustainability plan

Summary

The state CASA director and the OPA finance director develop the budget and meet quarterly to monitor it. This finance director is working with the CASA staff to develop a Financial Sustainability Plan which will inform the director of OPA when he goes before the legislature to ask for funding. There are plans to coordinate the Financial Sustainability Plan with a growth plan, yet to be developed.

Through its placement in the OPA, the program has a process to manage current budgetary needs. Funding is largely state government funding and program could benefit from more diverse funding.

Recommendations

- Assess the rate of growth of the program’s budget and staff as well as volunteers and examine why the number of children served as decreased so significantly (from 692 in 2016 to 295 in 2020) and how to change that course.

Pillar 3: Funding, Legislation and Presence

Supported by statutory authority for CASA/GAL programs and volunteer role

18. Has or is working to achieve CASA/GAL enabling legislation including the volunteer role

Summary

The state CASA director participates on several committees, including CIP, the CINA Committee, Children’s Justice Act Task Force, Tribal State collaborative meetings, and the Steering Committee for the Alaska Child Welfare Conference.

The GAL is required by statute and the GAL may be an attorney or lay person. There is an understanding that the GAL program will support CASA volunteers for children on as many cases as possible. CASA is in state statute and no changes to the statute are needed at this time. At one point there was discussion on whether Alaska CASA should be a non-profit but those discussions resulted in the determination that the current structure as publicly administer entity works better for Alaska. Any work to grow the CASA program would need to include an evaluation the capacity of the current model.

Recommendations

- Explore the opportunity to propose a statutory change that defines the CASA program and role of the volunteer and that those roles are aligned with the National CASA/GAL Core Model and Standards.

Pillar 3: Funding, Legislation and Presence

Maintains sound financial and operational systems assuring stewardship, accountability and risk management

19. Has written financial internal controls and systems that support preparation of financial statements that are consistent with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP)

Summary

The OPA Finance office handles internal controls and the management and budgeting of all funds for the CASA program both OPA funds and outside grants. This office follows all state internal controls. OPA pays all bills and the CASA staff are required to have a pre-authorization to spend funds. OPA does have a credit card which the CASA staff can use with OPA permission.

The state CASA director meets with the OPA finance director frequently, sometimes daily and no less than quarterly. OPA uses state proprietary financial software and the state CASA director utilizes an Excel spreadsheet to track grant funds.

There are no separate local office budgets. The state CASA director approves any costs for local offices and tracks expenses for each office on an Excel spreadsheet.

State procurement policy is followed with all bidding, quotes and contracts – per state of Alaska policy.

The CASA program does not have cash reserves.

Pillar 3: Funding, Legislation and Presence

Promotes and maintains National CASA/GAL brand consistency at the local and state level

20. Complies with National CASA/GAL branding requirements and policies which includes trademarks, slogans, logos and other brand assets

Summary

During the document review, it was noted that based on communication samples provided, Alaska CASA is not in alignment with National CASA/GAL brand guidelines. The state CASA director reported they are working to correct the logo with their rebranding efforts. The CASA of Southeast AK program was also noted as misusing the brand.

The local program coordinators are concerned that the National CASA/GAL provided images “do not look like Alaska.” They would prefer Images that are region specific.

Requirements

- Update all uses of the logo and brand to comply with National CASA/GAL branding standards.

Recommendations

- Work with public awareness consultant (currently engaged as part of the OVC grant) to balance the proper use of the brand with the desire to have more Alaska specific images.

Pillar 3: Funding, Legislation and Presence

Promotes and maintains National CASA/GAL brand consistency at the local and state level

21. Adheres to National CASA/GAL policies that apply to State CASA/GAL Organizations

Summary

The state and local National CASA/GAL Standards are shared with the OPA director and all local program coordinators are currently reviewing the newly revised Standards. The Standards are shared on One-Drive to ensure the local coordinators understand and adhere to them.

The state CASA director shares National CASA/GAL policies and procedures with the local program coordinators. Currently, the staff is working to update, review and revise Alaska CASA policies to comply with National CASA/GAL Standards.

Two areas identified were to confirm are whether background checks were updated every four years and requirements around insurance for transporting children.

Requirements

- Provide National CASA/GAL with updated Background Screening Policy and Transportation Policy

HIGHLY EFFECTIVE REVIEW PILLAR 4

Pillar 4: Governance

Operates in compliance with regulations and laws

22. Is in compliance with regulations and laws

Summary

Alaska CASA follows all the state guidelines under OPA with any necessary legal counsel provided by the lead GAL attorney. The program has access to legal counsel through the GAL attorney, another attorney on the team or the Attorney General's office.

If any policy changes are made and need to be shared, the state CASA director would determine what training would need to be provided to local volunteers.

Public information meetings are open to the public but it is unclear if the state CASA program is subject to sunshine/state open meeting laws.

All CASA staff and volunteers sign a conflict-of-interest policy and code of ethics. All CASA Staff complete a state annual disclosure form reporting any outside volunteerism or employment.

Recommendations

- Implement a policy requiring staff to sign a conflict-of-interest policy annually.

Pillar 4: Governance

Operates in compliance with regulations and laws

23. Is familiar with and has access to resources that enable regulatory compliance

Summary

The state CASA director is working on a policy, practice and process manual for Alaska CASA which will collect all policies in one place along with processes. She is working to use CASA Manager to manage support information and provide local offices with coordinated materials, particularly regarding the brand.

Pillar 4: Governance

Fulfills responsibilities for oversight, leadership, resource development and support

24. Establishes organizational goals and evaluates them annually

Summary

The lead GAL attorney is responsible for performance evaluations of the state CASA director. She gathers information from judges, child welfare, paid GALs, and local CASA coordinators and compares this information to the job description. Areas of evaluation include success with funding resources, day to day operations and recruiting and child service goals. With the new grants the state CASA office has received, the performance evaluations will look at grant goals as well. The lead GAL attorney shared they have received very positive feedback from federal funders on how the state CASA director and grant project coordinator manage their grants.

While a specific state performance review format is followed it does not include CASA director job description specifics. The process does allow for employee feedback and is signed by the employee, evaluator and the director of OPA.

The lead GAL attorney states they can see the progress made by the program as they compare to previous years.

Pillar 4: Governance

Fulfills responsibilities for oversight, leadership, resource development and support

25. Manages financial resources in order to support the state organization's provision of services

Summary

Alaska CASA follows the state's competitive bidding process. Goods and services over a specific amount are subject to competitive bidding. They have a process for documenting exceptions to the competitive bidding process. All bids are advertised through RFPs and managed by the OPA finance office director who oversees the Procurement Policy alignment. The OPA finance office director interfaces with the state department of administration office on procurement and financial internal controls.

Pillar 4: Governance

Fulfills responsibilities for oversight, leadership, resource development and support

26. Reviews, updates and adopts all policies every three years or as required

Summary

The state CASA director is pulling together a plan to review all policies and a schedule of reviews. Each policy is now stamped with review date and frequency of future reviews.

All the CASA staff participate in annual retreat to review all policies which are often shared with the lead GAL attorney, director and deputy director of OPA.

The lead GAL attorney is researching whether any policies need to be reviewed by the director of OPA as well as assuring that there are no CASA policies developed that are counter to state government policies. In addition to all CASA policies being cross referenced with state of Alaska policies, they are cross referenced with Alaska state statutes, the state HR office, and the OPA staff.

The CASA volunteers are managed by the same policies as paid GALs. An example is the transportation policy which states they cannot transport parents.

During COVID pandemic, the policies were reviewed for visitation guidelines with approval given for virtual visits.

To disseminate information about state policies The state CASA director drafts all policy updates which then go to the lead GAL attorney for approval before being shared with staff and volunteers. All notices to the CASA volunteers from the state CASA director are included in monthly local trainings and newsletters. All GALs also receive any updated policy information. The CASA staff observe the open rate for the policy notices and follow up with more information as needed.

~STANDARDS #27-32 DO NOT APPLY TO PUBLICLY ADMINISTERED STATE CASA/GAL ORGANIZATIONS~

GHLY EFFECTIVE REVIEW PILLAR 5

Pillar 5: Staff

Highly qualified, skilled and experienced staff who provide effective leadership

33. Has relevant education and/or experience and competencies required by job descriptions

Summary

The staff hiring process aligns with specific items required by Standards as well as what the CASA staff know internally of what is needed. The process follows all state Human Resource (HR) protocol and requirements (e.g., education and experience). The process complies with all state requirements (posting for at least two weeks, applicants are scored based on a matrix provided by the HR state office) for hiring. HR sends the applications of vetted candidates to the state CASA director who puts together a hiring committee, which reviews all the applicants and decides who to interview. The hiring committee conducts the first and second interviews. All background checks are performed toward the end of the interview process.

The state CASA director shared that it is difficult to add staff. Often, they can add contractors (the grant project coordinator is a contractor). At times, they can hire a long-term temporary position.

HR has no specific requirements for continuing education or licensure by law or profession. CASA program staff do have to complete 12 hours of continuing education each year.

There are weekly check-ins meetings between the state CASA director and CASA staff. They also come together as a team once a week. Prior to the pandemic, the state CASA director visited programs on-site at least once a year.

Recommendations

- Submit a logic model to National CASA/GAL.
- Develop a growth plan to drive the expansion of the CASA program in Alaska so that ultimately all the children in need can be served with a high-quality best interest advocate.

Pillar 5: Staff

Highly qualified, skilled and experienced staff who provide effective leadership

34. Staff are screened through required background checks

Summary

The CASA staff and volunteers follow the same background screening process with all forms sent to a paralegal in the Anchorage GAL office for processing. According to the state director, the checks meet the requirements of National CASA/GAL Standards. Alaska CASA also does a Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) check for CASA volunteers. Following completion of the checks, the reports are uploaded into CASA Manager and reviewed every four years. All GALs follow same screening policy

The state CASA director is not sure of the screening process for all OPA employees.

The state CASA director has access through CASA Manager to check on any volunteer's screening status at any time.

Requirement

- Supply National CASA/GAL with the background screening policy for Alaska CASA employees.

Pillar 5: Staff

Operates with trust, accountability and commitment

35. Has written human resources policies and procedures which direct the work and activities of all staff in the organization

Summary

The state CASA staff utilize the OPA HR staff who provides all HR related information and makes sure they get all HR updates. If there are changes, they receive an email. If there are major changes, they have a "town hall" to discuss within OPA.

CASA program coordinators have the option to be part of the state employees' union. Staff shared they have not formally been asked for policy input by state government but sometimes the union asks their members. Neither the state CASA director nor the lead GAL attorney is eligible to be part of the union.

Recently hired staff reported the state CASA director walked her through the HR policies and paperwork during her orientation and the new staff member watched a video provided by HR. Other staff could not recall their on-boarding having been in their positions for a significant number of years.

The document review noted that the Staff and Governing Body training schedule for new CASA staff members was submitted but did not specifically include competency, inclusion and diversity issues as required by Standards. Alaska HR policies include a non-discrimination policy.

Recommendations

- Recommend staff on-boarding include items identified in the National CASA/GAL Standards

Pillar 5: Staff

Highly qualified, skilled and experienced staff who provide effective leadership

36. Utilizes a system of checks and balances to ensure effective oversight

Summary

All performance evaluations are completed annually. A six-month review is required during a new employee's first year. The state CASA director provides a draft of the evaluation to the employee before the review. During the evaluation, they review the job description and discuss any changes, look at previous year's goals and accomplishments, and set up to three goals for the next year. The state CASA director offers support and resources to achieve the goals. Staff reported the evaluations are a two-way street; nothing in the evaluation is a surprise. Both the employee and supervisor sign the evaluation and a copy is sent to HR. Staff can attach comments or areas of disagreement. The annual review aligns with the staff anniversary date of hire. The performance evaluation process does not include a specific plan for skill-building of employees. Staff goals are also reviewed informally during their weekly 1:1 meeting with the state CASA director.

The state CASA director mentioned she would like to get feedback from volunteers for the program coordinators' evaluations.

Recommendations

- Create a specific training plan for skill-building that is documented, tracked and time-bound.

Pillar 5: Staff

Is experienced and effective in building relationships

37. Has developed/maintained positive relationship with multiple stakeholders

Summary

CASA program staff have maintained positive relationships with stakeholders on the state and local levels. Staff have participated in the Child Welfare Academy DEI training.

There is no formal leadership training provided to the local CASA staff but all are encouraged to participate in National CASA/GAL offerings.

Each local CASA office has its own culture and differs in how they recruit volunteers, work with other service providers and meet their goals. The state CASA director provides local staff with tools they need to their work. All the offices use templates provided by the state office.

Staff members reported serving on various statewide committees and work groups including Facing Foster Care in Alaska, local Rotary clubs, the CIP, and the Alaska Federation of Nations.

CASA program staff have maintained positive relationships with stakeholders on the state and local levels. Staff have participated in the Child Welfare Academy DEI training.

There is no formal leadership training provided to the local CASA staff but all are encouraged to participate in National CASA/GAL offerings.

The staff feel that the *Supporting and Expanding Statewide CASA Programs* research has benefitted the program.

Staff were able to communicate information about the trends they have observed in children served and the volunteers activated over the past five years. They mentioned that COVID has hampered recruitment and they have struggled to find the right recipe for recruitment in Juneau where another factor has been the opioid crisis driving numbers of children in need up.

Staff report little problems recruiting volunteers in Anchorage where there were recently 63 people interested in attending training. Volunteers do have significant frustrations with the Office of Children’s Services (OCS) where there is huge staff turnover and the system moves slowly. These factors contribute to volunteer turnover. Some volunteers left during the pandemic. Child served numbers went down in Anchorage although the need is there. Staff noted less large sibling groups with 2 or 3 children in a sibling group instead of 10. Staff in some offices noted the number of volunteers has been flat and the number of children served is down. Cases are long; five, six or seven years. Volunteers are now not as willing to remain involved as long. Cases have increased in complexity and staff are mindful about who they assign and try not to burn volunteers out.

For five months the Valley CASA program was without a coordinator due to turnover and pandemic related challenges. Volunteer numbers are down from 22 to 16 although the program is recruiting consistently. They are now experiencing some new program growth.

The grant program coordinator is currently on contract and was formerly a program coordinator. She was hired with funds from an OVC grant and looks for funding opportunities, develops trainings, worked with the University of Alaska on CASA program research (published in National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges’ (NCJFCJ) Juvenile and Family Court Journal and develops resources for statistics, information, data.

The grant program coordinator approaches the CASA program with a holistic approach as to how to grow the CASA mission in Alaska.

Recommendations

- Continue existing and develop new mechanisms for support of CASA staff and volunteers.
- Implement a growth plan which includes increased volunteer recruitment and staff and volunteer support.

HIGHLY EFFECTIVE REVIEW ANALYSIS PILLAR 6

Pillar 6: Service

Has the capacity to effectively and efficiently meet local network needs and state service needs

38. Is organized to serve the entire local network and state service area

Summary

The state CASA director is working to develop a growth plan which will include a strategy based on collecting data and information obtained through focus group studies. They are currently in “lock step” with the GALs and very interconnected. The state director would like to create a position that specifically works with the GAL office. She wants to look at role of the CASA volunteer and what they are asking these volunteers to do and will consider making changes to the role. She will explore what is going well, what is not, and how to expand the program through staff GALs, contract GALs and in tribal courts.

Currently, staff GALs are partnered with a CASA volunteer; with plans to review the processes for CASA volunteers to work with contract GALs.

There are plans to look into working with tribal courts as there are currently no tribal CASA programs. It would be helpful to design a path for a tribal CASA program to be part of the state CASA.

There are also plans to look at how to prioritize the assignment of a CASA volunteer to best serve the children and visit them in-person as geography in Alaska is a challenge affecting the growth plan. The Anchorage program has the most potential for growth in number of children served.

The state office staff also plan to look at program regionalization as a strategy for growth as well as other innovations to serve more children. Alaska CASA currently serves 300 children of the 3,000 in care where they have office locations. Statewide there are 4,500 children in care. The number of children served has declined in recent years and is a concern of the CASA program and the FACC.

Recommendations

- Development of a growth plan that includes an annual assessment of children’s needs, children served, a written strategy to serve the entire network and a process to track progress.

Pillar 6: Service

Has the capacity to effectively and efficiently meet local network needs and state service needs

39. New and expanded local programs or auxiliaries are established in accordance with National CASA/GAL Program Development Process

Summary

Alaska CASA has worked with National CASA/GAL New Member Support team to discuss options for serving new areas. They are not currently developing new or expanding existing programs. While there are discussions about program development and expansion, the stability of existing programs is the top priority.

The CASA program is somewhat limited by their structure and by their geography with many communities are off the road system. Current programs are in areas where they can most easily serve children.

Recommendations

- Include plans for new program development and program expansion in growth plan.

Pillar 6: Service

Has the capacity to effectively and efficiently meet local network needs and state service needs

40. Assesses local network needs annually

Summary

While there is not a formal assessment of local offices, Alaska CASA is continually thinking of options to serve more children.

The four programs reported serving a total of 295 children with 158 volunteers in 2020. Anchorage alone served 185 children and is the most likely the place to focus on growth. They may pilot some options there before formalizing a network growth plan. There are more than 3000 children in care in the four program areas.

Statewide there are 4500 children in care. Historically the program has served around 10% of children in care and that percentage dropped in 2020 to 6%. While they have been seeing a decline in the number of children served in the past few years there has been strong volunteer interest “post” pandemic as the state courts have begun to open.

Former programs in the Kenai Peninsula and Yukon–Kuskokwim Delta closed but state CASA staff would like to start up in these two areas again.

CASA programs exist in cities where there is a state office for GALs. It is more difficult to have a CASA program where there is no state GAL office.

The state office will prioritize new startup and growth in areas where the most children in need live.

Pillar 6: Service

Has the capacity to effectively and efficiently meet local network needs and state service needs

41. Assesses state organization’s capacity to address needs annually and develops and implements a plan to meet needs

Summary

The state CASA director discusses goals with each program and any challenges associated with growth. Although there are limited resources available, they work to create tools to improve recruitment; update the website and utilize social media. CASA staff work to identify any areas where they could seek financial support for activities from the FACC. All the staff are consistently looking for low cost or free options for recruitment including community pages and bulletin boards.

The grant project coordinator mentioned working to research potential grant opportunities to support growth goals. It is difficult to add new projects to current staff hours.

Local CASA coordinators will also provide ideas for grant proposals. Coordinators are also asked to increase volunteer diversity with their recruitment efforts.

Recommendations

- Develop and implement a plan to meet local program needs and serve more children who have experienced abuse or neglect.

Pillar 6: Service

Has the capacity to effectively and efficiently meet local network needs and state service needs

42. Evaluates service delivery to the network annually

Summary

The state CASA director shared that she would like to design a formal means to gather feedback from local program coordinators and evaluate needs. Currently, the assessment is informal and anecdotal.

The state CASA director mentioned the most recent OPA directors find significant value in the CASA program and legislators know the need for GAL’s and CASA volunteers. The work of CASA volunteers is appealing to the governor and legislators.

Recommendations

- Develop a formal assessment or evaluation to gather information from local program offices as to their satisfaction with services from the state office and what their needs are for additional services and support.

Pillar 6: Service

Develops a written strategic plan/framework every 1-3 years that incorporates short- and long-term goals necessary for fulfilling the organization's mission

43. Engages in ongoing planning to advance the mission of the organization

Summary

The state CASA director stated that the operational goals are identified annually and she wants to finalize the process and procedures manual for new staff so all working in alignment. This manual will be included in the AK Strategic Plan and Sustainability Action Plan.

She is also Working more with JBS International (contractor for TTA for OJ and OVC) to help develop sustainability plan.

Recommendation

- Share sustainability plan with National CASA/GAL.

Pillar 6: Service

Continuously improves the quality of services and leadership it provides

44. Participates in the Highly Effective Standards Review conducted by National CASA/GAL as required

Summary

Alaska CASA staff and OPA staff participated in the Highly Effective Standards Review process.

Pillar 6: Service

Continuously improves the quality of services and leadership it provides

45. Ensures financial, statistical and programmatic information is collected

Summary

Local CASA programs submit their own data to National CASA/GAL using data from CASA Manager. The state CASA director submits for the state office and reviews the local data periodically for accuracy. The state CASA office works directly with the Alaska court system and social services to obtain child data. The Office of Children's services has its own research and analysis reports to share (children in care demographics, substance abuse issues, etc.).

The state CASA director uses data to develop growth and enhancement goals for Alaska CASA, looking to see how many volunteers are needed. She produces annual summaries for each local program office and is preparing a survey to community welfare partners to get sense of the perception of CASA in each program area. This data collected will help assess effectiveness and need.

The state CASA director stated there is a need for more grant funding because of less certainty around the sustainability of all positions.

The OPA uses its own data base (DBK) and supplies data related to GALs and number of children served to identify GALs that would like CASA volunteers assigned. Every child in Alaska is assigned a GAL.

All CASA staff receive CASA Manager training with additional 1:1 training for technical assistance. There is no formal mechanism to verify accuracy other than periodic checks by the state CASA director. The program coordinators are becoming more familiar with CASA Manager which has greatly improved data collection and reliability.

There is no local program data reported directly to Alaska CASA because of their access to the local program's CASA Manager information.

The GALs supervise the CASA volunteers assigned to their cases. The local program directors do not supervise volunteers but provide support. Only the GALs submit a court report at disposition. The CASA volunteers do not submit separate reports to the court.

Pillar 6: Service

Educates the public regarding the mission of the organization, the work of local CASA/GAL programs and the needs of the children served

46. Works with the court and judiciary to educate and ensure compliance with the Core Model

Summary

The local CASA coordinators are directed to interact with the local judiciary and are familiar with the Core Model to answer any questions

The lead GAL attorney includes information about the Core Model in training for judges and GALs.

Pillar 6: Service

Educates the public regarding the mission of the organization, the work of local CASA/GAL programs and the needs of the children served

47. Has and executes a public education and community awareness plan

Summary

A draft Strategic Communication Plan/Public Awareness plan was submitted. The local programs prepare their own communication plans individually.

The grant project coordinator is preparing a survey for stakeholders about their interaction with CASA volunteers. There are also plans for more of a focus on social media practices, helping people see themselves in the role of an advocate (resulting in improved diversity) and creating a unified voice from all the programs.

Brand guidelines incorporate National CASA/GAL Branding Guidelines and guide core messaging for the Alaska CASA network. There has been discussion on whether to begin to identify the other responsibilities of a CASA volunteer beyond those involved with the court to alleviate resistance to working with the legal system.

The state CASA office is now producing a statewide quarterly newsletter while the local newsletters go just to current and former volunteers. The statewide website hosts individual program sections.

The state CASA office partners with the Child Welfare Academy and OCS on awareness campaigns. Other agencies include information on CASAs in their training.

Recommendations

- Provide a copy of the new Strategic Communication Plan/Public Awareness Plan to National CASA/GAL

Pillar 6: Service

Collects, reviews, ensures the integrity of, and reports data from the local program network in non-aggregate form for National CASA/GAL and data as required to state agencies for national reporting

48. Has a process to ensure the timely submission of data from the local program network to National CASA/GAL and state agencies

Summary

Alaska CASA has developed a good process for accurate and timely submissions of data and reports.

Pillar 6: Service

Collects, reviews, ensures the integrity of, and reports data from the local program network in non-aggregate form for National CASA/GAL and data as required to state agencies for national reporting

49. Reviews data from local programs for accuracy

Summary

The state CASA director has direct access to all data in CASA Manager. She periodically checks for accuracy and reviews reports during weekly 1:1 meeting with local program coordinators.

Pillar 6: Service

Submits accurate, validated and timely state level data and reports to National CASA/GAL

50. Submits timely state level data and reports to National CASA/GAL

Summary

Alaska CASA has a strong record of accurate and timely submissions of data and reports to National CASA/GAL.

Pillar 6: Service

Ensures high-quality facilitation and delivery of research-informed and evidence-based National CASA/GAL Pre-Service training through evaluation and assessment

51. Ensures high quality delivery of National CASA/GAL Pre-Service Training

Summary

The state CASA program is currently using the National CASA/GAL 2012 Pre-Service Curriculum with a virtual model adapted to Alaska. During the COVID pandemic, the pre-service training is offered virtually with local programs working together to present. A portion of each chapter is completed by the new volunteer on their own and the remaining work is done virtually/in person. The CASA staff added a legal portion to the training which is presented by the GAL office.

The state CASA director has observed all trainings and continues to watch virtually.

The most recently hired program coordinator will attend one of the 2012 pre-service trainings and attend a National CASA/GAL Training of Facilitators (TOF) using the 2017 Pre-Service Curriculum to observe the difference in the two curriculums.

The state CASA director is identified as the person who should be the Master Trainer for the state. The local directors have been through a variety of TOFs at National CASA/GAL conferences or online.

The training has been adapted to the needs of the CASA volunteer in Alaska, in particular no court observations are required now because of COVID limiting court access.

The local programs do their own swearing in ceremonies following the virtual training.

The state CASA director shared that they would like to do an overhaul of the curriculum to bring everyone up to 2017 version but that project has been delayed during the pandemic. They also want to clarify what the court and GALs can expect from the CASA volunteers.

In addition to the curriculum training, CIP offers trainings for legal parties and ICWA training, which are used to compliment the curriculum.

The CASA staff debrief after all trainings to see what could be changed or added. A recent example of this led to adding more ICWA material specific to Alaska to the training.

Two of the local program directors reported participating in pre-service training during their first months on the job.

Requirements

- All local CASA coordinators are required to complete the pre-service training.

Final Summary

The Alaska CASA program, through its position as part of the Office of Public Advocacy, is engaged at the state level with the judiciary, legal and child welfare stakeholders. Local offices feel supported and rely on the state CASA office for guidance and leadership. Alaska CASA is supported by the OPA and through the state infrastructure, governance, human resources, financial management and technology are among the functions made possible. The state government infrastructure allows the CASA program administrator to focus primarily on local office support.

While aligned with the Core Model, there are two elements of the Alaska CASA model that vary from the Core Model; the volunteer is appointed by OPA (instead of the court) and the volunteer makes his/her report to the GAL who advocates for the child's best interest in court. The Alaska model operates in accordance with state statute but does not provide a level of independence of the CASA volunteer from the GAL and instead, in some cases, the CASA volunteer serves in more of an assistant role to the GAL.

State CASA staff would like to prioritize the examination of the current model of operation within the OPA and GAL office and see if there is a more effective model of operation. The state CASA office, GAL attorney and OPA should also explore the recent decline in children served while resources have increased.

A one-year Action Plan is requested to address the requirements and recommendations noted in this report.

Alaska CASA demonstrates leadership, knowledge and engagement, as well as a strong commitment to the CASA mission, Core Model and National CASA/GAL's standards and policies. The work of the staff and volunteers is generally highly regarded and appreciated. The state office and local offices and volunteers enjoy a good reputation in the state. National CASA/GAL is grateful for the OPA's administration of the state CASA office and for the long-standing commitment and expertise of Joy Petrie, state CASA director.

State Preliminary HESRP Checklist



NATIONAL CASA/GAL ASSOCIATION

State HESRP Documents Reviewed For Publicly Administered States

HIGHLY EFFECTIVE STANDARDS REVIEW PROCESS

- Annual Budget for nonprofits / Plan to carry out mandates with available funding for public state agencies
- Annual Report
- Background checks (board/governing body & staff) – evidence they have been conducted
- Background Screening Policy
- Board Development Plan (nonprofit)
 - Board orientation and onboarding materials
 - Board performance evaluation process
 - Board Recruitment Plan
 - Board role descriptions
- Board meeting minutes for the past 12 months with attached reports (nonprofit)
- Communications - samples of the use of the logo, trademark, etc.
- Communications with local programs - documentation of inclusion of National CASA/GAL information
- Confidentiality Policy
- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Crisis Management Plan / Communications Plan
- Diversity and Inclusion Plan
- Documentation of committee and conference participation
- Documentation of efforts to participate in state-level decision-making
- Documentation of meetings with courts and judicial personnel
- Finance committee minutes for the past 12 months (nonprofit)
- Financial Sustainability Plan
- Gift Acceptance Policy
- Growth Plan
- Human Resources Policies / Employee Handbook
 - Grievance Policy
 - Human resources practices
 - Insurance protection
 - Non-Discrimination Policy
 - Training and development opportunities
 - Travel Policies
 - Wage Policy and benefits
 - Whistleblower Policy
 - Working conditions
- Insurance Policy
- Internal controls for processing contributions

- Internal Financial Controls
- IRS form 941 covering the past 12 months - evidence
- Mission Statement with evidence of formal adoption
- Organizational Chart
- Plan for cultivating relationships
- Pre-service facilitators and trainers of facilitators documentation
 - Proof of completion of pre-service volunteer training
 - Proof of completion of facilitator training or other certification process (if appropriate)
 - Documentation of completed hours of in-service/continuing education training
- Procurement Policy
- Program service delivery evaluation - evidence (program satisfaction tracked against service delivery goals)
- Program service delivery feedback – evidence (ex. surveys, scheduled calls, focus groups, committees)
- Public Education and Community Awareness Plan
- Public Policy Agenda (if developed)
- Public Policy Plan (nonprofit)
- Records Retention Policy
- Resource Development Plan / Fundraising Plan
- Resource Development Protocol (nonprofit)
- Social Media Policy
- Staff job descriptions
- Staff Professional Development Plan
- State Director job description
- State Director performance evaluation process
- State Director performance evaluation, signed and completed - evidence
- State Director Succession Plan
- Strategic Plan or Framework
- Training for leadership, board and staff – documentation of completed training, including diversity, equity and inclusion training
- Values Statement

REVIEW DOCUMENTS COLLECTED OR UPDATED VIA MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL OR OTHER NATIONAL CASA/GAL PROCESS

- 501(c)3 Letter of Determination (if applicable)
- Annual 990 (NP)
- Articles of Incorporation (NP)
- Audit, Financial Review and/or Compilation (NP)
- Board/Governing Body Roster with Affiliations (if applicable)
- Bylaws or Operational Procedures
- Evidence of committee and conference participation
- Logic Model
- State Statute/Court Rules (if applicable)