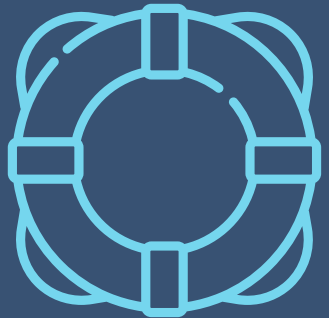


New Executive Director

SURVIVAL GUIDE



TEXASCASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

STRENGTHENING THE VOICES OF CASA STATEWIDE

New Executive Director

SURVIVAL GUIDE



TEXASCASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
 **FOR CHILDREN**

MISSION

Texas CASA's mission is to support local CASA volunteer advocacy programs and to advocate for effective public policy for children and families in the child protection system.

VISION

Texas CASA envisions a safe and positive future for all Texas children and families.

THE CASA WAY

We have an uncompromising belief that we will achieve what others think is impossible, and each of us is an essential part of the solution.

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www.TexasCASA.org

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WELCOME TO YOUR ROLE

As a new CASA Executive Director, you have taken on a leadership role of great importance, a role that can be transformative for children and families in your community. You will soon discover the many wonderful and challenging hats you will wear over the next year. You will be responsible for keeping many projects going simultaneously and with great accuracy. You will be a cheerleader for your staff and volunteers, build relationships with the courts and community partners, write grants to sustain your program, put out fires and share your vision and mission widely. Texas CASA is here to support you, to provide guidance and resources, and to help you keep a positive outlook and a smile on your face!

You are now part of a community of 72 CASA programs in 219 counties across the state of Texas who have nearly 11,000 volunteers serving more than 28,500 children in foster care. As you contemplate this scale, feel the pride that comes with being part of a powerful and positive movement. Join us in our commitment to The CASA Way: “We have an uncompromising belief that we will achieve what others think is impossible, and each of us is an essential part of the solution.”

Thank you for your commitment to leading the CASA movement in your community. There will be wonderful days, and there will be challenging days – and through it all, you will not be alone. We have faith in your capacity to do a fantastic job as Executive Director of your program, and we are here to back you up. Don’t hesitate to get in touch!

Yours,



Vicki Spriggs
Texas CASA CEO



DHB

SURVIVAL TIPS FOR HUMAN RESOURCES

Now that you've arrived in your new role, it's time to get to know your staff and the lay of the land. Executive transition is a great opportunity for growth, and can also be tough on a program. As a new ED, come in with a positive attitude and know your values and boundaries. They will be tested. Some of your staff will understand why the previous ED is no longer there and some might feel abandoned and afraid, or even resentful. It is important for you to get to know your team, and know what role they each play in the program. Reviewing job descriptions is a good place to start. Remember, you are inheriting someone else's idea of what works. Now, you get to build relationships, observe operations and make decisions about what works best for the organization.

Take a look at your organizational chart to see how it flows. Meet with your team one-on-one as well as in a group. You may have walked into a program with a strong core group, or maybe not. Consistently listen, document your meetings and continue forward. It may be tempting to reflect on your predecessor's mistakes or differences of opinion on leading a CASA program, but it is vital to encourage positivity and teamwork.

In order to effectively lead people, it is important to know what the rules are. Take time to review your personnel policies or handbook.

Your employee files should have all pertinent information in them with the exception of copies of the background checks, which are confidential. A review of the contents of employee files should include, as appropriate:

- The completed application,
- Job description,
- 3 unrelated references documented,
- Documentation of record checks,
- Verification of education for professional and administrative personnel,
- Training records,
- Annual performance evaluations,
- Disciplinary actions,
- Letters of recommendation,
- Time records,
- Termination summary, and
- Form I-9.

Motor vehicle division records checks are also a required background check for all staff who transport children and must be conducted annually. You will also need a copy of current driver's license and insurance coverage for all staff.

The employee file may contain the benefits package as well. Know what benefits your program offers, the portion paid by the program versus paid by staff, and the due dates and renewal dates of these benefits.

Develop and distribute a staff meeting calendar for the next three months and monitor successes and challenges.

Successful staff meetings take thought, planning, and sound execution. Such meetings should be held regularly, with the just-right frequency determined over time. Multi-county programs may need to utilize a webcam or telephone access to ensure everyone's voices are included and everyone has the same information, all the time. Have notes from staff meetings

recorded and distributed afterward. Nonprofit employees have a major stake in their organizations and make vital contributions to it. Staff meetings are also a great opportunity to discuss or do team building activities or make professional development plans. Make sure that everyone has an opportunity to shine and share their work and wisdom at various times during staff meetings.

Please review Texas CASA Standard 7: Human Resources.





SURVIVAL TIPS FOR WORKING WITH CHILD WELFARE PARTNERS

CASA programs work with many partner agencies within the child welfare system. The children we serve are in the legal custody of the state through the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). Over the years, CASA and DFPS have agreed to work together through the agreement known as a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The purpose of this MOU is to define and foster a collaborative working relationship between CASA programs throughout the state and the Child Protective Services (CPS) division of DFPS. This agreement establishes consistent policies and procedures that enhance these critical working relationships.

The parties expect that the protocols within this document will be adhered to and enforced by state and local leadership. It is required this document be reviewed and signed by all parties every two years. Review your most recent, signed MOU to learn about the roles each party plays. Setting up a meeting to review and sign the document is a great opportunity for you to meet the local case management staff.

With the ongoing implementation of Community-Based Care (CBC), key functions of the child welfare system – placement and case management duties – are shifting over time from CPS to local contractors, known as Single Source Continuum Contractors (SSCCs). Texas CASA has recognized the need for a new agreement to clarify roles between CASA programs and the SSCCs and we are working to develop a standard agreement that can be used by all CASA programs.

Our next primary partner is the court. All CASA cases are held in front of a judge and are on a mandated timeline with statutorily

required hearings. You learn about the court timeline in Pre-Service Training. It is crucial that you meet with the judge or judges in a timely manner. With a change in CASA leadership, you want the courts to know who you are and begin to develop a working relationship with them. It is also important that you attend court for observation, especially if you do not have CASA experience.

The CASA program has a written agreement with the court, reviewed every two years, that defines the working relationship between the program and the court. This written agreement must be renewed when there is a change in the judicial leadership or changes in policy, law or local court rules that substantially impact the relationship between the program and the court.

The CASA program abides by the Texas Family Code and any other statutes or court rules which govern the relationship with the court. Talk to your program staff about whether you are appointed as Guardian ad Litem, and what this means. To better understand your legal role, review section 107.002 of the Texas Family Code. The CASA program has regular communication with the court in order to evaluate the court's satisfaction with the program and to obtain the court's recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the program. Make an appointment with the court(s) to introduce yourself.

Please review Texas CASA Standard 1: Core Model and Mission, and Standard 5: Governance and Administration.

SURVIVAL TIPS FOR GOVERNANCE

Understanding the role of the nonprofit board is essential for the new ED. The role of the nonprofit board is to steer the organization towards a sustainable future by adopting sound, ethical and legal governance and financial management policies, as well as by making sure the nonprofit has adequate resources to advance its mission. The board is also responsible for hiring, terminating and evaluating the ED. Below are a few things you need to know:

- Texas CASA standards require that your board consist of a minimum of 9 voting board members. As the ED, you are a member of the board, but not a voting member. Your board members are also required to have term limits. Ask your board chair for a copy of the program's bylaws to ensure term limits are reflected within the bylaws.
- Your board is required to annually sign the program Conflict of Interest Policy. Ask your board chair to see the most recent signing and review it for the following:
 - If active volunteer advocates are members of the governing body, processes and procedures are in place for handling potential conflicts of interest in relation to personnel, human resources and other issues with potential for a conflict of interest being addressed by the governing body; and
 - Policies are in place restricting the employment of any person related within the second degree of affinity (spouse, in-laws or the grandparents/grandchildren of a spouse) or the third degree of consanguinity (parent,

child, sibling, grandparent/child, niece/nephew, aunt/uncle) to any member of the governing body, or to any other officer or employee authorized to employ or supervise such person.

- Ask your board chair to see the recent history of your program's board meetings, and review the past year's board minutes. The minutes should include the attendance records reflecting simple majority quorum was met, budget approval, review of finance reports (at a minimum of four times a year), and active committee reports. Pay attention to the topics and nature of discussions.
- Local Board Officer Development (LBOD) training is a required training offered by Texas CASA. Your board is required to send at least one board member to this training annually. It is a good practice to have two members registered in case one is unable to attend at the last minute. It is never too early to get commitments from your board members on who will attend. You may want to attend too, and you are welcome to do so!
- Your board chair is your direct link to the board as a whole. A strong partnership between you and your board chair is the single most important relationship in a strong organization. Find common ground based on mutual respect, trust, shared purpose, clearly defined roles and unflinching support for one another. Make sure you are meeting monthly with your board chair.

Please review Texas CASA Standard 4: Ethical Conduct and Confidentiality, and Standard 5: Governance and Administration.



SURVIVAL TIPS FOR RISK MANAGEMENT

In thinking about potential risks to your CASA program, what comes to mind? Some of the top contenders are risk to the children you serve, financial security and your program's reputation. Below are some ways to be aware of the potential risks and how to negate or reduce them.

Background Checks

All CASA board, staff and volunteers are required to have background checks cleared prior to serving your program. Before you were hired, your program had you submit to Fingerprint Background Checks (FBC) for any criminal history and they submitted your information into the Automated Background Check System (ABCS) for any child abuse allegations or history. Identify the person or persons (at least two persons are recommended) in your program that have the clearance required to access these systems, FBC and ABCS. Review the most recent program self-audit of those records to ensure all board, staff and volunteers are up to date.

If the former ED is still listed as an authorized user, they must be removed. You will need your own authorized access. The former ED must also be unsubscribed from the FBC and made inactive in the ABCS.

Not fulfilling the background check requirements can result in a big financial penalty: a sanction of 10% of the grants that Texas CASA administers. If we have a volunteer out visiting children and they don't have a background check, we have exposed a very vulnerable child to an unscreened adult. What goes wrong

for one CASA affects all CASAs, so this is a crucial element of your oversight.

Strong Financial Policies

Strong financial policies are a good first step in lessening the risk of mismanagement of funds—and policies need to be followed to be effective. Internal controls begin with segregation of accounting duties. Review your financial policy to determine if the following language is included and the policy is practiced:

- Two people open the mail and log incoming checks.
- The person preparing the deposit slip must not make the deposit.
- Two signatures should be required on all checks or on all checks above a set amount, such as \$500.
- Different people must complete bookkeeping and bank statement reconciliation. A credit card user cannot make credit card reconciliation.

Clarity of Roles

Another area of risk involves understanding the role of CASA staff and volunteers. Clear policy outlining the parameters of the relationships with the children we serve and the meaning of acting in their best interest will help your program “stay in your lane” and avoid potential conflicts of interest. CASA/GAL staff and volunteer advocates may foster or foster/adopt a child or children only when the case is based outside the CASA/GAL program’s counties served or court jurisdiction; or if the staff or volunteer is biologically related or is fictive kin to the child, defined as a close, pre-existing relationship with the child prior

to coming into care.

Individual CASA/GAL staff and volunteers have no contractual relationship with DFPS or designee within their court jurisdiction.

Please review Texas CASA Standard 4: Ethical Conduct and Confidentiality; Standard 6: Management and Funding; and Standard 7: Human Resources.



SURVIVAL TIPS FOR GRANTS

Knowledge about your program's operating budget, including all funding sources, expenditures and allocations, is essential to avoid unwanted surprises. Access and review the most recent board-approved budget. Make a list of all funding sources, detailing the amount of funds awarded, funding cycle, and next dated action needed. Begin with the nearest action date and proceed to the next until you have a monthly calendar.

Every CASA program receives VOCA and CVC funds, and each program also has other funding sources with a variety of due dates and reports. It is important to identify those distinctive to your program and make contact with your funders.

Texas CASA is a funder for your program and passes through Crime Victims Compensation (CVC) fund monies and Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) fund monies based on a funding formula. In addition, we have competitive grant opportunities.

Victims of Crime Act (VOCA)

Texas CASA receives a VOCA grant from the Criminal Justice Division of the Office of the Governor (CJD) and passes it through to local programs based on a formula.

VOCA Funding Formula:

- \$50,000 base amount,
- \$3,000 per additional county served,
- 45% share of the balance of funds of total children served,
- 45% share of the balance of funds of the number of active/assigned volunteers,

- 5% of the balance of funds for each program with 80% compliance with percentage of cases served by a volunteer, and
- 5% of the balance of funds based on the percent of children served in your service area.

VOCA funds must be used primarily for direct services to child victims. Local programs use VOCA funds for personnel, travel, training, equipment, contractual and direct operating expenses, such as supplies, rent, utilities, communications, etc. The VOCA grant cycle is October-September. The Requests for Reimbursement (RFR) are due on the 15th of each month. Log in to the Texas CASA Online Data Manager system (ODM) and review your past RFR submissions. Keep all VOCA related records for 3 years.

Crime Victims Compensation (CVC)

These are state funds that Texas CASA receives as an appropriation by the state legislature through the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). They are distributed based on a formula.

CVC Funding Formula:

- \$25,000 base amount,
- \$3,000 per additional county served, and
- A share of the balance of funds of total children served by volunteers.

Local programs primarily use CVC funds for personnel, travel, training, equipment, contractual, supplies and direct operating expenses. Additional CVC Growth Funds are available and may be applied for on a competitive basis by submitting a separate

CVC growth application for programs that want to increase their number of children served with volunteers. The CVC grant cycle is September-August. The Request for Reimbursement (RFR) is due on the 5th business day of the month. Log into the ODM and review your past RFR submissions. Keep all CVC-related records for 3 years.

Annual Audit & 990

Typically the same Certified Public Accountant (CPA) conducts your IRS Form 990 and annual audit. Your organization's Form 990 is due on the 15th day of the 5th month after the end of the organization's taxable year. This means that if your organization follows the fiscal year Sept. 1 to Aug. 31, your Form 990 would be due on Jan. 15 of each year. Your board-approved audit is to be submitted to Texas CASA within 9 months of the end of the fiscal year. Determine your fiscal year as reported in your bylaws. Review your program's most recent annual audit.

Please review Texas CASA Standard 6: Management and Funding.



SURVIVAL TIPS FOR VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

Volunteers are the core of your program. Understanding the roles and responsibilities of CASA volunteers is an essential way for a new ED to both grasp the mission and connect with their volunteers. Being able to speak the language of advocacy will help with volunteer connections, speaking engagements and court appearances. Per Texas CASA Standards, newly hired EDs and volunteer supervisors are required to attend the 30-hour Pre-Service Volunteer Training class. Determine when your program will host the next training, so you can attend. Also, plan to participate in court observation as a separate part of the training. Put this on your calendar. If your program does not have a pre-service training scheduled, you may want to reach out to your neighboring CASA programs to inquire when their next training is scheduled and if you can attend.

As you pursue your CASA education, deepen your understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a CASA through the Online Core Advocacy Skills Training (OCAST) offered via Texas CASA's Learning Center. This e-learning course is taken at your own pace and gives a comprehensive look at one particular case as it moves through the court process.

Your program will have a copy of the Volunteer Policies and Procedures on hand. Take time to review those policies and ask questions when needed. Some CASA programs allow for the volunteers to transport children in their cases. Review your program's policy on transporting children.

Make time to meet your volunteers, because they, too, are experiencing the change of leadership. This can occur at an

“Open House,” an in-service training session or an informal gathering. This will assist in strong, enthusiastic relationship building with your volunteers.

CASA programs are required to maintain an 80% or above ratio of children served by your program with a volunteer. This means that at least 80% of the children served by your program have a volunteer assigned to them who provides documented activity on the case. Of course, the goal is to have 100% of the children served assigned to a volunteer, but 80% is the minimum. Determine what your percentage is as of today. Then, on the Online Data Manager system (ODM), look at your past Performance Measures to view the program history.

Another number that you need to be mindful of is the number of cases that your volunteer supervisors are supervising. For staff assigned to supervision as a full-time function, the staff must not supervise more than 30 volunteers or a maximum of 45 cases. If the staff person is part-time or is required to perform other duties, the number of volunteers the staff can supervise shall be reduced pro rata. Some programs set the ratio for supervision at 24 or 25 volunteers per supervisor. Request a list of cases by supervisor to determine the number of cases/volunteers that are being supervised by each staff person, and make sure it is within bounds.

How do you know if good coaching and volunteer supervision is occurring in your program and how is it tracked? Meet with volunteer supervisors to discuss how they track quality advocacy in the cases they supervise. It could be they have volunteer timesheets with detailed notes, or that the volunteers log their activity in the case management system such as Optima, or it could be they meet monthly and the volunteer supervisor logs their activity during the meeting. At case closure, each supervisor is required to conduct an evaluation on the volunteer.

This is a good time to discuss successes, hurdles and taking on another case!

Volunteers may be assigned to two cases at any time. An exception can be granted for a volunteer to be assigned to additional cases as long as there is documentation justifying why they are permitted to do so. However, a volunteer must not be assigned to more than five cases. Request and review your program's current report showing volunteers assigned to cases to determine volunteer caseload.

Please review Texas CASA Standard 8: Volunteer Administration.



SURVIVAL TIPS FOR PLANNING

A successful plan is, by definition, a usable plan—one that informs the organization’s activities as well as its long-range view, and one that yields meaningful improvements in effectiveness, capacity and relevance. Although the challenges of funding, governing and managing each organization are unique, certain lessons apply across the board. The features of a good planning project do not vary—regardless of organizational scope, emphasis or specific issues.

Strategic Plan

Your program has a strategic plan that was, most likely, developed with board and staff input. The strategic plan is the document that drives the program to meet the goals outlined. Review the strategic plan and identify needs of the program, with long- and short-term measurable goals, tasks with related timeframes and persons responsible. You should also review the tracking process and how often the plan is being reviewed. Committees often arise from goal areas. Does your board have committees working on the plan goals?

Recruitment & Retention Plan

Your program is required to have a written plan for recruiting and selecting volunteers whose backgrounds reflect the backgrounds of the children served. It should also include retention goals and practices for retaining volunteers. Review your program’s plan to see that it demonstrates that inclusiveness and diversity components are essential components of quality advocacy and targets strategies to attract a diverse volunteer pool. By setting goals and using a tracking

system, you will be able to see successes and shortfalls so adjustments can be made in the plan.

Fund Development Plan

The fund development plan provides the framework for the financial development of your program. Develop a plan effectively and work that plan well. A good process promotes ownership of the plan, assures shared accountability and achieves your targeted results. Review your program's written plan for securing and maintaining diversified financial resources adequate to accomplish its established goals and objectives.

Staff Development Plan

This plan provides for implementation of a training and development program for staff to improve their knowledge, skills and abilities, and to provide information about the backgrounds and needs of the children served by the program. Review your program's plan to ensure it provides training needs of the staff based on annual assessment, requires a minimum of 12 hours of continuing education, and includes the opportunity for staff to upgrade knowledge and skills to fulfill the requirements of their respective positions. It should also include information related to children who are abused and neglected and in the court system, family violence, applicable statutes, cultural competency, disproportionality, and disparity in outcomes.

Diversity Plan

This plan guides your program in setting diversity and inclusion goals for board, staff and volunteers, demonstrating your commitment to inclusiveness and diversity as essential values,

and recognizing the importance of building an organization whose makeup reflects and is responsive to the cultural backgrounds of the families being served in your community. The plan is an opportunity to articulate the aspirations of your program on equity issues and to develop strategies and metrics over a defined period of time. Review your program's diversity plan to ensure the following:

The program implements a written plan to guide and measure progress in diversifying its governing body, staff and volunteers. As a part of the planning process, the program:

- 1) Identifies specific measurable goals,
- 2) Reviews those goals to measure progress, and
- 3) Identifies new goals and activities to be met in the future.

Please review Texas CASA Standard 3: Diversity, Equity, and Confidentiality; Standard 5: Governance and Administration; Standard 6: Management and Funding; Standard 7: Human Resources; and Standard 8: Volunteer Administration.

SURVIVAL TIPS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Texas CASA provides Quality Assurance (QA) reviews and assistance as part of its partnership with local CASA programs and as authorized in Texas CASA Standards, the Texas Administrative Code and CVC and VOCA contract requirements. The review will include an organizational assessment in 5 areas of operation: Governance, Administration, Finance and Risk, Volunteer Management, and Advocacy. Prior to your onsite/virtual visit for Quality Assurance, you will receive notice of your review and will be invited to attend a training held in Austin to learn about the process. Each program is reviewed at least once every 3 years.

Prior to the onsite/virtual QA visit, you will also be asked to submit a list of documents. These are referred to as the Indicators of Compliance (IoC) documents. You will also receive a copy of the Readiness Guide. It is designed to assist you in preparing for the review and includes step-by-step information about the process. The QA team will contact you to schedule the date of the review, work directly with you to answer questions, and assist you through the entire review process. A good way to learn about your program's past QA visits is to read previous years' reports. You can find copies of the reports from your past two cycles on the Online Data Manager (ODM) system. Review the reports to identify past strengths and needs.

The Quality Assurance Report is the final report and includes any requirements identified to bring the program into compliance with monitored Standards and specifies the actions required to fulfill the requirement.

These items may be policies that need added language, documentation missing from volunteer or child/case files, or a request for practice and process to match. Certain requirements in Texas CASA Standards and the HHSC contract with local programs require an immediate response if a final determination is made that a program is out of compliance during the onsite/virtual QA review. Immediate response requirements fall into one of two categories: risk to children and financial risk.

Several checklists are provided during a QA review to audit the program's volunteer and case files. Consider using those checklists to conduct ongoing, spot audits to continually assess your program's advocacy and volunteer management practices. This best practice will allow you to evaluate if you are meeting minimum expectations or not, simply "checking the box," or committing to go above and beyond in your practices, policies and plans.

When meeting with your staff, ask them who has been through the QA process, what they learned from the process and what they implemented as a result of the review. After the onsite/virtual visit, the QA reviewer provides resources to the program based on program requests. The reviewer may also provide resources or recommendations that offer opportunities for growth and continuous improvement. Find out if the recommendations made were implemented.

Please review Texas CASA Standards 1–11.



SURVIVAL TIPS FOR ONLINE DATA & SYSTEMS

The Online Data Manager (ODM) system is the home for all of your grants and performance measures reporting. Every program has a unique login and password. You will need to gain access to this database in order to view your grant budgets, applications, revisions and requests for reimbursement. A key person such as your program director or board chair should have access to this account. Once the past ED checkbox has been selected to Inactive, your key person will be able to enter you into the ODM so that you will have access to it. Should you have difficulty in gaining access to the account, contact Texas CASA for assistance. Visit the login site to the ODM at: <https://texascasa.force.com/casaprograms/login>

Once in the ODM, you will be able to access your program history for grants, performance measures, and QA reports. Make some time to review the information housed in this database. It is an essential way to gather historical data for your program. While in the ODM, look at your "contacts" list to make sure it is up to date. It should be a complete list of your current board and staff, along with their positions in your program. This is a great time to make any additions, deletions or corrections. Any time your board chair or treasurer changes, you will need to change that contact in the ODM. Remember to update "Executive Director" with your name!

A potential risk to your program is data integrity. Texas CASA requires programs to report child and volunteer statistical data on a quarterly basis. This data is used for state and national reporting through Texas CASA and is linked directly to CVC and VOCA funding formulas. Accuracy of the reporting is the responsibility of the staff. Policies that define the process are reviewed and approved

by the board. The reporting of inaccurate data may result in a financial penalty.

It is important to understand the meaning of the “active child” and “assigned volunteer” count. Active children are defined as children currently being served by the program with documentation of activity by staff or volunteer. Assigned volunteers are defined as volunteers actively assigned to a case, with documentation of activity by the volunteer.

Two of your grants administered by Texas CASA, VOCA and CVC, are based on the number of children served and/or active volunteers. These numbers are also used for reporting purposes to the legislature and other funding sources. Take time to look over the past year’s performance measures report. Review your program’s policies on data management and ask how your program audits the data submitted quarterly to ensure accuracy of reporting.

You will find an abundance of online learning resources on Texas CASA’s website, where our Learning Center provides CASA volunteers, board members, staff and other guests with e-learning courses, recorded webinars, toolkits and guides on a wide variety of advocacy and program operations topics.

Your program’s confidential information, including case and volunteer information, is housed in a secure database. Most CASA programs in Texas use OPTIMA. Someone on your staff will be able to provide you with a user ID and password. Set aside some time to learn about data entry and the reports that can be generated.

Your program should have a beautiful, clear and engaging website. Your website lets prospective volunteers, donors and others know all about your program, and it should represent the excellence of your program in its visuals and ease of navigation. Texas CASA offers website support to local programs and a template for your use,

if you wish. If you need assistance with developing, updating or changing your website, just email communications@texascasa.org.

Review your crisis management plan to ensure that it addresses issues that may have a significant impact on your program's credibility, reputation or funding at the local, state or national level. This crisis management plan provides for information sharing between national, state and local organizations within 24 hours, subject to confidentiality. The Texas CASA communications team can assist you with crisis management as well, such as crafting messages for media releases and determining strategy in the event of a public relations emergency.

Please review Texas CASA Standard 9: Public Education and Engagement, and Standard 10: Data and Records.

SURVIVAL TIPS FOR QUALITY ADVOCACY

Texas CASA offers a variety of programs to assist with advocacy, recruitment and retention of volunteers, coaching methods, and more. Ask your staff about the following initiatives to learn which opportunities your program is currently utilizing.

Volunteer Recruitment & Retention

To help programs achieve their goal of providing a CASA volunteer for every child who needs one, Texas CASA created the Volunteer Recruitment and Retention initiative to provide resources and consulting services to local CASA programs. Additional support is provided by hosting online ZOOM chats, in person Recruiter Refresh trainings and a biennial Volunteer Power Unleashed Summit. Texas CASA is continuously creating new resources, such as the recruitment and retention e-learning course and a guidebook for staff. Just search “Art of Coaching” on the Learning Center on our website.

Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE)

To increase family engagement in Texas, Texas CASA created the Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE) process in 2015. CFE is an innovative Family Finding partnership between CASA and DFPS. CFE uses a structured approach that is built around the fact that children have many blood relatives and other important connections that can be identified, located and engaged with—providing children and families with a dedicated support system that is meant to last even after CASA and CPS involvement. CFE is all about connections, and the CFE

team works together to explore potential positive connections identified by the family.

CFE is supported with funding from the 84th through 87th Texas Legislatures. Since beginning in 2015, CFE has rolled out progressively to sites across Texas, and as of FY 2022, 60 local CASA programs in Texas are implementing CFE, covering 83% of the network.

Guiding Principles

It is vital to recognize the importance of family preservation and/or reunification when it is in a child's best interests to remain with their family of origin when safely possible. The CASA/GAL program acknowledges that children experience trauma when separated from their family of origin. If a child is removed from their family of origin, it is in the child's best interests to be reunified with their family of origin as soon as safely possible, and if not, then the child should be placed with a relative whenever safely possible and in the child's best interests.

The CASA/GAL program can assist in strengthening families through recommendations for services, supports, visitation and communications that are in the child's best interests to achieve stability and/or reunification. The CASA/GAL program requires and demonstrates respect for the parents and all parties associated with the case.

The CASA/GAL program ensures that information regarding the families and all parties associated with the case.

The CASA/GAL program ensures that information regarding the family's strengths and the child's wishes are incorporated into reports to the court.

On those cases when a court determines a child cannot be

safely reunified with their family of origin consistent with legal mandates, another permanent placement is in a child's best interests.

Volunteer Coaching & Advocacy (VCA)

Launched in 2018, Volunteer Coaching and Advocacy (VCA) is a new initiative that provides ongoing training and support to local CASA program staff who directly supervise CASA volunteers. Texas CASA offers volunteer supervisor coaching skills assistance by providing select programs across Texas onsite/virtual support, and offering statewide training to all programs' volunteer supervisors.

Legislative Advocacy Teams (LATs)

Legislative Advocacy Teams (LATs) are led by volunteer advocates and/or board members, and work with staff liaisons in each CASA program. LATs work with Texas CASA to build relationships with legislators, develop policy agendas to improve the child welfare system in partnership with Texas CASA, and motivate and empower others to advocate for those improvements. As a part of a LAT, CASA volunteers are able to advocate for children on a larger scale and work toward solutions to systemic problems they encounter in their role. This gives them the chance to be a voice of change not only for the children they serve, but also for every child in the child welfare system!

Pre-Service Online Training Curriculum

Texas CASA adapted the National CASA Pre-Service Curriculum and released the Texas CASA Volunteer Pre-Service Curriculum

in 2018. This 30-hour training should be provided to all volunteers. As a new ED, going through the training yourself will equip you with the solid base of knowledge you need to powerfully and compassionately advocate for a child and to understand exactly what your volunteers do. In addition to gaining an understanding of the child welfare system and the CASA volunteer role, you will also learn about trauma and resilience, efforts at improving our systems, cultural competence and much more. The curriculum comes with a facilitation guide and PowerPoints that the trainers in your program can use to offer the curriculum in a dynamic, energizing and unforgettable way.

Information and resources associated with all of these initiatives can be found on the Texas CASA website. If you need assistance locating resources or have questions about any of the initiatives, email txcasa@texascasa.org.

Please review Texas CASA Standard 2: Guiding Principles; Standard 8: Volunteer Administration; and Standard 10: Data and Records.



Congratulations!

You have completed this crash course in Survival Tips for the New Executive Director. Now it's time to dive in, make a few mistakes and make lots of great things happen. We're cheering you on. A year from now, you'll look back on these exhausting early days with amazement and look with pride on your accomplishments. Now, let's go make "a CASA for every child" a reality!



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