



Judges' Perspectives Study - Request for Information/Letter of Intent

National CASA seeks national research partners to conduct studies of evidence-based practices. Key in the delivery of “best-interest advocacy” is the role of the judges and the effectiveness of the volunteers resulting in child outcomes of permanence, safety, and the opportunity to thrive. Much like mentoring which has documented and measured match, dosage and types of mentoring, National CASA seeks to fully affirm “best-interest advocacy” as an evidence-based intervention.

About National CASA Association

The National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (National CASA) is known for its CASAs and Guardians Ad Litem who provide volunteer “best-interest advocacy” for abused and neglected children. With almost 1,000 programs across the nation, National CASA has over 88,000 highly skilled volunteers serving nearly 288,000 foster children and youth.

These volunteers go into the home, school and community to observe and recommend to the court what would be in the best interest of the young person in complex cases of vulnerability resulting from abuse and neglect. Your involvement with this movement will help ensure the service to our youth be impactful and meaningful, ultimately transforming their lives.

CASA Mission: The National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association, together with its state and local member programs, supports and promotes court-appointed volunteer advocacy so **every abused or neglected child in the United States can be safe and have a permanent home and the opportunity to thrive.**

CASA Vision: A world where every abused or neglected child is given the opportunity to thrive in a safe and loving home.

CASA Purpose: Every abused or neglected child needs a caring, consistent adult to advocate for his or her well-being.

For more information, visit www.CASAforChildren.org.

Background

Best-interest advocacy has legal and developmental practice elements including: improving and informing decision-making; legal mandates, practices, and local conditions; independent, informed observation and reporting in the home, school and neighborhood; the child’s experience and understanding based on developmental function; and public policy and development of the law guiding common ground for the team of professionals in the court room seeking to match the needs of the child to positive outcomes.

In 2012 National CASA commissioned Child Trends to assess the capacity of National CASA as an organization to collect and effectively report data to demonstrate efficacy and guide the

network. Based on recommendations in *Measuring Performance and Building an Evidence Base*, National CASA has significantly increased rigor in data collection and response rates to biannual organization-wide surveys, constructed National and State Logic Models, and established a network-wide Performance Measurement Committee. The network-wide Performance Measurement Committee of 17 state and program leaders from across the country conducts internal peer review of baseline evaluation efforts targeted to strengthen program evaluation to be focused over time on impact and implementation.

Other efforts in the National CASA network may also be brought to inform moving towards an evidence-based approach including quasi-experimental studies that include participation of the judges currently being conducted by the LBJ School and Case Western with the Texas CASA Association and the Ohio CASA Association. Previous judges surveys have also be conducted in New Jersey, Nebraska and Indiana.

National CASA devotes significant annual resources to internal and external outcomes initiatives led by a cross-functional team fully qualified for quantitative and qualitative research and program evaluation at the doctoral level. In-house Performance Measures and Research team professionals include specialization in developmental psychology, applied anthropology, epidemiology, developmental evaluation, and business administration.

National CASA has a portfolio of contract and grants from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention which, like all federal agencies, increasingly requires rigorous performance measures. In addition to other national foundations and sponsors supporting the performance measure work at National CASA, the Kappa Alpha Theta Foundation provided a significant award to advance performance measures in July of 2016. The goals of this award include the establishment of national, state, and local program logic models, producing a best practices manual on best-interest advocacy for the field of child welfare, and evidence-based studies- leading to this RFI.

The first in a series of studies over time to ultimately include measuring volunteer effectiveness and documenting child outcomes---this RFI seeks the national partner to conduct the Judges' Perspectives Study.

Judges Perspectives' Study

A study of evidence-based practice, National CASA seeks to understand, in this case, the effective roles and perspectives of juvenile court judges in organizing information presented to the court by CASAs and GALs as best-interest recommendations.

The national partner selected will provide rapid report to our network on the roles and mandates of "best-interest advocacy" as an evidence-based practice. Through the perspectives of judges, National CASA seeks to document best-interest advocacy as our intervention starting with our core model in the courtroom.

The Judges' Perspectives Study would be designed to move from the self-report and customer satisfaction orientation of past judges surveys (conducted in 2005), to more rigorous, evidence-

based approaches. These approaches can include survey, comparison and other methods to increase validity, such as normed survey items, focus groups, and interviews.

We anticipate the design of a survey followed by focus groups to map and measure the trends identified by the survey and further interviews to better document practices that can be used as tools across the network. The report would include implications for change on how we plan to improve based on preliminary findings. The study would be complete by early 2019 with findings to be reported to evidence-based clearinghouses.

Study Questions

From the perspective of the judges, in what ways do the CASA and GAL volunteers deliver recommendations that effectively meet the needs of the children:

- ✓ When do the judges assign or not assign a volunteer? Close a case?
- ✓ In what competencies should volunteers be trained? Need more training?
- ✓ Based on the best interest recommendations of the volunteers, what normal activities of growing up do judge's order? Why?
- ✓ In what ways do legal mandates, statutes, and local conditions present service barriers to effective practices?

Request For Information: Letter of Intent

Please answer the following questions:

What is the previous experience of your organization in conducting studies with a focus on the courts and / or foster children including practice-focused research and evaluation? (1 page)

(Here we are more interested in learning specifically about the past and ongoing work of the team that would likely conduct the study than the broadest scope of your organization.)

How do you define evidence-based intervention and evidence-based practice? (1 page)

(Address the challenges of conducting longitudinal research with random assignment and comparison group in a large scale network for a youth-serving non-profit organization.)

Describe the team that would be available to conduct the study? (1 page)

(Confirm availability March to December 2018; include two references from other clients that recommend your work.)

Provide a brief description of your approach to the design of the study? (3 pages)

(While we anticipate building on a past survey and the use of focus groups and interviews, we are open to design features as you may suggest.)

By when and what email should the RFI / Letter of Intent be submitted:

Supplemental Resources:

Child Trends Report: Measuring Performance and Building an Evidence Base

<http://nc.casaforchildren.org/files/secure/PerformanceMeasurement/ChildTrendsFinalRecommendations.pdf>

Organizational Research Services: Evaluation of Court Appointed Special Advocates / Guardians Ad Litem Volunteer Impact

http://nc.casaforchildren.org/files/public/community/judges/Judges_Survey_FullReport.pdf

Consumer Satisfaction with CASAs (Court Appointed Special Advocates – Eastern Kentucky University

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/222130570_Consumer_satisfaction_with_CASAs_Court_Appointed_Special_Advocates

2015 National CASA Association Annual Local Program Report

<http://nc.casaforchildren.org/files/secure/community/programs/annualsurvey/2015LocalSurveyReport.pdf>

National CASA/GAL Core Model of Service Delivery

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/qtttd6zut4ytmk07/7%20Core%20Model.pdf?dl=0>

Additional Citations:

Poertner, J and Press, A (1990) Who Best Represents the Interests of the Child in Court? Child Welfare League of America. Child Welfare LXIX(6)-November-December 1990.

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/y6nzef8hacofzuz/Who%20best%20represents%20the%20best%20interest%20of%20the%20child.pdf?dl=0>

Weisz, V. and Thai, N. (2003). The Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program: Bringing Information to Child Abuse & Neglect Cases. *Child Treatment*. 8(3) August 2003, PP 204-210. Doi:10.1177/1077559503254140.

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/nyr4bulaj9fvzy3/The%20Court-Appointed%20Special%20Advocate%20Program-%20Bringing%20Information%20to%20Child%20Abuse%20%26%20Neglect%20Cases.pdf?dl=0>

Wilbourne, M. C. (2014). Understanding the described experiences of Court Judges, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Volunteers, Department of Human Resources' Caseworkers, and Foster Parents. Dissertation for the University of Alabama, Birmingham, AL.

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/46m4kfsre4t8umh/UNDERSTANDING%20THE%20DESCRIBED>

[%20EXPERIENCES%20OF%20COURT%20JUDGES%20-%20CASA-%20caseworkers%20-%20foster%20parents.pdf?dl=0](#)

Submissions and Process

Please submit your Letter of Intent to include responses to our RFI and any inquiries to Mary Showell, Operations Officer, at marys@casaforchildren.org no later than Monday, April 9, 2018, 5:00 p.m. PST.

National CASA will be reviewing responses the week of April 16, 2018. Based on a review of the responses, we will select a short list of three-five finalists. Finalists will receive a formal Request for Proposal (RFP) by April 23rd. Q&A sessions with finalists will take place April 26th & 27th. In addition, organizations not selected will also receive notifications prior to the RFP date.

Details on the awardee decision-making criteria will be included in the formal RFP.

It is emphasized that this RFI does not constitute a Request for Proposal, Invitation for Bid or Request for Quotation. This procurement is subject to review or cancellation at any time.