

HIGHLY EFFECTIVE
STANDARDS REVIEW
REPORT
THE IOWA CHILD
ADVOCACY BOARD
CASA PROGRAM

October 29, 2021



Court Appointed Special Advocates
Guardians ad Litem
FOR CHILDREN

NATIONAL CASA/GAL ASSOCIATION

OVERVIEW OF ORGANIZATION

State Org Name: The Iowa CASA Program	State Director: Steffani Simbric
Year Established: 1987	State Director Hire Date: November, 2019
Structure of state organization: Publicly administered	Number of staff: 22

Mission

The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program commissions trained and qualified community advocates to serve as an effective support in court for children who have experienced abuse or neglect, strengthening efforts to ensure that each child is living in a safe, permanent and nurturing home.

History of the Organization

The Iowa Child Advocacy Board (ICAB) is an independent board established in Iowa Code Chapter 237, Division II to provide for citizen involvement in child welfare issues. They operate as an independent commission in the Executive Branch. It is composed of nine members appointed by the Governor of Iowa. ICAB is a unit of state government attached to the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals. ICAB establishes policies and procedures for two volunteer child advocacy programs: the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program and the Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) program. The Iowa Child Advocacy Board recently celebrated 35 years of supporting CASA volunteers in Iowa.

Along with establishing these programs to support the work of citizen volunteers helping children who have experienced abuse or neglect, ICAB is also required to report annually its findings on issues affecting the best interests of children and families in Iowa's child welfare system and to offer recommendations for improvements.

The Iowa Child Advocacy Board directs the work of the CASA program and Foster Care Review Board, with Steffani Simbric serving as the Iowa Child Advocacy Board Administrator. Amy Carpenter is the Deputy Director, CASA.

In addition, there is a non-profit auxiliary, the Friends of Iowa CASA and ICFCRB (Iowa Citizen Foster Care Review Boards) Auxiliary whose mission is to promote and support volunteer advocacy for abused and neglected children and public awareness of the importance of safe and permanent homes for all children. The auxiliary raised \$174,047 in 2020.

Network Composition

There are twelve local CASA offices in Iowa that recruit, screen, train and supervise volunteers to speak up in court for children who have experienced abuse or neglect. Iowa CASA programs reported serving in 65 of the 99 counties in the state on the 2020 National CASA/GAL Annual Program Survey.

During calendar year 2020, a total of 1,359 children were served by 507 CASA volunteers who contributed a total of 21,497 hours to this effort. According to 2020 data, roughly 60% of Iowa children served by CASA volunteers were identified as White, 13% as Black or African American, 7% Hispanic or Latino and 11% as two or more races.

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 – Q3, 2021

“Virtual’ Onsite Review Dates* – August 3 – 4, 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	
Steffani Simbric	Administrator, Iowa Child Advocacy Board
Beth Myers, Rachel Cadena, Judge William Owens	Iowa Child Advocacy Board (Administrative Authority)
STATE ORGANIZATION STAFF	
Amy Carpenter, Nikki Whittiaker, Sherri Ripperger	Additional staff
LOCAL OFFICE STAFF	
Amy Hennies, Meg Campbell, Anne Christensen, Kathy Fritz, Kevin Schnoebelen	Panel of local office staff (selected by state director with cross section of affinity groups and governance models and program ages)
EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS	
Honorable Julie Schumacher	Judiciary; Court of Appeals Judge
Lori Frick	Child Welfare; Iowa Department of Human Resources
Polly Parrent	Auxiliary Board Chair (if applicable); Friends of Iowa CASA and IFCRB

National CASA/GAL Association Review Team

Review Team Role	Name/Title
Team Lead/State Director and Staff Interviewer	Brad Ray
QA Lead	Denice Hairston
Logistics Lead	Kelly McDonald
Document Reviewer	Kelly McDonald

Research & Data Analyst	Roxanne Mennes, Noriko Osada, Jetaun Woodley
Financial Reviewer	Tom Dunn
Auxiliary Organization Interviewer (if applicable)	Sally Erny
Local Office Staff Interviewer	Roxanne Mennes
Stakeholder Interviewer	Diane Nunn
Board Meeting Observer (if applicable)	Sally Erny
QA Reports Analyst & Writer(s)	Brad Ray & Paige Beard



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

In 2019, the Iowa CASA staff received training on the Core Model from a National CASA/GAL staff member. Although not the first time it was introduced, it was the first time they had this topic as the focus of their meeting. Iowa statute does not limit assignment to Core Model cases, but program staff do have the ability to meet with stakeholders to address issues regarding requests to operate outside the Core Model and can decline a case. Program offices have implemented the Core Model to serve children who have experienced abuse and/or neglect including children who have experienced abuse or neglect and have not been removed from their home. The CASA program has a good relationship with the chief justice of the Iowa Supreme Court.

The volunteers serve as a Friend of the Court with a guardian ad litem (GAL) attorney assigned in addition to the CASA volunteer. The only variation is in the 4th judicial district where the CASA volunteer is appointed as the GAL.

The state office has a policy that states volunteers are to be screened following the National CASA/GAL Standards and have secured First Advantage as their provider for background checks. Prior to this, the screening was performed through their state system.

The state CASA office has an aligned adaptation of National CASA/GAL's pre-service curriculum on their own learning management system (LMS) platform.

The state CASA office conducts data quality checks monthly, during their one-on-one meetings with local office staff. They utilize dashboards and a sampling of new cases to ensure accuracy.

The state CASA office has assessment, development and disciplinary plans for staff and programs. The development plan is considered the on-the-job training. There is a curriculum for development of program staff and professional development training.

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 office works to keep their local program offices consistently informed of their role as well as that of National CASA/GAL. They have a monthly newsletter and a Facebook page. There are also monthly "special ads/messages" that are shared with the local offices to place in local media outlets. The state CASA office received a 2019 National CASA/GAL marketing grant, which was primarily focused on TV ads.

The state CASA office provides support to local program offices via monthly meetings. Each program has an individual assessment plan, which includes outreach, children served, and other key data points, however, they do not have a formal assessment process. Staff office staff noted they do have some programs that are

"underperforming for which they are developing plans to address." Each program had state leadership meet with them at least once in the past year.

The state CASA office has a designated trainer to aid in providing consistent facilitation of the pre-service volunteer curriculum.

The state CASA office relies on the Friends of Iowa CASA auxiliary to do fundraising to supplement state funding which flows through the Iowa Child Advocacy Board (ICAB). There are a few local program offices which do smaller fundraisers and the state CASA office is planning to work on identifying the parameters for local resource development.

The state CASA office is very involved with National CASA/GAL and strives to keep those involved in their work informed of the National CASA/GAL role. They have created an orientation for ICAB members which includes operations and roles. State CASA staff have served on multiple National CASA/GAL councils and committees in recent years, including the State Leadership Council, Suburban Leadership Council. Training, Annual Conference, Performance Measurement, and Data Governance committees.

Recommendations

- Develop a formal assessment process for local program offices.
- Develop an orientation for board and staff of the Friends of Iowa CASA.
- Work with ICAB to advocate for increased funding and resources that will enable a robust growth plan to serve 100% of eligible children in Iowa.

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 office has a written mission statement that it is clear and easily explained and is recognizable as a state CASA organization.

Iowa CASA incorporates their mission statement in all their documents and local office materials. The forms they share with their network include an infographic that includes their mission and values. It is also on their staff meeting agendas.

The ICAB and CASA staff regularly refer to their mission in decisions making.

The Iowa state code states that the Iowa Child Advocacy Board approves policy for the state CASA program. The state CASA office has been working to update their policies to reflect the National CASA/GAL Standards. They review these policies, and the board approves them annually, with plans to go to every three years before they consider major revisions, unless required sooner.

The state staff regularly discuss the outcomes of the organization and consistently track and review through a dashboard and other reports.

Recommendations

- Review the mission statement annually.

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 Iowa CASA values are clearly defined and reinforced through documents and images in state and local program offices. They are included in the orientation documents and shared in all meetings. The values are also in staff documents and displayed in meeting rooms.

The Iowa Child Advocacy Board reviews the values at least once every three years as part of the policy review.

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 Iowa Child Advocacy Board meetings are held quarterly with staff presenting reports including budgets, strategic plans and other agency information. They also present a quarterly CASA report that includes statistics relevant to projects and planning for the next fiscal year.

The ICAB meeting observed revealed a knowledgeable, committed board with a high level of interest. Topics covered during the meeting observed included the CASA administrative report which included data and comparison statistics, pre-service and in-service training, budget, COVID procedures and Iowa Code changes. The meeting was well facilitated, and members participated actively including expressing diverse opinions.

The ICAB chair and director meet at least monthly to stay informed as well as to plan for and follow-up to board meetings.

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

Iowa state government determines the content of the job descriptions, and the CASA staff descriptions align with National CASA/GAL expectations. Performance evaluations are conducted at least annually. These annual reviews follow a formal process and include self-reflection by the director as well as input from the ICAB.

A review of the state CASA growth plan is part of the annual performance evaluation and discussed in an ongoing basis. The Iowa Child Advocacy Board chair leads these discussions.

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

Each staff member has a professional development plan based on a recent *DISC* assessment. They have a robust system for tracking the staffs' plans. Most recently, there has been increased focus on marketing and training.

There are few advancement opportunities within the state primarily because of low turnover. The state CASA office is currently assessing their staffing structure to determine if it remains the most appropriate and may consider adding new or creating different positions in the future.

Recommendations

- Maintain a record of attendees at trainings offered.

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

Both the Iowa Child Advocacy Board and the state CASA office have an onboarding process that includes all the elements outlined in the National CASA/GAL Standards. Part of the onboarding process includes the Core Model work, a Standards review and alignment with National CASA/GAL policies.

Regarding court observation, only those board members who also serve as CASA volunteers are invited to observe due to confidentiality requirements.

The Iowa Child Advocacy Board has received some development opportunities in the past. They have conducted shared opportunities for training with other state agencies that include Family First legislation and other relevant topics as part of their conference. The judge serving on the Board is the Family First implementor in the state and several of the board members who are also CASA volunteers are being trained on the legislation.

The ICAB participated in a diversity training through Mid Spring and United Way. Some have also participated in implicit bias training. The state also offered to the ICAB training on diversity recruitment.

Recommendations

- Engage the board in a needs assessment to identify areas in need of further development.

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 CASA office follows the CASA of Iowa Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan which is part of the state organization's program manual. All staff are part of the plan, and annual diversity training is required. Although Iowa is a very rural state, they have a large racial disproportionality in foster care and are very aware of the issue. The staff referred to their DEI plan as "robust, with the goal of eventually reflecting those in the child welfare system".

Recommendations

- Develop a process to track and evaluate the DEI plan.

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 CASA office described a clear understanding of providing reasonable accommodations and stated they are in compliance with all requirements regarding ADA, nondiscrimination and other relevant laws. They have no discrimination violations. All staff, board and volunteers have read and signed the Anti-Discrimination policies as part of their onboarding.

Iowa CASA has a presentation on implicit bias as part of their volunteer training. The state CASA office has also facilitated presentation of a day-long training by members of the Cultural Alliance of Iowa.

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

All the state CASA office staff have access to the National CASA/GAL portal and receive National CASA/GAL communications. Iowa CASA staff have served on multiple National CASA/GAL councils and committees in recent years, including the State Leadership Council, Suburban Leadership Council. Training, Annual Conference, Performance Measurement, and Data Governance committees.

Judge Owens serves on the Judicial Leadership Council.

Iowa CASA communicates with National CASA/GAL whenever needed and appropriate and serves as a collaborative partner. They have strong and transparent communication with National CASA/GAL.

The state CASA office conducts numerous trainings regarding the National CASA/GAL Standards and share information from state trainings offered by National CASA/GAL.

State office staff and ICAB members routinely participate in local CASA office activities including training, awards ceremonies, volunteer recognition events and regional Friends of CASA events.

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 office serves as a collaborative partner with National CASA/GAL whenever appropriate and possible within the limitations of a state government agency. They worked with National CASA/GAL regarding CAPTA reauthorization and supported the National CASA/GAL Volunteer's Day.

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

The state CASA office stated they would collaborate if appropriate and were allowed on private and public funding opportunities within the limitations of a state government agency. They commit to informing National CASA/GAL of any opportunities they may become aware of.

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 leadership members are aware of the roles and needs of the organization and are mindful and respectful regarding others. Individuals serve on numerous state committees and provide information about the CASA work in that service.

The state CASA director serves on the Iowa Children Protection Council (CPC), which is directed by the Department of Human Services and other stakeholders. The CPC is the decision maker and responsible for CAPTA funding for Iowa. They have had several Family First presentations and Iowa CASA staff have presented how CASA advocacy operates within the law. The state CASA director also serves on the Children's Justice Council lead by the chief justice. Both groups are made up of the child welfare decision makers. The state CASA office also has a collaborative relationship with the Iowa Department of Human Rights.

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 state CASA staff stated that statewide meetings have been very limited because of COVID, so it has been difficult to pursue relationships over the last two years. The state CASA director is on the Iowa Children Protection Council and the Children's Justice Council

The state CASA office also has a very strong relationship with the Attorney General's Office which has worked to implement language on the CASA program's behalf. Strong relationships also include key state agency leaders, judges, legislators and other stakeholders.

Recommendations

- Assess current statewide stakeholder relationships for potential increased funding support and call on partners to support initiatives as appropriate.

Pillar 3: Funding, Legislation and Presence

Obtains, maximizes and leverages state funding support

16. Seeks state funding

Summary

The organization seeks to sustain and increase state funding as appropriate. It is part of the Strategic Plan to increase revenue by 5% by the end of FY24 to support program growth and sustainability. However, state staff are aware the Strategic Plan was adopted before COVID, so they may need to adjust accordingly. They are also looking at other resource development options and opportunities, like the feasibility of reserves and other types of fundraising. The state CASA office is also pursuing Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds, but recent broad cuts have impacted these efforts.

The state CASA office currently maximizes all the state funding they is allocated in an efficient and effective manner.

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 office described a very thorough and thoughtful process for allocating the funds they receive from the state. They track their revenues and expenses monthly, partnering with the board for this work. Their Strategic Plan has a sustainability component monitored by the board and the state CASA staff.

In the event reserve funding is acquired, they do have the ability to designate those funds for future use however there is not a current plan for that to occur. They meet with state government management to determine short- and long-term changes in the budget.

The ICAB approves the annual budget. They are not involved in the day-to-day financial activities but are involved in significant outlays like a new database. Financial reports are presented at every quarterly meeting. Questions are asked and answered during the meetings and staff can provide the necessary information in relation to the reports.

Iowa CASA consistently searches for additional and diverse funding. The state allows for requests for additional funds through the annual funding process.

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

There is enabling legislation in Iowa Code that defines CASA roles but does not extend the appointment to cases beyond the Core Model. However, the state CASA office has enacted a policy that limits appointment to children who have encountered abuse or neglect and in the juvenile court. The Iowa Code Administrative Rules include the screening and training requirements. A volunteer must authorize the release of information to conduct a complete criminal history check, including Motor Vehicle and Child Abuse Registry checks. At the time of the HESRP the state CASA office was proposing some non-substantive Code changes.

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

Iowa state government has internal financial controls and systems and an infrastructure that supports strong accounting practices including oversight. Written budgets are all subject to state policies. The state CASA office has an internal control policy that is reviewed by state leadership annually. They submit documentation for the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report. Because of their placement in the Executive Branch, Iowa CASA has a strong, structured procedure regarding internal controls and financial reporting.

Iowa CASA requires financial documents from the Friends of Iowa CASA auxiliary as part of the annual report that goes to a central administrative agency of the state. The ICAB and Friends of Iowa CASA are required by Iowa Code to have a 28E agreement. The agreement requires Iowa CASA to meet quarterly with the Friends of Iowa CASA board. The agreement is a mutual benefit agreement required by the state auditor for government and private entities working together.

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

The organization frequently goes by the name CASA of Iowa, however there is another Iowa CASA organization (the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault). The current logo used includes only the word "Iowa".

The state CASA office secured a National CASA/GAL marketing grant that focused on building the brand and rebranding CASA of Iowa to align with the National CASA/GAL identity. They have a service enterprise volunteer who is a marketing professor working with their recruitment specialist on branding. She is also working to help create a brand for the Friends of Iowa CASA auxiliary.

Requirements

Logo is not in compliance with the National CASA/GAL Naming Convention – review use of "Iowa" only.

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

Iowa CASA is familiar with and adheres to relevant National CASA/GAL policies.

The state organization has a fundraising auxiliary, Friends of Iowa CASA. Iowa CASA is in close communication with Friends of Iowa CASA through the state director. The state director comes to the auxiliary's monthly meetings and keeps the board up to date on activities and needs. The information provided helps the Friends' board do a better job budgeting and planning. The role of the auxiliary is to raise funds, awareness and recruitment of CASA volunteers. Funds raised by Friends help cover costs such as equipment, training, state conference and the Friends' organization's director's salary. Former CASA state director, Jim Hennessey is on the Friends' board which provides a helpful context.

The state CASA office is currently working on trainings to align with local standards. They have monthly meetings with local program staff to go through the local standards and create any trainings and resources needed to prepare for the local program self-assessments.

The state CASA office is currently moving from local programs/offices being responsible for building "their own brand" to having an aligned brand across the state. Iowa CASA has a state recruitment position and there has been a concerted effort to build strong collaboration around the state.

HIGHLY EFFECTIVE REVIEW PILLAR 4

Pillar 4: Governance

Operates in compliance with regulations and laws

22. Is in compliance with regulations and laws

Summary

The state CASA office staff stated they follow all the requisite regulations and laws. Compliance with regulations and laws is ensured by ICAB oversight including frequent conversations with staff and review of information.

They are not subject to of open meetings laws. The Attorney General provides legal counsel to the ICAB and CASA program.

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 Iowa Child Advocacy Board has access to several state government resources that help assure the CASA office is effectively managed and in legal compliance. There are a wide range of subject matter experts active in the CASA program and on the ICAB and Friends of CASA the program.

The program policy that implements National CASA/GAL standards and Iowa Code are reviewed and recommended by the board. The state CASA office works with board leadership to enact change.

Pillar 4: Governance

Fulfills responsibilities for oversight, leadership, resource development and support

24. Establishes organizational goals and evaluates them annually

Summary

The Strategic Plan was adopted in December 2019, expiring in 2024. The Resource Development plan is included in the Strategic Plan but lacks specific numeric targets as it focuses more on establishing relationships.

Plan goals are reviewed annually, with the state board chair leading the evaluation. The evaluation is based on progress toward performance goals with the state director having the opportunity to have input. The grant writer submits a report on funding applications and activities.

The state CASA office has a written growth plan that acknowledges the county and child service goals, seeking to help programs reach their capacity by 2022. At that time, they will identify the maximum service numbers in order to identify any necessary staffing changes needed to reach their goal of serving 100% of the children in the communities they currently serve. They also have a logic model.

There is not a sustainability plan that is designed to maintain and grow their income.

Recommendations

- Review Strategic Plan annually and include data to better track the goals of serving more children.
- Develop sustainability plan focused on growing income to build capacity to serve more children.

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

The state CASA office has multiple software systems and inventory processes to manage their assets. They have layered requirements for asset acquisitions and the state does negotiate for large asset acquisition with other state agencies. Inventory is tracked by the state CASA office management and must be made available to the state auditor. Any asset over \$5,000 has additional reporting requirements. State CASA leadership oversees their budget and critically assesses their spending, adjusting as necessary to ensure efficiency.

The state office follows established Iowa state government policies regarding purchasing, inventory control and financial reporting.

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 organization states they review, update and adopt all policies within the requirements of the State of Iowa.

Recommendations

- Within the constraints of the administrative authority, develop and implement a plan to review and update required policies at least every three years or annually as called for in the Standards for State CASA/GAL Organizations.
- Maintain a central system of record keeping so that future state office staff will have access to a history of the office and network, key decisions, policies, plans and practices.

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

HIGHLY 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

Each state CASA staff member has a written job description that aligns with their appropriate education and experience. They have competencies and education, experience and/or training in a field related to the position in which they are serving. They are supervised accordingly and retained as appropriate. Where any certification or licensing is required by a staff member, they ensure it is met. Iowa CASA is currently assessing their staffing structure to ensure it aligns with their long-term goals and may adjust as necessary.

Recommendations

- Complete review of current staffing structure and adjust as necessary.

Pillar 5: Staff

Highly qualified, skilled and experienced staff who provide effective leadership

34. Staff are screened through required background checks

Summary

The state CASA office uses First Advantage to perform all their background checks. They also use the Child Offender Registry and in-state license checks.

The state CASA office does have a criminal background check policy that is written into the administrative rules. They cannot change it without legislative approval. The policy provides subjective decision-making by state administrators and they are required to document any exceptions made.

State leadership discussed creating an internal policy that drives the decisions around background and screening.

Requirements

- Verification of a background checks, meeting the screening requirements in the National CASA/GAL Standards, for the state CASA staff.

Recommendations

- Develop a background check policy for the CASA office that meets National CASA/GAL Standards requirements for screening and provides guidance in reviewing any findings.

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 office has comprehensive, written human resources policies and procedures. If there are any changes made to any of the documents or policies, the state will communicate them to the employees in writing. CASA administration follows-up to make sure the staff are aware of and changes and acknowledges them in writing. The policies are administered without discrimination.

All staff orientation initially occurs through the state agency and then CASA administration.

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

Evaluations are formal and based on performance measures and state government evaluation processes. A standardized evaluation form is used. Staff are active participants in the process, granted an opportunity to respond to evaluations and must sign them. Reviews and follow-ups are part of the monthly one-on-one meetings (or as often as needed). The evaluations all have goals and deadlines related to the position and program needs.

Pillar 5: Staff

Is experienced and effective in building relationships

37. Has developed/maintained positive relationship with multiple stakeholders

Summary

The state CASA office cultivates and maintains relationships with appropriate agencies, including the judiciary and child welfare, and private organizations to advance the CASA mission. In addition to representation on multiple state committees (e.g., Iowa Child Protection Council and Children's Justice Council) state CASA leadership is involved with Prevent Child Abuse Iowa and with some law enforcement entities. Staff are also very involved and open to pursuing opportunities with stakeholders on a state and local level. Staff members' embrace their role in building and maintaining stakeholder relationships, based on the appropriateness to each staff member's job description.

The judicial interview for this report mentioned the CASA/GAL brand is well known within the judiciary, especially with juvenile court judges but believes the state CASA program could have a stronger presence in advertising throughout the state. She mentioned that many CASA volunteers come out of the school system and the state CASA office should focus recruitment efforts there.

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 current priority for Iowa CASA's growth strategy is to maximize the current local programs' abilities to serve all youth in the communities in which they currently operate. From there, they have an intentional plan to increase service to currently unserved counties in the state. Iowa CASA assesses the plan at least monthly and is moving forward with increasing the capacity of programs. They implemented the growth plan in 2020 and have been continually assessing it. They refer to the plan as the "Dream Map". Although the plan is being implemented, the goals of the plan have yet to be achieved.

Recommendations

- Continue efforts to serve all children and youth in the areas local CASA offices currently operate and then introduce and increase service to those counties currently unserved.
- Conduct an annual assessment/gap analysis of child service provision needs in the state.
- Create a strategy in collaboration with the local CASA program network for serving all the children in the state who have experienced abuse or neglect and are before the court.

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

The state CASA office informs and seeks guidance from National CASA/GAL regarding planning around any new local office development. They acknowledge they have achieved limited growth over the last five years. They are currently working with National CASA/GAL to identify what a "program" is and "what it looks like" versus a local office based on National CASA/GAL's definitions and expectations.

Once they have maximized local program capacity, they will work with National CASA/GAL to engage new, currently unserved areas in development in conjunction with National CASA/GAL's membership process.

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

The state CASA office surveys the network regarding programs' needs consistently. They have regular communication about local office needs in their one-on-one monthly meetings. Iowa CASA has a number of internal committees with staff from around the state providing their input and insight. They also have completed a marketing survey.

Program coordinators interviewed for this report remarked that the state CASA office organizes workgroup and committees so the majority of the work they do will involve feedback from local programs. The state office is very open to ongoing feedback. In addition, to the monthly meetings, local programs are also welcomed to attend the Iowa Child Advocacy Board meetings.

Recommendations

- Develop a process to document that feedback from local programs has been solicited, collected, and analyzed; using the information to inform the Strategic Plan.

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 office performs assessments with programs consistently regarding their needs through multiple avenues, including surveys and one-on-one meetings that occur monthly. These meetings also generate written documentation that record and track needs and progress made. The state organization seeks additional resources based on local program needs.

Recommendations

- Ensure inclusion of local programs in the assessment of state organization capacity.

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

While Iowa CASA has open and transparent dialogue with local staff about their satisfaction with service from the state CASA office, they do not have a formal satisfaction survey. They do track all feedback and use it to assess future needs and operations.

Recommendations

- Develop an annual satisfaction survey, document, and analyze results.

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

Iowa CASA's Strategic Plan was created by the ICAB in conjunction with state leadership, three local program leaders and members of the auxiliary board. It is effective December 2019 and ends 2024. The plan includes four primary goals: (1) consistently increase annual funding to maintain and expand ICAB programming, (2) implement continuous marketing and recruitment strategies to engage Iowa citizen volunteerism with ICAB, (3) provide high quality training for volunteers and staff to ensure competent advocacy, and (4) to become an integral partner in the child welfare system. The plan is reviewed at every quarterly board meeting, although they are only required to review it annually.

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

Iowa CASA staff participated in the HESRP and are dedicated to meeting the Standards for State CASA/GAL Organizations. They worked with National CASA/GAL staff to facilitate the HESRP through the virtual on-site visit as well as local program, administrative authority and stakeholder interviews.

Recommendations

- Actively participate in the development of an Action Plan to implement the requirements and recommendations included in the HESRP Preliminary Report.

Pillar 6: Service

Continuously improves the quality of services and leadership it provides

45. Ensures financial, statistical and programmatic information is collected

Summary

Iowa CASA establishes and maintains a system for collecting the appropriate data using the Child Advocacy Match System (CAMS). The system shares data between the CASA program and Foster Care Review Board. The state organization completes and submits their required National CASA/GAL surveys in a timely manner. Their system allows them to run multiple reports regarding the data they collect, most often running them by date and/or program.

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 organization has a strong relationship with the judiciary and the chief justice, who serves in an informal advisory capacity to the program. At the district level (there are eight districts), the programs participate in permanency summits and other relationship drivers with the court. The local programs also have strong relationships with the judges and are “proactive with working with and reaching out to them” to address any issues that arise.

State and local CASA staff works to ensure the judiciary’s understanding of the Core Model and scope. Whenever there are issues that present potential deviations or risks to the National CASA/GAL Core Model, Iowa CASA works with National CASA/GAL to address them.

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

The state CASA office developed a Public Education and Community Awareness Plan (PECAP). The plan has four tenants: Support for local programs, conduct statewide data collection and distribution, enhance mission with stakeholder partnerships, and engage community members. They received a grant from National CASA/GAL to support this plan. One of the purposes of Friends of Iowa CASA is to increase community awareness of the program and mission.

The state CASA office has multiple avenues for training. They recently partnered with the judiciary to train on the CASA model and with DHS to train foster parents. The auxiliary also provides support for training to CASA volunteers and staff including through an annual conference.

The MOU with DHS addresses the CASA programs agreed-upon procedures. This includes each program’s “local plans and flair”. There is a community awareness element to the MOU.

Regarding volunteer referral, Iowa CASA has a system on their website to accept volunteer inquiries, including the ability to apply to become a volunteer. The referrals go to the state office, which shares them with the appropriate local program by zip code. They also work collaboratively with the local coordinators and have a written process for contacting potential volunteers, which is documented in their CAMS database.

All state public education efforts are coordinated with local program coordinators.

The auxiliary has a Marketing Committee and there is a dedicated staff member on the state staff to execute the PECAP.

Iowa CASA is collaborating with National CASA/GAL on their branding campaign, using the “Change a Child’s Story” campaign.

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

State- and program-level data is submitted in a timely manner to National CASA/GAL by Iowa CASA. They have written policies for maintaining the data they collect. In addition to data submitted to National CASA/GAL, they collect data as part of a six-part child assessment regarding child safety and parental factors, Adverse Childhood Experiences, education, health and, when appropriate, assessing transitional needs. They are continually assessing and working to improve their data collection efforts.

Recommendations

- Develop a written policy regarding what uses will be made of data collected from the programs.
- Review National CASA/GAL Data Collection Protocol and execute in Iowa.

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

All CASA data is collected and reported by Iowa CASA through CAMS. The state office reviews and confirms local office data prior to submission to National CASA/GAL. The state office is responsive to National CASA/GAL regarding data collection and reports errors or concerns when known to them.

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

Iowa CASA submits timely state level data and reports to National CASA/GAL. They have a very intentional and robust data collection system. Data is reviewed and validated for accuracy prior to submission. All data needed to submit annual surveys is collected.

The state CASA office is reassessing the data they collect and process for collecting and reporting.

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

Iowa CASA has a dedicated Master Facilitator who delivers high-quality training. She was trained by National CASA/GAL staff in 2017 as a Master Facilitator. All facilitators in the state delivering training to volunteers has been trained by this person. Iowa CASA uses the National CASA/GAL Flex Learning curriculum on their own Learning Management System. They have added sections and resources to supplement the Flex Learning curriculum. Guest speakers are allowed in their training, for example in Module 5 where they include an advocate panel, but those speakers do not facilitate or deliver content.

Iowa CASA uses Google Classroom, and each module has an evaluation section. They enter responses to the evaluations in the facilitators' notes recorded in CAMS.

Iowa CASA has partnered with National CASA/GAL on training initiatives, with state leaders serving on the National CASA/GAL Training Committee.

Recommendations

- Establish and implement a system, potentially through the site visits, for monitoring local program delivery of pre-service training in alignment with National CASA/GAL Association standards.

Final Summary

Iowa CASA is viewed as a leader and, through its position as part of Iowa state government, is engaged at the state level with the judiciary and child welfare stakeholders. Local offices feel supported and rely on the state office for guidance and leadership. Iowa CASA is strongly supported by the Iowa Child Advocacy Board and Friends of Iowa CASA. Through the state government infrastructure, governance, human resources, financial management and technology are among the functions made possible. The state government infrastructure allows the CASA program administrator and state level staff to focus primarily on local office support and advancing the CASA mission.

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

Iowa 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 state office and local offices and volunteers enjoy a good reputation in the state. National CASA/GAL is grateful for the state of Iowa and ICAB's administration of the state CASA office and for the commitment and expertise of Steffani Simbric and Amy Carpenter, state office leaders, and the many dedicated CASA staff across the state of Iowa. Iowa CASA has long been a strong partner to the National CASA/GAL Association.

State Preliminary State HESRP Checklist



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)