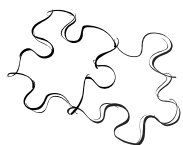


## CHAPTER 9

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### PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT



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#### **INTRODUCTION**

CASA programs in New York State have historically grown from the ground up. In some instances, the impetus for a program originated with the Family Court, which convened a stakeholders' group to create a local program. In other cases, an individual or local organization has identified the need for CASA advocacy, and galvanized support. At times, a CASA program serving one or two counties has expanded to serve another. In each county, the process takes shape in a unique way that conforms to community need.

Sometimes there are barriers to program startup that need to be overcome, such as a lack of financial resources, lack of understanding of the role of a CASA volunteer, or objections from one of the key stakeholders in the county. Always there is a need for the development of a committed steering committee or advisory group with a clear plan, outlining how the program will be created and sustained, and assuring that it complies with National CASA and New York State CASA standards and New York State Unified Court System court rules.

#### **WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A CASA PROGRAM?**

The State CASA Association (CASANYs), National CASA and the UCS CASA Assistance Program (UCS CASAA Program) all need to be integrally involved in the creation of new programs. Only National CASA can give the program the right to use the name "CASA." Programs must apply for and receive provisional status from National CASA as part of the development process. In order to receive that status, programs must be affiliated with the State Association and in compliance with the Affiliation Agreement.

National CASA also produces information about program startup, both for agencies and the courts, which is available through [www.casenet.org](http://www.casenet.org). It is important to note that information

is not state-specific, and some of the procedures or language used may not apply to programs starting in New York State. National CASA also offers annual grants specifically geared to program startup or expansion.

According to New York State court rules ([www.nycourts.gov/rules/chiefjudge/43.shtml](http://www.nycourts.gov/rules/chiefjudge/43.shtml)), CASA programs must meet regulations promulgated by the Chief Administrator of the Courts in order to receive assignments from the court. Regardless of current eligibility for funding from the Unified Court System, this means that interested organizations must be in close communication with UCS in order to be assured of case assignments once the program is created. The UCS can arrange for meetings with local judges to discuss the use of the CASA program, and, with the State Association and local Court Improvement Project staff, can assist the local steering committee in identifying support and overcoming any resistance. The Court Rules regarding CASA also require compliance with National and State CASA standards. (Please see Chapter 2 of this manual, “Guiding Documents.”)

### **WHERE DO WE BEGIN?**

An important early step in program development is convening a meeting of all stakeholders to discuss the need for CASA advocacy and how the program is to be structured. This helps to educate the community on what role CASA volunteers play in Family Court and how CASA programs work collaboratively with all entities in child welfare. Stakeholders would include the judges and key court staff, department of social services and county attorneys, attorneys for the child, parents’ attorneys, major service providers, and members of the local bar. Representatives of local businesses or civic, social or child advocacy organizations can be a major help in securing support for the new program; in many counties in NYS, for example, the Junior League was a critical player in the early stages of program development.

It is essential that all the major players in child welfare proceedings be integral partners in efforts to start a CASA program. Both CASANYS (518-426-5354) and UCS CASA Program staff (518-238-4360) can assist in convening and facilitating those community meetings.

Generally following this meeting, a Steering Committee is formed to guide program development. The host entity would need to develop a management or governance plan, and a plan for program operation including staffing, office space, policies and procedures, and resource development. The formative process includes developing Memoranda of Understanding with Family Court and Department of Social Services. This manual can offer general program management guidelines, and samples of standardized forms used in New York State. Contact CASANYS and UCS for assistance if any challenges occur.

There are pros and cons to each method of program startup, whether as an expansion from an existing program, creating an independent not-for-profit, or under an administering agency. Both the UCS CASA Assistance Program and CASANYS can assist the forming organization with any decisions in this area.

## **THE LEGAL ENTITY**

An entity desiring to form a new not for profit needs to develop its own governing Board of Directors, generally beginning as a Steering Committee. An interested entity will need to file a Certificate of Incorporation with the New York State Department of State. For guidelines for this process, go to: [www.dos.state.ny.us/CORP/nfpguide.htm](http://www.dos.state.ny.us/CORP/nfpguide.htm) To apply for tax-exempt status, an organization would incorporate as a 501(c)3 organization through the Internal Revenue Service ([www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov)). The program would also need to obtain a NYS Charities Bureau Registration Number through the Office of the Attorney General ([www.oag.state.ny.us/charities](http://www.oag.state.ny.us/charities))

Programs sited within other agencies are guided by an Advisory Committee that includes a liaison to the host agency's board of directors. National CASA has produced a guide to umbrella agencies that is available at [www.casenet.org](http://www.casenet.org). In New York State, most of the CASA programs have administering agencies such as Community Dispute Resolution Centers, Mental Health Associations, Catholic Charities or Boys and Girls' Clubs.

## **PROGRAM MANAGEMENT**

Once a director is hired for the local program, he or she should attend a New Directors' Training, offered periodically by CASANYS and the UCS CASA Assistance Program. The program director also attends statewide program directors' meetings, and will benefit from the combined wisdom of the network's dedicated staff.

## **FUNDING**

Sustaining funding is an ongoing challenge for CASA programs in NYS, although some regular opportunities for resources occur. National CASA grants are available on an annual basis. There are several factors to consider when applying. One, the process may be highly competitive. And two, the length of time the grant funding is available is limited. Carefully consider how those funds would be replaced when the grant term ends.

UCS offers a periodic Request For Proposals (RFP) for CASA program funding. These are five-year contracts for general CASA services, and currently account for about 25% of CASA budgets statewide. Through CASANYS, grants from the NYS Interest on Lawyer Account Fund are available. CASANYS also may offer grants from other sources as availability occurs.

Local programs also have qualified for public funding through state "member items," and their county. Programs may receive United Way grants, local foundation grants, and funds from special events and individual donors. (Please see Chapter 2 "Guiding Documents" for CASANYS's standards on Resource Development.) The support of a strong Board of Directors committed to regularly supporting the program's resource development is critical. Ongoing information and training about resource development is available from both CASANYS and UCS CASA Assistance Program. UCS offers an annual resource development seminar in the fall to the programs funded through the Office of Alternative Dispute Resolution and Court Improvement Programs.

**AND MORE . . .**

This CASA Program Manual is intended as a guide to assist all New York State CASA programs throughout their life span. There is a great deal of information in other chapters to assist new programs in each phase of program operations including guiding documents, program management, fiscal responsibility, technology and more . . .