# Frequently Asked Questions

STANDARDS FOR LOCAL CASA/GAL PROGRAMS (2020)

## GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STANDARDS FOR LOCAL CASA/GAL PROGRAMS

1.  What is the timeline for implementation of the new standards?

    - The *Standards for Local CASA/GAL Programs* were approved in the fall of 2020 and effective January 1, 2021.  The corresponding quality assurance process is being developed, with the first element of that process being a self-assessment in early 2022.

2.  Can I obtain a WORD version of the standards?

    - In an effort to preserve the integrity of official documents published by National CASA/GAL, they are published in PDF format, unless the documents are intended and/or designated for network edit/customization (e.g., toolkits, sample templates). National CASA/GAL's practice is to release approved documents in PDF format, to avoid them being altered.

3.  Can local programs submit draft versions of required policies, plans or documentation for National CASA/GAL to review and approve?

    - National CASA/GAL does not have the capacity to review, preview or approve draft versions of individual local program policies, plans or documentation outside of the quality assurance, membership or grant accountability processes. Local programs should review the standards for components for required policies and plans.

4.  Where can local programs find a list of all the required documentation a local program must maintain to adhere with the standards?

    - Required documentation is listed at the end of the published *Standards for Local CASA/GAL Programs*. Additional required documentation and/or information may be noted in the elements of practice. It is recommended that local programs review each standard and elements of practice rather than rely solely on the Documentation List.

5.  May local programs operating as part of an umbrella organization use the *Standards for Local CASA/GAL Programs (2020) - Publicly Administered Programs* instead of the *Standards for Local CASAGAL Programs (2020) - Programs Structured as Nonprofits*?

    Umbrella organizations are nonprofits and must adhere to the *Standards for Local CASAGAL Programs (2020) - Programs Structured as Nonprofits*.

6.  Where can local programs find samples of policies or plans required by the standards?

    - BoardSource or state or local nonprofit associations may have resources and exemplars that are applicable. State CASA/GAL organizations may also be a resource for samples.

7.  How do local programs access their BoardSource membership and Everyone Ready?

    - BoardSource is free to members of the National CASA/GAL Association. BoardSource is the recognized leader in nonprofit board leadership and supports, trains, and educates nonprofit leaders from across the country and throughout the world. Click here to set up a CASA/GAL local program account for BoardSource.

    - National CASA/GAL contracts with Energize, Inc. to provide Everyone Ready to member programs. This is an online volunteer management and retention tool that volunteerism expert Susan Ellis and the staff of Energize, Inc. developed. To request a registration code and link for Everyone Ready from National CASA/GAL, members must complete a registration form. The form is also accessible from the member portal under Volunteer Management: https://member.nationalcasagal.org/volunteer-management/.

8.  Will National CASA/GAL provide samples or templates of required documentation?

    - National CASA/GAL will be identifying and/or developing samples and templates. Additionally, National CASA/GAL is developing how-to webinars related to the standards' requirements based on requests from the network. How-to webinars, will occur between June and December 2021.

## STANDARD 1 CORE MODEL AND MISSION

9.  Does the local program's mission statement need to be a verbatim match with the *National CASA/GAL Association Core Model*?

    - The elements of practice require the mission statement to be consistent with, as opposed to a verbatim match of, the *National CASA/GAL Association Core Model*.

10. What if a court, statute or local rule provides for CASA/GAL appointments on cases other than abuse or neglect (e.g. delinquency, guardianship)?

    - State statutes and court rules take precedence over the *National CASA/GAL Standards for Local CASA/GAL Programs*. Standard 1.A.3 states: "State statute takes precedence if it provides for the CASA/GAL volunteer to take other types of cases."

    - Additionally, the *National CASA/GAL Association Core Model* states: "State statute takes precedence if it provides for the CASA/GAL volunteer to take other types of cases. National CASA/GAL assistance and support is limited to work with dependent children who have experienced abuse or neglect. CASA/GAL staff serving children is kept to a minimum and only occurs under extraordinary circumstances or when mandated. Anyone serving children must adhere to the service provisions and standards outlined in the core model."

## STANDARD 2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

11. How does a local program demonstrate adherence to the guiding principles?

    - National CASA/GAL anticipates local programs will demonstrate adherence with the guiding principles through a combination of requested documentation (including sample court reports) and interview responses as part of a quality assurance process.

12. Are local programs required to provide court reports to National CASA/GAL under Standard 2?

    - Local programs demonstrate adherence to Standard 2 during a quality assurance process by providing redacted court reports consistent with confidentiality obligations.

13. Standard 2.B requires local programs to provide orientation, training, and continuing education for staff, volunteers and nonprofit governing board members about these guiding principles. Does this mean the local programs are required to offer the training annually or track completion dates for each staff person, volunteer and nonprofit board member?

    - Local programs are required to track completion dates of this requirement for volunteers, staff and nonprofit board members in order to demonstrate adherence with this standard. Educational programming about the guiding principles may be offered/provided by the local program, the state CASA/GAL organization or National CASA/GAL, as long as completion is tracked by the local program. Frequency of this topic for inclusion in continuing education options is not specified in the standards.

## STANDARD 3 DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

14. Should the local program work to diversify its staff, volunteers and governing board to reflect the population of children served by the CASA/GAL program, the population of children in foster care, the population of eligible children or the community served when creating plans for diversity, equity and inclusion? These statistics are not the same.

    - Local programs should work to reflect the population of children served.

    - Reflecting the population of children served refers to the population of children eligible for CASA/GAL volunteer appointment in alignment with the Core Model.

15. What samples or guidance can National CASA/GAL provide about creating strong diversity, equity and inclusion plans?

    - National CASA/GAL will provide a how-to webinar about creating a strong diversity, equity and inclusion plan. This, and other how-to webinars, will occur between June and December 2021.

16. Do the standards permit a local program to include the required diversity, equity and inclusion plan into the local program's strategic plan as a designated section or is a separate document required?

    - A program's diversity, equity and inclusion plan may be incorporated into a strategic plan so long as the strategic plan clearly designates a section for this purpose and measurable goals and action steps are specified.

## STANDARD 4 ETHICAL CONDUCT AND CONFIDENTIALITY

17. Can a volunteer advocate of the local program also serve on the board of the same nonprofit CASA/GAL program?

    - Yes. Standard 4.A.4 states that if active volunteers are members of the governing board, there are processes and procedures in place for handling potential conflicts of interest in relation to human resources and other issues with potential for a conflict of interest.

18. Can an active foster parent serve on the board of a nonprofit local program? Can a judge serve on the board of a local nonprofit program?

    - Local programs are required to have conflict of interest policies that guide them in making these determinations. Judicial ethics may prohibit sitting judges from serving on the board or may limit the activities if they do. It is required that local programs have access to lawyers and/or leaders with insight about conflicts of interest to weigh the benefits and challenges of allowing those with potential conflicts of interest to serve on the board.

19. Is the volunteer advocate required to sign a new statement of confidentiality with the acceptance of each new case or can they just sign one statement at the end of their pre-service training?

    - Volunteer advocates are required to sign a confidentiality statement, oath or commitment (or similarly titled document) upon acceptance of each assigned case. Staff and nonprofit board members sign a statement of confidentiality annually.

20. Regarding confidentiality (and record keeping), can National CASA/GAL provide examples of non-case information?

    - Examples of non-case information include but are not limited to: volunteer records, human resources records, donor records and board records.

21. Are volunteer advocates allowed to talk about their cases with other volunteer advocates?

    - The program should set clear guidelines and guardrails about what information volunteers may share. Applicable laws will set the minimum expectations for confidentiality, but programs may impose stricter limitations than those required by law. Within that framework, volunteer advocates may discuss generalities with fellow volunteer advocates but not anything that would identify the child or family. However, programs should bear in mind the tendency for people to become less diligent about protecting confidentiality as they become more comfortable with each other. Maintaining a culture of confidentiality requires consistent diligence.

## STANDARD 5 GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

22. Standard 5 requires that local programs have written annual operational goals or a strategic plan that is reviewed annually. Can National CASA/GAL provide a sample of operational goals or a strategic plan?

    - National CASA/GAL will provide a how-to webinar about creating operational goals or a strategic plan. This, and other how-to webinars, will occur between June and December 2021.

23. If the public entity over the publicly administered local program only requires that staff complete a background check upon hire, can the re-check that is required every 4 years be waived? (The same question and response applies t umbrella organizations,)

- Background checks must be rerun every 4 years for staff of every local program, regardless of the local program's governance structure unless Rap Back service is in place for the program's background checks.

24. What if the umbrella organization does not require background checks for board members?

Background checks for board members of umbrella organizations are required by the standards. Re-checks are required every 4 years as part of the requirements around governance of a CASA/GAL program unless Rap Back service is in place for the program's background checks.

25. Is a fingerprint check an equivalent to the social security number check?  If a local program fingerprint checks the staff, volunteer advocates and nonprofit board members, do they still need to complete a social security number check? If a fingerprint check does not suffice for a social security check, can you provide an example of what would suffice because some volunteer advocates do not want to provide their social security number.

A fingerprint check and a social security number check are not equivalent.  Standard B.3.f. requires local programs to conduct a check to identify additional names, aliases, and/or addresses of applicants.  The standard expressly states that local programs may use social security number checks or an equivalent type of check.  The particular method used to meet this requirement – social security number or fingerprint or other – does not matter as long as the check identifies the additional names, aliases, and/or addresses.  Local programs should receive assurances from their background check provider that the check satisfies this requirement.

26. What background check information is required for potential staff, volunteer advocates and board members that have lived out of the country within the past 7 years?  How does a local program conduct an international background check?

- Local programs should work with the prospective volunteer advocate and the appropriate embassy or consulate to complete equivalent background checks to those required in the standards.

- A list of countries and their process for securing background checks can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criminal-records-checks-for-overseas-applicants (updated 2017)

## STANDARD 6 MANAGEMENT AND FUNDING

27. Can National CASA/GAL provide more information or training about creating a logic model and what it is used for?

- Recorded trainings on logic models are available on the National CASA/GAL member portal. This, and other how-to webinars, will occur between June and December 2021. Additionally, some state CASA/GAL organizations continue to offer guidance about logic models.

28. Regarding Standard 6.C.6 about financial requirements, our state law does not align with the financial thresholds described in this standard.  How do we manage this?  The state-required threshold for a full audit is higher than what appears in the standards. Does the state law supersede?

- In this instance, to meet National CASA/GAL standards, members should follow thresholds set forth in the standards.  State law does not prohibit the organization from conducting an audit below the statutory threshold.

29. In the table about the time/level requirement for financial reviews, should the language read "Independent CPA audit recommended every 3 years" for revenue <$250,000? It currently reads "independent CPA review."

- This is a typographical error. The recommendation is an independent CPA audit every three years regardless of revenue threshold. This entry has been removed from the table in its entirety as it is referenced above the table.

30. What insurance is required for local programs?

- Standard 5.A.9 states the nonprofit board or administrative authority ensures the program has applicable insurance coverages, such as liability insurance, workers' compensation insurance and directors' and officers' coverage.
- Standard 6.G.2 requires directors' and officers' liability insurance for nonprofit boards.
- Standard 6.G.3 requires general liability insurance or an equivalent.
- Standard 6.G.4.f requires workers' compensation (and/or additional employee protection as deemed necessary by the program).
- See also Standard 6.G.10 and 8.F.9 related to insurance and the transportation of children, if applicable.

## STANDARD 7 HUMAN RESOURCES

31. If the program is publicly administered or under an umbrella organization and another department is responsible for developing and managing aspects of, or all of the human resources policies, what is the local program's responsibility to ensure that the policies align with the standards? (The same question and response applies to other policies managed by other departments for publicly administered and umbrella programs.)

- The local program should review the policies to identify whether or not any elements of practice are missing or if there are any inconsistencies between the policies and the *Standards for Local CASA/GAL Programs.* The program should communicate with the respective department as needed and work with the appropriate department/staff to align the policies.

32. Who are "key" staff, other than the program director, for purposes of succession planning?

- Local programs determine the key staff positions for purposes of succession planning, which will vary depending on size and structure of the local program. National CASA/GAL does not designate specific titles or positions as key positions other than the position of program director. It is suggested that local programs consider the overall impact to the program and how cases will be managed during position vacancies when identifying key positions for succession planning.

33. If a local program no longer keeps paper copies of personnel files and instead stores this information in a database with only the program director having access – is this considered a separation of confidential information in alignment with Standard 7.G?

- If the information is separated electronically, the same as it would be in paper form, this method of organization aligns with the standard.

34. Do local programs need to segregate old/existing human resources files as designated in Standard 7.G or does this standard apply only to future human resources files?

- Current human resources files should be separated as designated in Standard 7.G. The current standards do not impose an obligation on local programs to reorganize human resources files that were closed prior to the January 1, 2021 effective date of the current standards. Note that this standard tracks with the requirements of federal, state, and local laws that impose obligations to segregate certain personnel records. For example, federal law requires that employers keep an I-9 form in a separate file from the personnel record.

## STANDARD 8 VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATION

35. What constitutes an "equivalent curriculum" (sometimes referred to as an alternative curriculum) for pre-service training? If a local program follows the National CASA/GAL Association curriculum but adds some sessions or weaves in locally relevant information, do they need to go through the approval process for an equivalent curriculum?

- As long as a local program follows the curriculum for the chosen modality of the pre-service training, the local program is not required to seek approval for an equivalent curriculum. Local programs may add sessions and local content. For example, some programs add a question and answer session with local judges, former foster youth and/or representatives from the local child welfare agency.

36. How does a program get an equivalent pre-service training curriculum approved?

- Local programs that have an equivalent curriculum to be approved should email training@nationalcasagal.org to request a review of their curriculum.

37. Are all pre-service training facilitators required to complete the Training of Facilitators (TOF)? Even when facilitating an equivalent curriculum?

- Pre-service training facilitators must complete one of the following:

  - National CASA/GAL TOF, or
  - TOF offered by the state CASA/GAL organization, or
  - Facilitate for the first time with a facilitator that has completed a National CASA/GAL or state CASA/GAL TOF.

- This applies to all pre-service training facilitators, even if an equivalent curriculum is approved.

38. What are the pre-service training modalities?

- Currently National CASA/GAL has approved three modalities:  Traditional In-Person, Flex Learning and Guided Learning. In 2020, as a response to COVID-19, Flex Learning was modified to be delivered in a totally virtual environment. All requests to deliver the Guided Learning curriculum must be approved by the state CASA/GAL organization or designee.

39. Should state CASA/GAL associations still offer TOFs?

- Yes, National CASA/GAL encourages state organizations to designate a Master Trainer who can train local program pre-service training facilitators.

40. Will National CASA/GAL ask local programs to participate in a state's TOF if they have one?

While National CASA/GAL will not ask local programs to participate specifically in a state CASA/GAL organization's TOF if they offer one, National CASA/GAL does recommend that. State CASA/GAL organizations should have the ability to convey content that is unique to their state. Before local program staff register for a National CASA/GAL TOF, it is recommended they reach out to their state CASA/GAL organization to inquire about upcoming state-offered TOFs.

41. Does National CASA/GAL still want there to be a "Master Facilitator" in each state, where the capacity exists to do so?

- Yes. National CASA/GAL is currently revising the master facilitator training that will be offered to pre-service training facilitators designated by state CASA/GAL organizations for their state.

42. Does the emphasis on a statewide TOF only qualify pre-service trainings that are in-person and not for guided or flex learning, or does this not matter?

- The goal of a TOF is to equip pre-service training facilitators with the skills and abilities to deliver adult learning curriculum regardless of the curriculum or content. While we encourage all facilitators to employ the adult learning skill of being agile with multiple delivery methods, we do recommend facilitators focus on building their greatest strengths around the curriculum being offered.

43. Can National CASA/GAL talk to Optima (and/or other database service providers) about adding a field in the pre-service training section of the database to be able to add facilitator names so local programs can properly document that the training was delivered by a qualified facilitator?

- Yes, National CASA/GAL can reach out to Optima (and/or other database service providers) regarding this issue.

44. The standards require volunteer advocates to visit with the child at least monthly. What if the child's placement is changed to three hours away or the child is placed in congregate care and visitation is not permitted monthly?

- Programs may permit an exception to the required monthly visitation so long as the program has a written exceptions policy and retains the required documentation.  Standard 8.F.5.g. states that a volunteer advocate "Meets in-person with the child once every 30 days at a minimum."  The Standard continues as follows:

- i. In-person contact should take place where the child lives for a majority of visits to ensure in-depth knowledge of the child's environment for informed recommendations to the court.

- ii. To allow for an exception, the program must have a written exceptions policy outlining circumstances when exceptions may be permitted. Exceptions to permit less frequent in-person contact, or alternatives for in-person contact, shall be documented and retained in the program's case record as to the justification for and reasonableness of the exception.

45. What if the state CASA/GAL organization has a prohibition to or additional requirements for permitting transportation of a child? Does that conflict with National CASA/GAL standards?

- Having a prohibition to or additional requirements for the transportation of assigned children is not necessarily a conflict. A state CASA/GAL organization may have additional requirements so long as they do not conflict with the National CASA/GAL standards relating to the transportation of children.

46. Is it required that the program's executive director sign each court report?

- The standards do not specify this requirement. Programs should confirm whether or not this is required by the judge, court rules, or statute.


## STANDARD 9 PUBLIC EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT

47. Can local programs phase out the "I am for the Child" materials and gradually phase-in the "Change a Child's Story" materials?

- Yes, as long as marketing campaigns are not co-mingled, mixed or used simultaneously by a local program.

48. Can a local program tailor the CASA/GAL logo for a special event?

- Local programs may not alter or change the CASA/GAL logo or incorporate the logo into another logo.

- The CASA/GAL brand is unique and special. The more consistent the network is in how we maintain our brand, and the campaigns within it, the more recognizable and identifiable our brand will be, and the more likely that current and prospective constituents will retain and recall it. The net effect is a stronger CASA/GAL brand that benefits the children we serve. Please review the *National CASA/GAL Association Brand Guidelines and Intellectual Property Standards* available on the member portal.

49. What is the difference between a communications policy and a crisis management plan?

- A crisis management plan sets forth the decision tree and steps that the local programs will follow in response to a crisis, and the roles and responsibilities of staff, board members, and/or outside advisors. Steps for creating a crisis management plan are available on the member portal.

- A communications policy is a written protocol for dissemination of generalized public information, outreach and education activities.

## STANDARD 10 DATA AND RECORDS

50. Standard 10.A.2.c states that the safeguards related to the tool and/or software used for the collection of data include "Review of all decisions regarding electronic files by program management." What does this mean?

    Local programs should have a policy, practice or procedure of reviewing decisions about access to data, information sharing, storage, security and management of electronic data. For example, if a local program decides to allow volunteer advocates access to the database to enter their case notes, how are decisions made about this practice? What approvals are needed and who makes decisions as questions arise?

51. How long is a local program required to keep data and records? Are local programs required to destroy data or records within a specific timeline?

    • Programs are required to establish a records retention policy in alignment with federal, state and local laws. Standard 10.B.5.a states that child/case records are kept a minimum of seven (7) years from case closure unless there is a court or statutory requirement that dictates otherwise. The standards do not set specific timelines for destroying records. (See also, Standard 8.H.3 requiring the local program to retain volunteer records after a volunteer has left the program in accordance with the program's records retention policy.)

52. Is having confidential data and information stored in a database such as CASA Manager or Optima considered an electronic offsite backup of that file?

    "Cloud" storage is the equivalent of offsite storage. As long as the data on CASA Manager, Optima, and other databases, is stored "in the cloud," this aligns with the requirement for offsite back up of that information. However, local programs should work with their service provider to understand and confirm back up of their data.

53. If a local program keeps paper copies of case files and also enters the information into a database such as CASA Manager or Optima, does that count as electronic backup or is an additional electronic backup required?

    • So long as cloud based storage is backed up, there is no need to create two electronic records. Local programs should consult with their database service provider to ensure that information is backed up regularly.

54. Programs are required to submit statistics to National CASA/GAL about program services and child and case information. Is it possible for National CASA/GAL to provide state and national summary reports annually?

    • National CASA/GAL annually shares summary reports from both state and local surveys in an aggregated form. Additionally, National CASA/GAL provides state organizations with an Excel document that details data collected from their local programs as a result of the annual survey.

## STANDARD 11 NETWORK AND MEMBERSHIP

55. What is an auxiliary program?

    An auxiliary program is a nonprofit established for the purpose of fundraising and/or providing ancillary services for a state CASA/GAL organization or local program most often because the program is publicly administered.  Activities can include fundraising, marketing and similar activities.

56. What does a local program need to do in order to expand into a nearby county? What if a local program wants to merge with another local program or change the governance structure from operating within an umbrella entity to an independent nonprofit or vice versa?

    - For any of these changes, the first step is to notify the state CASA/GAL organization, if one exists, in the local program's state. A collaborative needs assessment will determine whether the proposed change can go forward. If approved based on the needs assessment, the local program will then go through the National CASA/GAL Program Membership Process in partnership with the state CASA/GAL organization.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT THE QA PROCESS FOR LOCAL CASA/GAL PROGRAMS

57. What is the plan and timeline for the new local program quality assurance process?

    - National CASA/GAL is now focused on development of the self-assessment component of the larger quality assurance process.

    - National CASA/GAL will begin to develop the remaining components of the new quality review process in late 2021. Answers to specific questions about the process are not yet available.  That being said, there are several guiding elements anticipated:

      - National CASA/GAL has responsibility for and will manage the new quality assurance process and review system.

      - State CASA/GAL organizations may choose to continue to lead their own quality assurance reviews of local programs.

      - National CASA/GAL will work with any state CASA/GAL organization that has a quality assurance process in place to align it with the National CASA/GAL process, seek to assure the processes are complementary, eliminate duplication of efforts where possible and increase efficiency for local programs.

      - National CASA/GAL will continue to have an annual compliance process as part of the membership renewal process.

      - National CASA/GAL will engage the leadership councils and the network at large in the development of our new quality assurance review process.  The new process will be determined in full before it is released.

58. What is the timeline for the new self-assessment process for local programs and will the self-assessment questions be posted on the National CASA/GAL member portal in advance?

The self-assessment for local programs will be launched in January 2022 and local programs will have until the end of April 2022 to complete and submit it to National CASA/GAL. Feedback reports will be provided to local programs no later than September 30, 2022. The self-assessment questions will be posted on the member portal before the end of 2021. The other elements of the quality assurance process have not been finalized. National CASA/GAL will update the network as soon as the elements of the quality assurance process are finalized.

59. Is it correct that National CASA/GAL will only request the bolded items on the Documentation List at the end of the *Standards for Local CASA/GAL Programs* for the self-assessment in 2022?

    • Yes, National CASA/GAL will only request the bolded items on the Documentation List.

60. Will all local programs be required to complete the self-assessment in 2022?

    • Yes, and all local programs will have until no later than April 30, 2022 to complete their self-assessment.

61. If the state CASA/GAL organization requires local programs to participate in a quality assurance process, are local programs required to complete one for National CASA/GAL as well?

    • Each local program must complete the quality assurance processes established by both National CASA/GAL and their respective state CAS/GAL organization, if required by their state CASA/GAL organization. National CASA/GAL will work with any state CASA/GAL organization that has a quality assurance process in place to align it with the National CASA/GAL process, seek to assure the processes are complementary, eliminate duplication of efforts where possible and increase efficiency for local programs.

62. Will National CASA/GAL certify state CASA/GAL organizations to conduct local program quality assurance reviews in lieu of participating in the National CASA/GAL process and if so, when?

    • The National CASA/GAL Association quality assurance process for local programs is under development. National CASA/GAL will have a certification process for state CASA/GAL organizations that are conducting quality assurance reviews of local programs in the event those reviews can be used in lieu of National CASA/GAL's process. National CASA/GAL does not anticipate the certification process will be developed as part of the 2022 self-assessment cycle.