



## ***Flex Learning: Volunteer Training Curriculum*** **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is the *Flex Learning* Curriculum?**

The *Flex Learning: Volunteer Training* Curriculum was designed by the National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association in response to the needs of local and state programs. The curriculum gives CASA/GAL programs a flexible option in pre-service training for volunteers. The curriculum was piloted by 8 local programs in 2011 and is now available to the CASA/GAL network. The curriculum is made possible by a generous grant from the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation.

### **What is the format of *Flex Learning*?**

National CASA's *Flex Learning* curriculum is a blended approach to training that combines in-person and online delivery of information. The training occurs in five sessions. Each session contains approximately 3 hours of self-guided work that participants complete online, and a 3-hour in-person session that participants attend as a group. The online sessions introduce the participants to the key elements for CASA/GAL work, allow them to interact with others, explore new ideas, and obtain tools for effective child advocacy. The in-person sessions use *case studies* to introduce participants to a variety of dynamics including poverty, mental health issues, substance abuse, domestic violence, etc. By using this method, volunteers not only obtain experience with different types of cases but also in how to complete a thorough investigation. The facilitator is also able to ascertain volunteer readiness and competency.

### **Why blended learning?**

As the name implies, the blended format of this curriculum is designed to provide flexibility. Programs have the option of using this design and incorporating their own resources. This will allow programs to cut down on approximately half of the in-person time for Pre-service Training. The blended learning approach also provides greater focus for the in-person sessions. Participants complete the required online and self-study portions of the curriculum prior to attending class. This allows for richer discussions as well as giving more time for skill practice and application of knowledge through case studies.

### **Does the *Flex Learning* curriculum take the place of the 2007 Edition Pre-Service Volunteer Training Curriculum?**

*Flex Learning* does not replace the traditional 30 hour in-person Pre-service Training, neither does it replace the Independent Study Edition. Rather it gives CASA/GAL programs an alternative way of providing Pre-Service training to their volunteers. It is an option, not a mandate. Some programs may choose to make the *Flex Learning* Curriculum their primary way of providing initial training, others may

use both the traditional and *Flex Learning* approaches, and still others may opt not to use the *Flex Learning* Curriculum at all.

### **Are there content differences between the *Flex Learning* Curriculum and the 2007 Volunteer Pre-Service Training Curriculum?**

The *Flex Learning* Curriculum covers the same National CASA Standards-required topics as the existing pre-service curriculum. Some of the activities and information are straight from the 2007 edition, other activities and ways of conveying information are new. In particular, a large portion of the in-person classroom time is dedicated to case studies which provide opportunities for dialogue and application of new knowledge. Because of these significant differences, the chapters of the two curricula do not directly correspond and cannot be used interchangeably.

### **How do the online and self-study portions of the *Flex Learning* Curriculum work?**

The online work uses a Learning Management System (LMS) called Moodle. Moodle is the most commonly used LMS and it automates the administration, tracking, and reporting of the online portions of the training. It has become very popular among educators around the world as a tool for creating online web sites for their students. The Moodle vendor that National CASA uses is called Moodlerooms. Hear about the benefits of Moodle [here](#). This will make it easy for facilitators to monitor their volunteers' participation.

For program that wish to offer the *Flex Learning* Curriculum they will need to contact National CASA in advance of their training schedule to request a course and select a date. A "course" will then be set up on National CASA's Moodle site. From this online Moodle course, volunteers will access curriculum materials including a printable Volunteer Manual that lays out step-by-step all of the online and self-study activities as well as activities and materials for the in-person sessions. Facilitators will also have the option of adding content that they will find useful during training.

### **Will the *Flex Learning* Curriculum save staff time?**

Although the in-class time is reduced to 15 hours, staff has additional responsibilities outside of that class time. The discussion forums, which are private for each class, must be monitored by a facilitator who makes sure that participants are respecting each other and answering questions fully. Facilitators will want to add their own thoughts to the discussions and answer any participant questions that arise. This mirrors what a facilitator would do in a classroom. Also Facilitators will need to confirm that participants are completing their work, as well as check participant responses in the final online case study. Additionally, monitoring online activities provides opportunities for evaluating the suitability of potential volunteers.

In short, the *Flex Learning* Curriculum gives staff more flexibility with their time, rather than an overall savings of time.

### **Is there a *Flex Learning* Facilitator Training?**

There is a two-part online *Flex Learning* Training of Facilitators (TOF). The first part, which is required, explains the logistics of using a Moodle course and tips for how to monitor online activity. The second session looks at case-study facilitation which is central to the in-person portions of the curriculum. The TOF for the 2007 Edition of the Pre-service Training Curriculum is still pertinent as it covers the key elements for facilitation, adult learning principles, and skills applicable to overall effectiveness of CASA Volunteers. National CASA's TOF can be adapted per a program's request to include activities specific to the *Flex Learning* Curriculum.

Please check the [NCASA Training Calendar](#) to learn of upcoming dates for these training sessions.

### **Is it mandatory for staff to participate in the *Flex Learning* Facilitator Training before implementing the curriculum?**

Session one (see above) of the online TOF will be required for those charged with facilitating the *Flex Learning* Curriculum. Those completing the Facilitator Training will then be designated as facilitators for their Moodle course giving them the ability to monitor students and, if needed, add additional local materials. Also, it is advisable that facilitators have previously completed National CASA's TOF for the core Volunteer Curriculum and are well grounded in principles of adult education and group facilitation.

### **What does a program need to do to participate in the *Flex Learning* Curriculum?**

Programs interested in participating in the *Flex Learning* Curriculum should review the Flex Learning Curriculum Program Readiness Checklist in order to assess their program's readiness to offer this option to their volunteers. Programs can then complete the *Flex Learning* Request Form which will ask for the program's preferred training dates. After the training dates have been approved by National CASA and the program pays a flat course fee of \$75 per course of up to 15 participants ( $\$75 \div 15 = \$5$  per person), it sends in a completed *Flex Learning* Student Roster. Once all items are received, a Moodle course will be set up for the program and links and instructions will be sent to the program contact.

Please note:

- *Flex Learning* materials including Facilitator and Volunteer Manuals are available for member programs to download from the *State and Local Programs* section of the National CASA webpage (login is required). The link to the National CASA Moodle site will be provided once a program has completed the request process as detailed above.
- *Flex Learning* Request Forms must be submitted at least 2 months in advance of requested training dates.
- A separate *Flex Learning* Request Form must be completed for each *Flex Learning* course being requested.
- The number of *Flex Learning* courses running at any given time is limited, therefore, requests will be approved on a first come, first serve basis. To meet the needs of the entire CASA/GAL Network, the number of courses that a single state or local program offers per year may be limited.

- Courses are functional only during the duration of the training (typically 5 weeks), although facilitators will have access to participant information after the course is closed.
- There is a 15 student maximum for each course. Space is limited to 15 to allow facilitators to monitor discussions and activity in Moodle without being overwhelmed. It is recommended that programs have a facilitator as well as a co-facilitator (who may serve as an observer in Moodle to review content throughout the 5 weeks.)

**If I only have 6 participants can I only pay \$30?**

No, the \$75 is a flat fee per course. The fee covers the ongoing expense of the LMS and the staff time needed to create program courses and student accounts.

**May I preview the course?**

Both the *Flex Learning* Volunteer and Facilitator Manuals are available for download by member programs from the National CASA website. These provide a complete outline of both the online and in-person components of the course. To preview the online Moodle course a person needs to sign up for a *Flex Learning* TOF. Registered participants will be given access to a sample course for a limited period of time.

**Can two programs offer a *Flex Learning* course together?**

Yes, two or more programs may join together to offer one *Flex Learning* Course. It will be up to the programs to work out the details of their collaboration including whether or not to hold in-person sessions together. The programs together should submit one joint request form, one joint student list and one form of payment covering the \$75 course fee. Each Program should have its own facilitator(s). Please note that the 15 participant maximum still applies.

**What happens if we have to cancel our course?**

At times, a program may need to cancel a previously paid for course. In this case the program has two options:

1. Postpone the course for a later date within the next 12 months.
2. Request a refund of the fee that was paid.

**Will the curriculum be regularly updated?**

We do make improvements and updates as needed. The goal is always to have well prepared volunteers advocating on behalf of children and youth. The *Flex Learning* Curriculum was designed based off of feedback from local programs looking for a blended learning option. As always, local programs are encouraged to contact National CASA with suggestions for program management, development, and training.

For answers to additional questions, or to suggest improvements, please contact [staff@casaforchildren.org](mailto:staff@casaforchildren.org).