

The National CASA Association  
Volunteer Training Curriculum

*Flex-Learning Edition*

**Facilitator Manual**



## Acknowledgments

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## How to Use the *Flex-Learning Edition*

### Understanding the Flex-Learning Curriculum

This version of the *National CASA Association Volunteer Training Curriculum* is a “blended” approach to training that combines (or *blends*) in-person and online delivery of information. The accompanying Volunteer Manual will serve as the volunteers’ guide during the entirety of the training (for both online and in-person components) and will be an important resource to which they will refer throughout their work as CASA/GAL volunteers.

#### *Why “flex” learning?*

The blended format of this curriculum is designed to provide both flexibility and focus. Participants complete approximately half of the volunteer pre-service training at a time and place of their choosing. The other half of training occurs at focused, in-person sessions. **Although the self-guided online components are done outside of the formal classroom, they are not optional.**

The training occurs in five sessions. Each session contains a self-guided online component that participants complete on their own and an in-person component that participants attend as a group. The content-heavy online segments introduce participants to the information and skills they will use as CASA/GAL volunteers. The in-person sessions use case studies to allow participants to apply the material they’ve learned during the online components. While volunteers are not expected to master all of the online material in advance of the in-person sessions, they are expected to develop a foundation of knowledge that will enable them to approach the case studies with some degree of comprehension and skill. The in-person sessions provide a safe environment for participants to process and digest the information and concepts learned during the self-guided sessions and allow for more in-depth discussion.

The general sequence and flow for the training appears in the diagram on the next page.

	<b>Self-Guided/Online</b>	<b>In-Person</b>
<b>Session 1</b>	Getting Started Online The Bleux Case Introduction to Child Welfare The Role of the CASA/GAL Volunteer	The Role of the CASA/GAL Volunteer Introduction to Child Abuse and Neglect Values Participants in a Case
<b>Session 2</b>	Family Strengths and Risks Mental Illness Poverty Children’s Needs Communicating with Children	The Greene Case Your Local Court Report CASA/GAL Volunteer Introductions
<b>Session 3</b>	Cultural Competence Domestic Violence Substance Abuse	The Lavender Case Effective Court Reports The Amarillo Case
<b>Session 4</b>	Resilience Permanence and Concurrent Planning Educational Advocacy LGBTQ Issues Recommendations to the Court	Child Development Older Youth The Brown Case
<b>Session 5</b>	The Redd Case	Redd Case Debrief Court Report Review Guest Speaker: Current CASA/GAL Volunteer

## *Curriculum Design*

The material found in this manual is designed to be presented in the order in which it appears. The information and activities in each section build on the knowledge gained online and in each previous section.

The online portions of the curriculum are intended to take approximately 15 hours in total. However, different people work at different rates, so the actual time may vary among participants. The in-person sessions will take approximately 15 hours to facilitate (not including breaks). Each case study varies in length, and the time suggested for each in-person activity will vary according to the size of the training group, the style of the facilitator and the degree of discussion that occurs. Be sure to incorporate breaks into your session and find time to answer questions.

This curriculum lends itself to facilitation by one person or by a team of co-facilitators. If your program plans to use multiple facilitators for the curriculum, consider designating one person who will monitor the online discussion and be present in the classroom consistently throughout the training.

## **Using the Flex-Learning Materials**

### *The Manuals*

The Facilitator and Volunteer Manuals for the flex-learning edition of the curriculum exist online as printable documents. Each manual consists of a chapter for each of the five sessions. These documents guide facilitators and participants through both the online and in-person components of each session. Your program may choose to print out the Volunteer Manual and give copies to the participants, or you may ask participants to print out the documents themselves. (Be sure participants have the resources to do so.) Be clear with participants that they must use the Volunteer Manual to guide themselves through the online components of the curriculum; if they simply look online, they will miss much of the content of the sessions.

The Facilitator Manual contains both the material that appears in the Volunteer Manual and instructions for facilitating the training. Facilitator instructions are set apart in shaded text boxes.

### *Facilitator Prep*

For each session of the training, the Facilitator Manual provides information you need to know in order to facilitate both the online and the in-person portions of the session. The **Online Facilitation Tips** provide helpful ideas for creating the best online learning environment possible, and **Online Prep/Facilitator Involvement** tells you which online activities require you to provide materials, post responses to discussion forums or monitor online discussion. **Advance Prep** alerts you to activities that require you to gather information or create handouts before class, and the **Supplies Checklist** details the equipment and materials you will need to bring

to the in-person session. Be sure to read each session’s material thoroughly before you facilitate that session.

### *Facilitator Instructions*

The facilitator instructions label each activity as visual, auditory, kinesthetic or some combination of these, depending on the learning modality to which it caters. Because participants in the training have a range of learning styles, the curriculum is designed to incorporate this variety. Visual learners prefer to see the material they are being asked to learn. Auditory learners best process new information as they hear it presented. Kinesthetic learners learn best when they have an opportunity to incorporate movement into their learning opportunities.

The instructions also identify each activity as anchor, content, application, future use, or some combination of these.

- An **anchor** activity is designed to connect the material to participants’ previous work or life experiences.
- **Content** activities, as the term implies, provide substantive learning material that may include research, data, theories and the like, and may be presented through charts, lists, stories, readings, lectures or other similar activities.
- **Application** activities present an opportunity for participants to work with the content during the course of training to reinforce the acquisition of their new skills or knowledge.
- And finally, **future use** information relates the content to the work CASA/GAL volunteers will do once they begin taking cases.

Finally, instructions provide a time estimate for each activity. Times for the self-guided activities will vary according to the pace at which participants work, and times for the in-person activities may vary depending on the size of your training group.

### *Localization*

The creators of this curriculum tried to make it as general as possible to accommodate differences between jurisdictions. It is possible that some information—how the case studies proceed, information on various forms or checklists—will be different or will not apply in your area. As you point out differences in how things work in your jurisdiction, demonstrate respect for your learners and the curriculum by avoiding negative comments. It helps volunteers to understand your local environment and feel part of the national network.

### **Facilitating Online**

The self-guided online portion of this curriculum includes onscreen activities, videos, audio podcasts, discussion forums and some reading that appears only in the Volunteer Manual. As a facilitator, you will need to provide specified materials, monitor participants’ online activity, participate in online discussion forums and

answer questions posted to the online Parking Lot. You can use participants' online activity as a screening tool to evaluate their knowledge, communication skills and level of engagement.

Set aside specific times that you will check in online and tell participants how often you will be checking in online to answer their questions and participate in discussions. If your schedule permits, best practice is to check in at least once a day.

### *Providing Technical Support*

For some participants, this training will be the first time they have attempted to learn in an online environment. It's important to monitor participation very closely, especially at the beginning of the training period. If participants don't appear to be participating online, reach out to them to answer any questions or concerns they have about logging on or using the online tools.

### *Monitoring Online Participation*

Just as facilitation of small and large group discussion is crucial in an in-person training environment, monitoring online discussion is essential in maintaining a safe and engaging blended-learning environment. At times, the online dialogue will revolve around sensitive or values-driven content; **it is your responsibility as facilitator to ensure that conversations remain respectful and on task.** In addition, you are responsible for holding volunteers accountable for full participation in the online components of this training curriculum. Just because participants complete the online components at their own pace and on their own time does not mean these components are optional.

### *Facilitating Online Dialogue*

In a classroom setting, facilitators ask clarifying questions or in some cases play devil's advocate in order to help participants think about all sides of an issue. Your role in facilitating online discussions is very similar. When participants are asked to post their thoughts online as part of an activity, your role is to monitor the online discussion. If participants' posts are extremely brief, you should challenge them to dig deeper and expand on their thoughts (if appropriate). You should also engage participants online by asking clarifying questions or offering examples to reinforce how the content may play out in an actual case.

### *Orientation to Technology*

You may want to include an orientation to technology at the end of the interview process to allow you to help participants register and get comfortable with the training technology while you are still face to face.

## **Facilitating Case Studies**

The in-person portion of this curriculum relies heavily on case studies to reinforce the content that participants learn during the self-guided components. Session 1

introduces participants to working with case files through various case-based activities. Then, during the in-person portions of Sessions 2, 3 and 4, participants work in small groups to investigate four cases and write recommendations to the court. Finally, Session 5 includes an online case study activity that participants will complete on their own.

Each case study is based on the work of the North Carolina Guardian Ad Litem Program and has been used successfully as a learning tool for CASA/GAL program staff and volunteers at conferences and in-service training opportunities across the country.

These case studies are designed to reinforce the basic tenets of CASA/GAL volunteer work, including providing culturally appropriate advocacy, adhering to the minimum sufficient level of care standard, remaining child-focused and collaborating professionally with colleagues from other agencies that serve children. These tenets are embedded in the structure of the training; for the most part they are implicit rather than explicit.

The cases have been designed to mirror real-life CASA/GAL volunteer work. With only a brief introduction to their case, participants must decide whom to interview and what other documents to request; they don't get a list. Thus, their work product depends on their thinking, group process and initiative. As in the real world, CASA/GAL volunteers must retrieve the information they want and make recommendations based on their investigations.

### *Learning Principles*

Learning principles emphasized in these case studies include relevance and engagement. Participants will find these cases to be highly believable, realistic and relevant, as the case-processing activity mirrors real-life CASA/GAL volunteer work. Engagement refers to active participation in the learning experience. Participants who are actively engaged with the content will learn more and remember what they learned. Active engagement in relevant, meaningful learning activities that mimic what volunteers need to be able to do on the job substantially increases the likelihood that participants will apply what they learn to their future CASA/GAL volunteer work.

The choice to use case studies is also based on a belief in the autonomy of the learner. Adult learners are decision makers in their lives; they take responsibility for their own learning. Within the structure of these case studies, individual participants will direct their own learning and will take from the experience what they find meaningful. As a facilitator, you must trust the participants and have confidence in the training materials.

Each case involves at least one issue requiring cultural competence. Issues about which some participants may hold strong opinions—such as immigration or sexual orientation—are embedded in some of the cases so that volunteers have the

opportunity to gain perspective on their personal values and how those values might influence their CASA/GAL volunteer work.

The cases include “reveals,” crucial information that is discovered only with in-depth investigation or follow-up interviews. Some extraneous information is also included that may lead small groups astray, but it is included specifically so they can decide what information is important and what is not and ultimately make their way back to the truth in a safe practice setting. No case is clear-cut, so participants have to think in complex ways before determining their recommendations. Just like in real life, these cases are not easy to resolve.

### *Small Group Format*

The small group format provides opportunities for participants to learn from each other’s different perspectives and approaches to the case. Each member of the group chooses a specific role for each case and carries out the responsibilities that go with it. The process of choosing roles starts the group working as a team. The fact that each person has an official role to play in processing the group’s case helps all group members feel valued and involved.

The roles for each case are Runner, Scribe, Controller and Questioner. The Runner is the member of the group assigned to retrieve document packets from the facilitator. The Scribe records the group’s recommendations to the court. The Controller is responsible for keeping the group on task. The Questioner is charged with asking certain questions and making sure the group discusses each document before moving to the next one.

Each interview/document has at least one question in boldface print at the bottom of the page. Small groups are prompted to address these questions *only if they are of interest* and are free to discuss other topics/questions of more interest to them, so long as each document is discussed by the group before moving to the next. The boldface questions act as discussion prompts and guidance for groups that need direction and can be ignored by groups who are moving well on their own. The two questions found at the end of most documents are “What difference does this information make to the case?” and “What are your follow-up questions?” Other questions refer specifically to a particular interview, such as, “How will you respond to her question?” or “Will you buy her a phone card? Why or why not?”

### *Facilitating Case Study Activities*

Most of the case study activities are organized in two parts. Part 1 includes investigating the case and writing up court recommendations in the child’s best interests. Part 2 includes debriefing the case. (The Brown case in Session 4 includes two additional parts pertaining to court report writing.) During Part 1, your main tasks as facilitator will be to hand out requested materials and monitor small groups’ progress. As the groups work independently, it is important to keep track of which documents you’ve given to each group. You can do this by writing down

which documents you've given to each group or by labeling each group's stack of documents so you know which ones you have left to hand out.

The first time the Runners come to ask for a document, remind them that everyone in their group should read the document at the same time and discuss it before sending the Runner to request the next one. Groups should keep the documents at their table until the end of the session.

Keep the small groups moving forward during the activity. If no one has come to ask for interviews in the first 7 minutes or so, remind participants not to spend too much time on the introductory documents. They should examine them only long enough to get a feel for the case and name some people they want to interview. If one or two groups have still not come up for documents after 10 minutes, drop by these groups and urge them to move forward. Sometimes a small group may get so involved discussing what the case *might* be about, they forget to get the interviews and documents that tell what the case *is* about.

During the small group discussions, monitor the room to be sure all groups are on track. Don't directly supervise their discussions; just make sure they are active and following instructions.

Once a Runner has requested three or four interviews/documents, you may want to do a little coaching depending on what they've asked for or missed (for example, you might ask if they'd like to observe a family visit if they haven't asked to do so).

After 25 minutes, remind participants that they are more than halfway through the activity and have 15 minutes left to finish processing the case, decide on recommendations for the next court hearing and write them up on a flipchart.

After 35 minutes of case processing, announce that the Information Booth is officially closed—no more documents can be retrieved. Groups will have to decide their case recommendations with the information they already have. Inform them that court is in two weeks and their supervisor needs their report today. They have 5 minutes to write up their recommendations to the court.

### *Debriefing Case Studies*

After groups have looked at each other's recommendations, hand out the debriefing questions to each group and allow them to discuss briefly in their small groups. Then bring everyone together for a large group discussion.

**This is the only part of the case study activity during which your role as facilitator is to provide substantive information.** However, it's important to facilitate the group's discussion in a way that allows participants to search out answers for themselves as much as possible. If you pose a question, try to allow several seconds for an answer to emerge from the group before filling in the silence yourself.

The case study activities, as designed, can't actually be "failed." Feeling like a failure is not conducive to learning, so it's important to address this classroom safety issue if it comes up. Participants may sometimes remark during the debrief that their group "missed" important information in the case, as though they failed or got it wrong (perhaps their recommendations differed from those of other groups and now seem less complete). If this occurs, remind participants that the case study activities are contrived situations, meant to provide an opportunity for participants to apply and practice what they've learned online in a safe learning environment. The case studies, though realistic, are not real life. If groups missed crucial information because they didn't read a specific document, it's probably because they spent the time having in-depth conversations about the documents they did read. Remind them that in real life, they would have taken the time to continue investigating and discovered the information they missed in the case studies.

For debriefings involving cultural competency issues, encourage participants to speak as honestly and openly as they are willing and able to. No single person holds a monopoly on the truth. When conversations grow passionate, remind participants that they are welcome to speak their own truth, but they are not welcome to impose their truth on others.

### *The Six Cases*

Each case is briefly outlined below, with a bulleted list of the cultural issues and learning topics embedded in the case. These six cases are diverse as to the racial/cultural heritage and age of the child and the legal stage of the cases. **Before facilitating Sessions 2, 3 and 4, read all the documents for the case(s) in those session.** To approximate what participants will experience, you may want to read the interviews in the order volunteers would request them if actually working on the case.

#### Session 1 (online and in-person case-based activities)

- Bleux Case
  - New petition
  - African-American male child, 2 months old

#### Session 2 (in-person case study activity)

- Greene Case
  - New petition
  - Caucasian male child, 8 years old

#### Session 3 (in-person case study activities)

- Amarillo Case
  - Post-termination of parental rights
  - Salvadoran female youth, 16 years old

- Lavender Case
  - New petition
  - Native American female child, 6 years old

#### Session 4 (in-person case study activity)

- Brown Case
  - Permanency planning
  - Caucasian female youth, lesbian, 15 years old

#### Session 5 (online case study)

- Redd Case
  - Permanency planning
  - African-American female child, 1 year old

#### The Bleux Case (Case-based online and in-person activities)

Deshawn Bleux, 2 months old, was removed from the care of his parents, Toni (age 18) and Miles (age 20), after he was diagnosed with shaken baby syndrome during an emergency room visit. The CPS caseworker recommends parenting education, anger management classes and a mental health assessment for the father and the mother. This is a new petition case.

#### Learning topics and cultural competency issues:

- Domestic violence
- Poverty
- Identifying strengths and resources in a family
- Conditions that may lead to abuse and neglect
- The needs of children
- Asking the right questions

#### The Greene Case

Marky Greene, age 8, Caucasian, is of normal intelligence, but his mother is developmentally disabled and his father is depressed. Marky's is a classic neglect case, reported by his school for frequent cases of head lice, poor hygiene and ill-fitting clothes. The CPS investigator finds the home a filthy mess, with no food in the refrigerator. The child is exhausted. This is a new petition case. The next court date is a combined adjudication/disposition.

#### Learning topics and cultural competency issues:

- Developmental disabilities
- "Parentification" of children
- Searching civil records as part of a CASA/GAL volunteer investigation
- Confidentiality in CASA/GAL volunteer work

### The Amarillo Case

Maria Amarillo, age 16, is Salvadoran and has lived in the United States for 10 years as an undocumented immigrant. She has juvenile diabetes. Severe domestic violence led to termination of her parents' rights. Maria has two younger sisters, who were born in the United States. The social worker wants Maria to go live with an aunt in El Salvador. Although her aunt would welcome her, Maria doesn't want to go. This is a post-TPR case.

Learning topics and cultural competency issues:

- Undocumented immigrants and Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS)
- Religious intolerance
- Differences in Salvadoran and U.S. lifestyles and standards of living
- CASA/GAL volunteer–youth boundaries
- Differences in working with children and working with youth
- Emotional bonds in cases of termination of parental rights
- Confidentiality in CASA/GAL volunteer work

### The Lavender Case

Lavender Bass is a 6-year-old Native-American child (tribe unnamed). Her single mother has alcohol/drug issues. Lavender's extended family will care for her but will not agree to ban her mother from their home. The lack of a viable protection plan makes this a neglect case. The case introduction does not say that Lavender is Native American, so participants will likely misinterpret and pathologize her behavior. Her Native American status is revealed later, and then participants should discuss the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). This is a new petition case. The next court date is a combined adjudication/disposition.

Learning topics and cultural competency issues:

- Native-American culture and family life
- Making assumptions based on lack of information (i.e., diagnosing too quickly)
- Culturally appropriate assessment of children
- Childhood depression
- Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)
- "Indian/Native American" as a legal designation, not a racial one
- Confidentiality in CASA/GAL volunteer work

### The Brown Case

Jessica Brown, age 15, identifies as a lesbian, but Jessica's mother does not accept her identity. A dependent personality type, her mom prioritized her live-in boyfriend over her daughter but has now kicked him out and wants Jessica back. The caseworker recently changed the permanency plan back to reunification. Jessica

has been living with her 30-year-old cousin; they both want to formalize the relationship with adoption. This is a permanency planning case.

Learning topics and cultural competency issues:

- Best practices for working with LGBTQ youth
- Dependent personality disorder and domestic violence
- Finding relatives for youth placement
- Permanency planning
- CASA/GAL volunteer-youth boundaries
- Differences in working with children and working with youth
- Searching civil records as part of a CASA/GAL volunteer investigation
- Confidentiality in CASA/GAL volunteer work

### The Redd Case (Online)

Mariah Redd is a 1-year-old African-American female who tested positive for cocaine at birth. Her mother has had nine months to work on her case plan but has not made progress. Mariah has been with the same foster family her whole life, and they want to adopt her. However, this foster family is Caucasian, and they do not plan to keep Mariah connected to her cultural heritage as she matures. Meanwhile, the CASA/GAL volunteer found Mariah's Aunt Sierra in another state, and she is willing and able to adopt Mariah. The caseworker is not pleased about this late-arriving relative. This is a permanency planning case.

Learning topics and cultural competency issues:

- Interracial adoption
- Honoring children's cultural heritage
- Sexual abuse by stepparent
- Permanency planning
- Dilemma: Should child be adopted by foster family she's known since birth or by a competent blood relative living in another state?
- Reporting suspected abuse of non-client child
- Searching criminal records as part of a CASA/GAL volunteer investigation
- Confidentiality in CASA/GAL volunteer work