
LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY TEAMS (LATS): HOW TO DEVELOP A LAT FOR YOUR CASA PROGRAM

- 1 TRAINING:** Schedule training using the Basics of Legislative Advocacy curriculum. Invite staff, board members and, most importantly, volunteers who can tell their personal CASA stories.
- 2 LEADERSHIP:** Choose a volunteer as your chair who will organize and lead your LAT so that you limit staff time expended on legislative advocacy. Normally, one member of your staff should be able to oversee and support your advocacy efforts.
- 3 PRIORITIZE:** Select legislators based on committee membership, tenure, etc., and schedule meetings with those legislators and volunteers in their district. They will be more responsive to constituents who:
 - Thank them for their support this session and let them know how state funding and other child welfare system improvements have positively impacted your program and the children you serve
 - Use the opportunity to start building a relationship (or cultivate an existing one)
 - Share their CASA stories
- 4 MEETINGS:** Schedule initial meetings at legislator's office or in your office. Make sure to collect business cards from staff members and get to know their names, titles and faces so that you can talk to them as well as the legislator when you make future contact. Bring a packet of information about your program and your contact information. Send a thank you letter for the legislator's time, and offer to be a resource for them.
- 5 CULTIVATE:** Create opportunities to interact with your legislators in order to build relationships, increase awareness and reinforce their knowledge of CASA. Your goal is to cultivate these relationships which can be achieved by any combination of the following:
 - Inviting them and their staff to observe CASA volunteers in court hearings and meeting with the judge and volunteers
 - Inviting them as a special guest to an event such as a volunteer appreciation event or swearing-in ceremony
 - Inviting them to meet with volunteers at your office
 - Sending them your newsletter, annual report and newspapers clippings about your program
 - Sending them information about child abuse and neglect in your community, including news items, or any specific issues you've discussed with them or that are affecting your local child welfare system
- 6** Meet with them again the summer before the legislative session starts. By this time, Texas CASA will have (or will be close to firming up) our legislative priorities which you may share with them. Share a story from one of your cases, using first names only, to make your point about the legislation that means the most to you. The legislators will listen when you make it personal and refer to an actual child for whom you have advocated.



HELPFUL TIPS FOR LAT MEMBERS

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE AN EXPERT.

It is not necessary to have every answer or statistic at your fingertips. The relationship and the reliance on you as a trusted resource and broker of information is the most important thing. Don't make up answers, but offer to get back to them with the answers or with a resource they can use to find the answers.

NEVER MISS A CHANCE TO TELL A PERSONAL CASA STORY.

Legislators and staffers meet with people every day, all day long, about statistics, economics and policies. Stories (without names or other identifying information) grab their attention and pull at their heartstrings—they are also what they remember most. Stories based on your experiences as a volunteer, your passion to help children and the fact that you are a constituent are your most persuasive attributes and can help you explain the CASA cause.

REMIND THEM WHAT CASA IS AND WHAT WE DO.

Don't assume they know what CASA is or does just because they already support CASA or because they say they know. They often don't. Even our biggest supporters sometimes don't really get it. Yet.

DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS WITH LEGISLATORS' STAFF MEMBERS.

Developing relationships with the staff who work for your senator or representative, especially the district director, legislative director and chief of staff, is very important. These are also the people who do the legwork, research the bills, get background information and keep the legislator versed on current issues and/or bills; they will be your main contacts during session. Explaining your concerns and suggestions to them directly will get your issue before the legislator.

BE VERY CAREFUL AROUND PRIMARY AND ELECTION TIMES.

As a 501c(3), CASA is prohibited from campaigning or appearing to endorse one candidate over another. When your legislator has an opponent, it is usually not a good idea for a local CASA program to invite your legislator to speak in a public venue, accept an award or receive media coverage in conjunction with a CASA activity or news event.

TEXAS CASA IS HERE TO HELP AND ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS! PLEASE CONTACT THE PUBLIC POLICY TEAM AT PUBLICPOLICY@TEXASCASA.ORG FOR ASSISTANCE.

