



DELAWARE AND
CHESTER COUNTIES

CASA Youth Advocates

Serving Delaware & Chester Counties

Strategic Plan 2026–2028

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INTRODUCTION & STRATEGIC CONTEXT

CASA Youth Advocates exists to ensure that children and youth involved in the dependency court system in Delaware and Chester counties are supported through consistent, high-quality volunteer advocacy. Grounded in the belief that every child deserves stability, safety, and a trusted adult, CASA provides a steady and reliable presence for children navigating moments of uncertainty, disruption, and transition. The organization's work is rooted in care, consistency, trust, and accountability—values that shape authentic relationships with children, families, volunteers, staff, partners, funders, and the courts.

CASA operates within a child welfare environment that is increasingly complex. Courts and child-serving systems face rising caseloads, complex family dynamics, limited community resources, and growing expectations for collaboration and measurable outcomes. At the same time, nonprofit organizations nationwide are navigating funding uncertainty, heightened competition for philanthropic support, volunteer recruitment and retention challenges, and increasing demand for services. These conditions require CASA to remain deeply mission-centered while strengthening organizational resilience, clarity, and adaptability.

This three-year strategic plan responds directly to these realities. Developed through an inclusive, data-informed process, the plan integrates insights from board members, staff, volunteers, and external stakeholders, along with analysis of sector-wide trends and CASA's extensive experience delivering advocacy across Delaware and Chester counties. Innovative approaches—including AI-simulated virtual interviewing—were used to capture diverse perspectives and inform decision-making. The result is a focused strategic framework that honors the heart of CASA's mission while strengthening sustainability, effectiveness, and accountability.

ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

CASA delivers advocacy through a nationally recognized, one-to-one volunteer model. Carefully screened and extensively trained community volunteers are supported by professional staff to serve as independent voices for children involved in dependency court proceedings. Advocates gather information from all aspects of a child's life—including caregivers, educators, social workers, service providers, and the children themselves—and translate that information into objective, child-centered recommendations for judges.

A defining strength of CASA's model is consistency. Advocates remain involved throughout a child's court case, allowing them to build trust, understand each child's lived experience, and ensure that decisions affecting a child's future are informed by stability, insight, and long-term well-being. For children who often experience disruption and loss, this consistent presence can be transformative. For more than half of children assigned to CASA, the organization is also appointed as an Educational Decision Maker, stepping into the role of educational advocate for children who do not have a parent willing and able to serve in this capacity.

In addition to direct advocacy, CASA contributes to broader system and policy improvement through collaboration and leadership. The organization leads the Voices for Children coalition, a network of social service professionals, educators, legislators, mental health providers, and community members working together to strengthen the safety net of services for vulnerable youth in Delaware County. Through this work, CASA extends its impact beyond individual cases to help shape more responsive and equitable child-serving systems.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CASA Youth Advocates' strategic plan reflects a period of growth, learning, and intentional reflection. Developed with extensive input from volunteers, donors, staff, board members, and external partners, the plan captures a shared commitment to children and a collective vision for CASA's future. Stakeholders consistently affirmed CASA's effectiveness, professionalism, and deep alignment with its mission to provide consistent, trusted advocacy for children involved in the dependency court system.

Stakeholders expressed strong pride in CASA's volunteer-driven, one-to-one advocacy model and its ability to maintain a focus on direct service while expanding its reach across Delaware and Chester counties. CASA is widely viewed as a trusted partner to the courts and a respected presence within the child welfare community. This foundation of credibility and trust provides a strong platform for the organization's next phase of impact.

At the same time, feedback highlighted important opportunities for continued growth and focus. Key priorities identified include expanding and diversifying the volunteer base, strengthening training and support systems for advocates, improving communication and connection among volunteers, staff, and board members, and ensuring that growth does not outpace organizational capacity. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of remaining grounded in CASA's core mission while thoughtfully leveraging its visibility and expertise to increase influence and impact.

This strategic plan includes fundraising and financial sustainability goals to ensure the organization's capacity to expand and enhance its programming. The approaching conclusion of two large government contracts in the first year of the plan also allows CASA the opportunity to recalibrate its reliance on various funding streams and work towards increased diversification of revenue sources.

Guided by these insights, this strategic plan outlines five interconnected goals designed to advance CASA's mission while strengthening the organizational foundation that makes its work possible. Together, these priorities balance quality with growth, innovation with sustainability, and ambition with focus. The plan positions CASA to deepen its impact, sustain community trust, and continue ensuring that every child served has a consistent, well-trained advocate standing beside them during some of the most critical moments of their lives.

MISSION, VISION, AND CORE VALUES

Our Mission

Empowering community volunteers to connect with and champion children and youth involved in the child welfare system, advocating for equity, resources, stability, and permanency.

Our Vision

We envision a bright future in which all children and youth have the resiliency, consistent relationships with caring adults, and access to child welfare, education, health, and human services they need to fully experience the joys of childhood and pursue their dreams.

Our Values

Authenticity: We are a justice-oriented trailblazer and lead with grit. We believe that by leading with our true selves and encouraging open and honest communication, we build stronger relationships between our volunteers, staff, donors, children served, and community partners.

Collaboration: We can't do it alone. We believe that strong and mutually beneficial collaboration with families, organizations, and systems of care lead to better outcomes for the youth we serve.

Compassion: We are caring and do not judge others. We believe that empathy and active listening allow us to better understand the perspectives and experiences of the youth we serve.

Consistency: You can count on us. We believe that our reliability, dependability, and follow-through foster trust and credibility.

Effectiveness: We get things done. We believe in being data-driven, outcomes-focused, and innovative.

Equity: We commit to the pursuit of equitable outcomes and access to resources for all children and youth we serve, acknowledging the barriers caused by systemic discrimination and racism.

Volunteerism: We are powered by the commitment and passion of our volunteers. We believe that our trained volunteers serving as CASA volunteer advocates, donors, coalition partners, and Board members are the heart of our mission and positive impact on the lives of youth.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR 2026–2028:

Looking Ahead: Growing Needs and Continued Commitment

- Grow and Enhance Child Advocacy Programming
- Increase and Support Volunteer Base to Ensure Optimum Effectiveness
- Secure the Organization's Long-Term Strength and Financial Stability
- Enhance the Effectiveness of CASA's Board of Directors
- Explore Opportunities for Expansion and Further Reach

GOAL 1: Grow and Enhance Child Advocacy Programming

CASA will strengthen and sustain its core one-to-one advocacy model while strategically expanding complementary advocacy efforts to increase the number of children who receive high-quality, consistent support throughout their involvement in the dependency court system. This includes enhancing educational advocacy for children without an available parent through CASA's Educational Decision Maker program and advancing systems- and policy-level efforts that improve outcomes for children and families through the Voices for Children coalition.

Strategic Priorities:

- Increase the number and percentage of children and youth involved in the Dependency Court systems in Delaware and Chester counties who are assigned a CASA volunteer
- Implement and strengthen quality assurance measures through continuous program improvement practices
- Expand and enhance CASA's Educational Decision Maker (EDM) program
- Advance CASA's systems and policy advocacy efforts

Intended Impact: A greater percentage of children who are eligible for CASA's services due to involvement in the dependency court system will receive consistent, high-quality advocacy, leading to improved stability, stronger permanency outcomes, and enhanced educational and overall well-being.

Key Success Metrics:

- A minimum 5% increase in number of children served in CASA's core advocacy model year-over-year will be achieved in 2026, 2027, and 2028, with annual review and goal adjustment.
- Data collection systems will be refined and enhanced in order to effectively track services. By conclusion of strategic plan period, data will show an increase in the number of children with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), those receiving appropriate evaluations and enhanced educational services and supports, and those offered restorative approaches in response to school-based behavioral concerns.
- Completion of at least one collaborative systems- or policy-level initiative through the Voices for Children coalition, developed with community and system partners, and informed by CASA's core advocacy program. Result will be measurable impact on child well-being, safety, or access to services and will be supported by internal tracking of policy-informed advocacy efforts.

GOAL 2: Increase and Support Volunteer Base to Ensure Optimum Effectiveness

CASA's volunteers are the heart of our program and the key to fulfilling our mission. CASA will invest in the people who carry out its mission by fostering clarity, connection, professional growth, and organizational alignment. CASA aims to strengthen, grow, and sustain a diverse volunteer base to ensure that every child who needs an advocate has access to consistent, high-quality representation. CASA will enhance the current opportunities for volunteer engagement beyond case assignment, such as peer mentoring, on-going professional development opportunities, committee and Board membership, system and policy advocacy work, and donor opportunities, as well as explore additional opportunities for volunteer engagement. CASA seeks to refine and enhance recruitment, training, communication, and engagement practices that support volunteer preparedness, retention, and alignment with CASA's mission and priorities.

Strategic Priorities:

- Increase the number and diversity of CASA volunteers through targeted community recruitment
- Enhance current pre-service and in-service training modules
- Enhance support, communication, and supervision to improve volunteer retention
- Build robust spectrum of opportunities for community connection and engagement with CASA
- Expand meaningful opportunities for volunteer engagement beyond individual case assignments

Intended Impact: CASA's volunteer base will be larger, more diverse, and well-supported, ensuring the organization is capable of meeting growing community need. Volunteers and staff will feel informed, valued, connected, supported, and equipped to deliver consistent, high-quality advocacy on behalf of children in the dependency court system.

Key Success Metrics:

- Achieve a 5% annual increase in volunteers sworn in as Court Appointed Special Advocates year-over-year in 2026, 2027, and 2028, with annual review and goal adjustment as needed.
- Ensure that at least 25% of all newly recruited advocates represent diverse backgrounds (including people of color, lived experiences with child welfare system, disability, men, and people identifying as LGBTQIA+).
- Increased engagement of both prospective and current volunteers as demonstrated by tracked participation in CASA-hosted events, trainings, or service opportunities.

GOAL 3: Secure the Organization's Long-Term Strength and Financial Stability.

CASA will strengthen long-term organizational sustainability through diversified revenue, responsible financial stewardship, and clear articulation of impact. By proactively managing risk and aligning funding strategies with mission priorities, CASA will ensure consistent, high-quality programs regardless of shifts in the external funding environment.

Strategic Priorities:

- Evaluate current fundraising efforts and set annual fundraising goals for CASA, with a focus on overall financial health and sustainability of the organization
- Increase total individual donor base, through welcoming new donors and retaining and growing current donors
- Refine current donor engagement and sustainable giving opportunities
- Examine government funding landscape and develop strategies and informed decisions for future opportunities
- Develop benchmarks and expectations for Board involvement in philanthropy and fundraising

Intended Impact: CASA will operate with deliberate fundraising and financial health goals that will be set, tracked, and evaluated. Clear financial goals, diversified funding, and strong stewardship practices will position the organization for financial resilience while sustaining impact for children and families.

Key Success Metrics:

- A five-year historical fundraising performance analysis will be completed in year one to track trends in revenue generation from all sources and identify growth opportunities based on trends which will be utilized to inform annual fundraising goals and plan moving forward.
- A metric will be created to evaluate the return on investment of fundraising events, measuring all expenses of events, including the value of staff time in comparison to dollars raised and relationships built. Accordingly, CASA will refine the number, timing, frequency, and nature of special events by 2028.
- CASA will achieve average annual revenue growth of 4.5% year-over-year across all fundraising categories, in alignment with nonprofit sector benchmarks.
- CASA will align its revenue streams with best practices for a balanced and sustainable budget, including the following target ranges to be achieved by fiscal close of 2028: 40–45% of revenue from individual donations, 30–35% from corporate and foundation support, 20% from government funding, and 5–10% from special event revenue. This strategic shift positions government funding as supplemental, rather than foundational, and represents a deliberate effort to reduce the organization's reliance on special events.

GOAL 4: Enhance the Effectiveness of CASA's Board of Directors

CASA will strengthen the effectiveness and impact of its Board of Directors to ensure strong governance, strategic leadership, and accountability aligned with the organization's mission and long-term goals. Clear roles, expectations, and competencies will support a Board that is prepared to lead, govern, fundraise, and advance CASA's sustainability and impact.

Strategic Priorities:

- Refine Board roles and expectations through the implementation of a framework defining the knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, and behaviors required for an effective nonprofit Board of Directors, both individually and collectively, to govern the organization successfully and achieve its strategic goals
- Develop deliberate recruitment plan and pipeline for new Board prospects
- Strengthen Board leadership in philanthropy and fundraising
- Plan for future leadership of the CASA Board of Directors
- Improve effectiveness of Board committees and committee leadership
- Establish process for assessing Board performance and accountability of Board members

Intended Impact: The Board of Directors will operate with a solid infrastructure, clarity, cohesion, and accountability, providing consistent leadership, effective oversight, and long-term stewardship in support of CASA's strategic priorities.

Key Success Metrics:

- A new Board orientation process and on-boarding package will be created and implemented by 2027.
- Target Board size and composition matrix will be determined and finalized with multi-year recruitment plan established including defined screening and nomination procedures.
- A Board leadership succession plan will be developed and approved by the end of 2026.
- A new process for assessing Board performance individually and collectively will be established and launched in 2026 and conducted annually, using results to inform recruitment, leadership development, and Board goals.

GOAL 5: Explore Opportunities for Expansion and Further Reach

CASA will establish a clear, structured process for evaluating potential new programs, partnerships, or expansion opportunities to ensure growth is intentional, sustainable, and aligned with mission, capacity and impact. CASA will assess feasibility, resources, timelines, and organizational readiness and make informed decisions about sustainable and impactful expansion where opportunities are available.

Anticipated potential areas of expansion and further reach to be considered during this strategic plan period include providing advocacy and/or case management services to youth exiting the Dependency Court system and CASA's services between the ages of 18–21; the possibility of geographic expansion; and the consideration of rebranding opportunities to improve community recognition.

Strategic Priorities:

- Develop and apply a standardized rubric and assessment process for exploration of any new program or agency expansion opportunity
- Evaluate available resources and programmatic gaps to be filled in the provision of services to former CASA youth over the age of 18
- Prioritize opportunities and current gaps; develop project plan to determine viability and timeframe for launching new program
- Examine need for, interest in, and feasibility of, geographic expansion
- Explore the benefits and potential implementation of new rebranding opportunities, in conjunction with the statewide CASA network, to strengthen clarity, consistency, and recognition of CASA's mission and impact, while assessing positive and negative potential impacts with all stakeholder populations

Intended Impacts: CASA will be equipped to make disciplined, data-informed decisions about expansion that protect organizational stability while increasing impact, ensuring that any future growth will be aligned with community need, organizational capacity, and long-term sustainability, strengthening CASA's credibility and effectiveness.

Key Success Metrics:

- A working group will be convened, group goals established, regular meetings held, and a completed report submitted to the organization's leadership with recommendations regarding programming for former CASA youth by June 2027.
- Meetings will be conducted with at least 10 partner organizations to explore potential for enhanced partnership opportunities with five formal memorandums of understanding established.
- Completion and analysis of at least two data collection tools (survey, focus group, 1:1 interviews) with 35–50 total informants, to gather input regarding expansion opportunities, with review of analysis to be completed by executive leadership.
- Identification of potential sources for at least 70% of revenue needed for expansion project budgets with timelines for completion of application-based funding opportunities.
- Decision made and implemented regarding organizational rebranding by year two of strategic plan period, informed by stakeholder input and alignment with the CASA network.

STRATEGIC GOAL IMPLEMENTATION & MONITORING:

CASA will implement this strategic plan through a phased, realistic approach that reflects current nonprofit and child welfare conditions. Priority will be given to initiatives that strengthen core advocacy, volunteer support, and organizational stability. The Board of Directors and the Executive leadership team will share responsibility for stewarding plan implementation, with clearly defined ownership of priorities, timelines, and outcomes. Regular communication and touch points on implementation progress among Board, staff, and volunteers will support alignment, transparency, and accountability through the plan period.

CASA will monitor progress using a streamlined framework designed to support learning, accountability, and adaptive management. A centralized system will track strategic goals, priority actions, timelines, and outcomes.

Monitoring will be guided by the following principles:

- Shared responsibility among staff, volunteers, and Board of Directors
- Transparent reporting accessible to key stakeholders
- Integration of qualitative and quantitative data
- Regular reflection, learning, and course correction

Evaluation practices will be equity-centered, assessing not only what outcomes are achieved, but who is served, how decisions are made, and whose voices inform the process. Progress will be reviewed regularly and used to guide adjustments as needed.

CONCLUSION:

Positioned for Sustained and Increased Impact

CASA enters this strategic plan period as a strong, mission-drive organization at a pivotal moment. This plan reflects CASA's enduring commitment to providing consistent, high-quality advocacy for children while responsibly stewarding community trust and resources. By strengthening advocacy, supporting people, advancing equity, and sustaining organizational health, CASA is well positioned to deepen and sustain its impact in the years ahead.

APPENDIX: Methodology and Background

Purpose of the Appendix

This appendix provides an overview of the methodology and background analysis that informed CASA Youth Advocates' 2026–2028 Strategic Plan. It is intended to document the planning approach, data sources, and key themes that shaped the strategic direction, while keeping the main body of the plan focused on priorities, goals, and implementation.

STRATEGIC PLANNING METHODOLOGY

CASA's strategic direction was developed through a comprehensive, inclusive, and data-informed process designed to balance rigor with practicality. Rather than relying on a traditional, consultant-driven planning model, CASA participated in a Strategy Cohort Pilot Program led by the La Salle University Nonprofit Center. The cohort consisted of eight nonprofit organizations engaged in a structured, shared learning process focused on relevance, feasibility, and implementation.

Each participating organization was paired with a La Salle University Nonprofit Center consultant for guidance and technical support. This cohort-based approach allowed CASA to engage in strategic planning while remaining attentive to stewardship of time, financial resources, and staff capacity.

A HUMAN- AND EQUITY-CENTERED PLANNING APPROACH

The Strategy Cohort Pilot Program was intentionally designed to move away from top-down planning practices and toward a participant-informed, equity-centered framework. While overall objectives were established at the outset, the specific learning priorities, deliverables, and planning pathways were shaped collaboratively by cohort participants.

Early in the process, organizations engaged in a facilitated design session to identify shared challenges and organization-specific priorities. Based on these insights, facilitators proposed multiple planning roadmaps. Participants refined and selected their preferred pathways, defining learning outcomes, deliverables, and the structure of consulting support. This co-creation process strengthened relevance, ownership, and commitment to implementation.

The methodology remained iterative throughout the planning period. CASA and cohort partners regularly assessed progress, identified areas for adjustment, and refined the process to ensure alignment with mission needs and operational realities.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

CASA's strategic goals were informed by multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative data, integrating internal documentation, stakeholder input, and facilitated planning sessions.

AI-Supported Stakeholder Input

CASA utilized an AI-supported virtual interview and survey platform developed by StratSimple to gather input from a broad range of stakeholders. Questions were designed by CASA's Strategic Planning Committee to capture both trend data and lived experience, while minimizing burden on participants. Where appropriate, direct interviews supplemented the AI-supported process to ensure accessibility and clarity. Input was gathered from 89 individual stakeholders.

Document Review

A review of historical and current organizational materials provided essential context and trend analysis. Documents reviewed included prior strategic plans, governance materials, financial reports, policies, program documentation, and communications assets.

Thematic and Trend Analysis

Stakeholder responses and organizational data were analyzed to identify recurring themes, strengths, gaps, and emerging risks. Particular attention was given to areas of alignment and divergence across stakeholder groups, supporting informed discussion and decision-making.

GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

Strong governance and leadership engagement were integral to the planning process. CASA established a Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) composed of Board members, executive leadership, staff, volunteers, donors, and individuals with lived experience. The SPC guided the process, reviewed findings, and maintained communication with the full Board and staff.

Strategic Planning Committee Members:

- Loretta Brehony, Board Member
- Tom Collett, Board Member
- Shakira Hansley Ellerson, Policy and Advocacy Coalition Director
- Mary Kate Howard, Operations Director
- Tony McCarthy, Volunteer and Donor
- Leigh Anne McKelvey, Executive Director
- Adriana Termine, Board Member and Youth Voices Council Member

A dedicated Board planning retreat served as a critical bridge between research and decision-making, allowing Board members to review data, reaffirm mission and values, and define priority strategic directions.

PHASED PLANNING PROCESS

The strategic planning process unfolded in deliberate phases designed to produce actionable outcomes rather than abstract recommendations. Key phases included:

- Identification of stakeholders and priority research questions
- Analysis of internal and external trends affecting mission delivery
- Development of a shared vision and strategic priorities
- Drafting and refinement of strategic goals, strategies, and success measures
- Alignment of strategic direction with financial planning and fundraising capacity

SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES AND ORGANIZATIONAL INSIGHTS

Core Model and Enduring Strengths

Across all data sources, CASA's one-to-one, volunteer-driven advocacy model emerged as its most consistently cited strength. Stakeholders emphasized the value of continuity, noting that CASA advocates often provide the most stable adult presence in a child's life across placements and service systems. CASA's child-centered focus and professional credibility distinguish the organization within a complex child welfare landscape.

Leadership and staff were widely viewed as knowledgeable, compassionate, and mission-driven. Training for volunteers was recognized as a strong foundation, and respondents expressed confidence in CASA's ability to maintain advocacy quality during periods of growth.

Volunteer Capacity and Engagement

Volunteer recruitment and retention emerged as the most significant constraint on CASA's ability to serve additional children. While commitment among existing volunteers is high, overall growth has remained relatively flat, limiting the organization's capacity to assign advocates to all eligible children.

Qualitative feedback highlighted a desire for stronger peer connection, cohort-based engagement, and structured mentoring opportunities. Stakeholders also identified opportunities to enhance ongoing training and supervision, particularly in navigating complex systems such as education, mental health, and child welfare.

Closing Note

By grounding its strategic planning process in data, diverse perspectives, and practical implementation considerations, CASA ensured that this strategic plan reflects both aspiration and realism. The appendix documents the foundation for the plan's priorities and serves as a reference point for ongoing learning, evaluation, and adaptation throughout the plan period.

Staff Capacity and Infrastructure

Stakeholders expressed strong confidence in CASA's staff leadership and professionalism, noting relatively low turnover and strong mission alignment. At the same time, data indicate that staff capacity is approaching its current structural limits. Respondents emphasized the importance of maintaining appropriate staff-to-volunteer ratios and investing in management and support structures to sustain quality.

Program Focus and Strategic Discipline

Feedback reflected strong support for CASA's core advocacy mission alongside caution about overextension. While system-level collaboration and thought leadership were valued, stakeholders emphasized the importance of maintaining focus on direct advocacy.

There was broad recognition of unmet needs among youth transitioning out of the dependency court system, particularly related to housing stability, mental health, education, and life skills. However, stakeholders expressed varying perspectives on CASA's appropriate role, reinforcing the need for disciplined, data-informed decision-making.

Financial Sustainability and Funding Mix

While CASA's current financial management was viewed positively, stakeholders identified potential risk associated with reliance on government funding. Data underscored the importance of revenue diversification, expanded individual and corporate giving, and clearer articulation of CASA's value proposition.

Communications and Public Awareness

Stakeholders identified opportunities to strengthen CASA's visibility and public awareness. While existing communications efforts were well regarded, respondents encouraged greater use of storytelling, volunteer perspectives, and youth voices to support recruitment, fundraising, and influence. Positioning CASA as a thought leader in child welfare was viewed as both an opportunity and a responsibility.

Growth and Expansion Considerations

Feedback regarding expansion reflected both opportunity and caution. While community need exists and CASA has strong credibility, stakeholders emphasized the importance of assessing readiness, resources, and risk prior to expansion. This reinforced the value of a disciplined framework for evaluating future growth.