

CJA 101: Quick Facts About the Children's Justice Act Grant



Capacity Building
CENTER FOR STATES

The Children's Justice Act (CJA) provides grants to States to improve the investigation, prosecution, and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect, particularly child sexual abuse and exploitation, in a manner that limits additional trauma to the child victim. CJA grantees are responsible for implementing the requirements of the CJA grant program to reform state processes for responding to child abuse and neglect. This fact sheet provides information about the requirements of the CJA grant program and resources available to grantees in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities.

Since fiscal year 2000, \$17 million in CJA funds as authorized by the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) have been made available annually for distribution to the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Virgin Islands. Funds are allocated in the amount of \$50,000 per state, plus an additional amount based on the population of children under 18 years of age in the applicant's jurisdiction.

Funding for CJA comes from the Crime Victims Fund, which collects fines and fees charged to persons convicted of federal crimes. The fund is administered by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), and the grants are awarded by the Children's Bureau (CB), Administration on Children, Youth and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, (Children's Justice Act Fact Sheet, May 2012; <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/childrens-justice-act>).

Focus of the CJA Grant:

CJA funding provides assistance for states and territories to improve their approach and response to child abuse and neglect. The focus of the funding is to create systemic changes that prevent additional trauma to child victims, and to more effectively protect their rights.

Section 107(a) of CAPTA outlines the purpose of CJA funding, which is to assist states in developing, establishing, and operating programs designed to improve:

- (1) The assessment and investigation of suspected child abuse and neglect cases, including cases of suspected child sexual abuse and exploitation, in a manner that limits additional trauma to the child and the child's family;
- (2) The assessment and investigation of cases of suspected child abuse-related fatalities and suspected child neglect-related fatalities;
- (3) The investigation and prosecution of cases of child abuse and neglect, including child sexual abuse and exploitation; and
- (4) The assessment and investigation of cases involving children with disabilities or serious health-related problems who are suspected victims of child abuse or neglect.

Because CJA grants focus on general systemic improvements specifically for children's justice, funding for direct treatment services or prevention programs is not an appropriate use of CJA funding (CJA Program Instruction, March 2017; <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/pi1703.pdf>).

CJA Grant Eligibility Requirements:

To qualify for CJA funding, states must establish and maintain a multidisciplinary task force on children's justice and meet the eligibility requirements for the CAPTA Basic State Grant.

1. **Task force membership requirements:** The task force must be composed of professionals with knowledge and experience relating to the criminal justice system and issues of child abuse and neglect, child sexual abuse and exploitation, and child maltreatment-related fatalities. In addition, the task force must include representatives of parents' groups, adult former victims of child abuse and neglect, and individuals experienced in working with children with disabilities and homeless children

and youth. A complete list of requirements for task force membership is available in Section 107(c)(1) of CAPTA at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/capta2010.pdf>.

Task force members can represent only one professional category in the task force, though they may have experience in multiple categories. For example, if a prospective member represents a parents' group and works with children with disabilities, the member can either represent the parents' group or the group working with children with disabilities.

2. **Purpose of the task force:** The task force is required to make policy and training recommendations for systems improvements in the investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of child abuse, neglect, and exploitation cases, and child maltreatment-related fatalities. In order to do that, the task force must conduct a statewide assessment upon the initial CJA grant application and at three-year intervals thereafter.
3. **Assessment requirements:** Initial and three-year assessments must outline reviews, evaluations, and recommendations in all required areas identified in CAPTA Sec. 107(e)(1)(A), (B) and (C). View the full requirements in the CAPTA handbook at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/capta2010.pdf>.
4. **Required categories for use of CJA funds:** State task force projects selected for CJA funding must support front-end efforts or intake and investigation phases of child welfare cases. CJA grantees must implement recommendations in each of the following categories, as required by legislation:
 - a. Investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect.

Related Recommendation Example: Expand availability of Sudden Unexplained Infant Death Investigation (SUIDI) training to include professionals involved in the investigation, prosecution, and court handling in cases of child maltreatment.

Related Activity Example: Six cross-disciplinary statewide trainings addressing SUIDI will be provided over the next year.
 - b. Experimental, model, and demonstration programs for testing innovative approaches.

Related Recommendation Example: Support programs that will promote a consistent, coordinated multidisciplinary response to serious cases of child abuse/neglect as well as improve the coordination between the criminal justice system and civil child protection system.

Related Activity Example: Provide support for the launch of a Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) enhancement program, including evaluation of the program's implementation and impact at local child advocacy centers.
 - c. Reform of state laws, ordinances, regulations, protocols, and procedures.

Related Recommendation Example: Increase the number of reports of child abuse and neglect to the mandated investigative agency when those reports are received from within the school system.

Related Activity Example: Collaborate with school administrators/educators to identify current practices and procedures in addressing and reporting suspected child abuse and neglect.

The ongoing activities of a state task force in monitoring implementation of its recommendations and continuing interagency collaboration related to CJA also may be supported by CJA funds.

Roles and Responsibilities of CJA Grantees:

CJA grantees have a number of roles and responsibilities, including:

- ▶ Staying current on program requirements and grant application procedures for each fiscal year. Program Instructions, released annually by CB, provide specific program and application

requirements. Current and past years' CJA Program Instructions may be accessed here: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/laws-policies/program-instructions>.

- ▶ Submitting timely grant applications that meet all eligibility requirements, in addition to submitting the annual performance report evaluating programming, outputs, and outcomes of CJA-funded programs for the prior year.
- ▶ Ongoing oversight of CJA program requirements to ensure grant-funded activities meet CJA obligations.
- ▶ Continuing supervision of grant fund expenditures.
- ▶ Implementing, completing, and submitting the three-year state task force assessment and assessment report to CB in a timely manner.
- ▶ Attending the annual CJA grantees meeting.
- ▶ Serving as the communication lead with CB Federal Project Officer for CJA.
- ▶ Establishing and maintaining a full task force with individuals representing all required membership disciplines.

CJA Grantees and State Liaison Officers for Child Abuse and Neglect:

CB first used the term State Liaison Officer (SLO) in the mid-1980s to identify a public child welfare representative within each state and territory knowledgeable in matters and programming related to CAPTA. Since then, SLOs have served as the point of contact between public child welfare agencies, CB, and federal regional offices for Child Protective Services.

At times, CJA grantees are paired with SLOs for annual meetings and other collaborative opportunities. Outside of their official designation as an SLO, these individuals are identified by their knowledge and experience in program and policy development and/or administrative responsibilities for C P S within their state or territory.

While SLOs are not grantees and are not responsible for grant administration, there are common points of interest between CJA grantees and SLOs allowing them to serve as an information resource to each other. In some cases, CJA grant coordinators serve simultaneously as the SLO for their particular state or territory, or may share some areas of responsibility with the SLO. Both may participate in investigations of serious or life-threatening abuse or neglect associated with child fatalities or near fatalities that could result in civil and criminal prosecution. SLOs with roles in their state or territory's child protection system, as well as CJA grantees, must stay informed of changes to CAPTA requirements.

Resources Available to CJA Grantees:

CJA grantees have direct access to assistance from the CB Federal Project Officer responsible for the CJA grant program. A roster with contact information for CJA Grantees is located at: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/>.

In addition to guidance from CB, CJA grantees also have access to the CJA Grantees Constituency Group, which is a peer network support system coordinated by the Capacity Building Center for States.

Constituency group opportunities include:

- ▶ Access to a CJA-designated listserv where members can post inquiries about any topic, and can look to CJA peers for responses;
- ▶ Regularly scheduled webinars on relevant and timely topics;
- ▶ Opportunities to connect during the annual CJA grantees meeting;
- ▶ Activities and meetings that provide ongoing communication with peers from other states; and
- ▶ Opportunity to participate in a leadership role in the CJA Grantees Constituency Group.

How Do I Use the CJA Listserv?

To be added to the CJA listserv, send an email to the CB Federal Project Officer for the CJA Program requesting to be added as a member. Upon approval, you will receive an email notification from the administrator that you were added to the listserv.

To Access the Listserv for the First Time:

Go to the Listserv Web Page: <https://lists.icfwebservices.com/read/login/>.

To Login: Use your email address (often your work email) as your login ID and sign in with the original default password *justice*.

Your Password: Upon initial sign-in, the system will prompt you to create your own password.

To Send a Message to the Listserv:

Once in the listserv, click create new message on the upper right side of the screen. Type your message or pose a question. Messages are sent to all CJA grantees who joined the listserv as well as the Child Welfare Program Specialist responsible for the CJA grant. You may also send an email to cja@lists.childwelfare.gov.

Tips for Sending Messages:

► **Put a clear subject in the subject line.**

A clear and concise subject line allows busy peers to immediately understand the content of your message. Previous user feedback indicates vague subject lines increase the chances your message will be deleted by your peers.

► **Remember: Replies to a listserv message are seen by everyone on the listserv!**

If you would like CJA grantees to respond directly to you, rather than the entire group, please place your email address at the end of the message. However, responses sent to the entire group are memorialized on the listserv via the archives, giving peers who have the same or similar questions access to all responses.

► **Replies to messages are saved in archives and can be accessed later.**

When switching topics, always change the subject line to create a new thread. If you have multiple messages/questions that are not linked, consider posting different emails so that the thread can remain specific to one topic.

To Read Archived Messages:

Simply scroll through the list of messages. Messages are organized by date, with the most recent appearing at the top. Click the *show more* tab on the bottom left side of the screen, then click the number to the right of the message subject (in the *replies* column) to see the original message and all replies.

To Remove Your Name From the Listserv:

Please notify the CB Federal Project Officer for CJA or listserv administrator if you no longer need access to the listserv. If applicable, please also provide contact information for any new staff members that need to be subscribed. .

Contact Information

For questions or comments concerning CJA please contact Lauren Fischman, the CB Federal Project Officer for CJA, at lauren.fischman@acf.hhs.gov.