

Request for Proposal

The North Dakota Supreme Court is seeking a statewide contract for providing guardian ad litem services. The contract period will be from July 1, 2010 through June 30, 2011, with a possible non-competitive extension through June 30, 2012.

Project Description: The Guardian ad Litem (GAL) program is dedicated to the mission of preparing and maintaining a qualified group of individuals to accept guardian ad litem appointments for deprivation cases in juvenile court. The appointed GAL carries the case until the court's jurisdiction ends. GALs are provided with training, structure, consultation and support in their work through the program staff. When a GAL is needed for a case, the requisite juvenile court notifies the program office; program staff then contacts a GAL in the district, assigns the case, notifies the court, and appointment papers are prepared. GALs are required to prepare and present written reports for all dispositional hearings. Qualifications for GALs are found in the North Dakota Rules of Juvenile Procedure, Rule 17.

Background: The North Dakota Supreme Court as part of the ND Court Improvement initiative provides the funding for this project. The ND Court Improvement Project Task Force was created in 1995 to study current issues in regard to the legal process of foster care cases. Emphasis was placed on cases where children were adjudicated as deprived and placed in out-of-home care. One recommendation of the Task Force was to pilot a Guardian ad Litem Project in a limited area. Since the program has been extended statewide and now serves all 53 counties of the state, on average there are anywhere from 40-45 GAL's statewide. Approximately 500 to 600 cases filed each year that need a GAL appointment. The complexity of the case will determine how many hours needed, but generally run around 15 hours.

The philosophy behind improving practice, presenting multi-disciplinary training, and defining and developing standards of practice to reach the mission of the program, requires a dedication to the concept of partnerships between human service agencies, courts and court personnel, attorneys and guardians ad litem. All of these professionals are key players in achieving permanency for children and improving the collective response to children and families in the juvenile court system. Thus, this program will carry out activities consistent with this philosophy and mission.

Scope of Service: The program staff will hire, train and monitor guardians ad litem for the statewide program. The majority of activities will include providing orientation training for new GALs, consultation, and developing avenues of partnerships among courts, service providers, consumers and attorneys. Program consultation and supportive services are ongoing services provided to all program GALs via telephone and email contacts. Additionally, follow-up training and face-to-face consultation and support will occur at least once every 4-6 weeks.

The provider will maintain liability insurance. Coverage shall include \$1,000,000 for each wrongful act and \$2,000,000 aggregate. Board and Director liability insurance shall be for \$1,000,000. General liability shall be maintained at \$1,000,000.

In the event of litigation naming the GALs (agents of the provider) as defendants, the provider will furnish legal representation for the GALs.

Statewide oversight of the GAL program consists of reviewing program statistics and monitoring by the Office of the State Court Administrator and the Court Improvement Project. Quarterly reports are provided to the Court Improvement Committee and an annual report is prepared each calendar year by February 15. Minimum information to be included in the reports are hours worked per individual GAL, hours worked per case, cases opened, cases closed and active cases. Hours worked in pre and post disposition for each case must also be tracked.

Monthly GAL billings are approved and forwarded to the ND Supreme Court on a timely basis.

Proposals: Proposals to provide service should be submitted to:

Louis Hentzen
Office of the State Court Administrator
600 E. Blvd. Ave., Dept. 180
Bismarck, ND 58505-0530

Proposals should be submitted by February 12, 2010 and should include the following:

1. Background in providing similar services or in delivering of a statewide program.
2. Timeframes for recruiting appropriate personnel and guardian ad litem;
3. Timeframes for developing training programs;
4. Expected implementation of service timeframes;
5. Proposed budget for administration of GAL program. The budget should include estimated costs for training, supervision, recruitment, fixed overhead and insurance;
6. A detailed administrative and supervisory structure, and names and qualifications of key personnel.

7. An agency or organization that currently provides juvenile services or treatment should include an explanation as to how its structure will be adopted to avoid any conflict of interest that could potentially arise from an individual GAL recommendation.

Questions should be directed to Louie Hentzen at 701-328-2238 or lhentzen@ndcourts.gov.