

Budgeting for a Tribal CAC: A Starting Point

NCA Accreditation Standards this brief addresses:

Standard 3: Forensic Interview

Standard 9: Organizational Capacity

Standard 10: Child Safety and Protection

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The first step toward the development of an accredited Tribal Child Advocacy Center (CAC) is to assemble a Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) and establish regular meetings for the interagency coordination of child maltreatment cases. MDTs can generally be established with minimal budgets, as most team members should be able to participate in meetings on behalf of the agencies or departments that employ them, without the need for outside funding. To take the next step and open a new CAC, however, requires a more significant budget. Below, we will provide some preliminary budget guidance, outlining the components of each of the primary spending categories that are necessary to basic CAC operations as established by National Children's Alliance Accreditation Standards.

Because salaries and real estate/construction costs vary widely from region to region and community to community, we can't offer specific dollar estimates for most of these categories. Instead, we will describe the kinds of personnel, physical spaces, and other purchases that are necessary to CAC operations, trusting that Tribal stakeholders will be able to judge corresponding costs based on the financial characteristics of their communities. As your team develops a sense of your budget needs, we encourage you to review [NCARC Practice Brief 11](#), which provides an overview of various sources of funding that may be appropriate for CAC development.



Personnel

The number of staff positions that are necessary for effective CAC operations depends on numerous factors that will be specific to each community, including expected levels of demand for and utilization of services. We recommend that before deciding which positions to hire and at what Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) levels, MDTs meet to estimate potential caseloads and to think through which positions the team should house in the CAC itself versus which ones can be covered by existing positions at other agencies through the development of Memoranda of Understanding (MOU). A typical CAC in its early stages of development should generally seek to leverage community partnerships to cover numerous CAC functions. For example, many CACs enter into agreements with local medical providers to conduct medical exams and with mental health providers to deliver trauma-focused treatment to clients at no expense to the CAC itself. Generally, NCARC recommends prioritizing the hiring of two key positions: 1. an Executive Director (ED) who can also serve as the CAC's Forensic Interviewer (FI) and 2. a Victim Advocate (VA).

1. Executive Director/Forensic Interviewer (1 FTE)

This position should be full-time if possible, and candidates for the job should ideally have both management experience and experience with CACs. EDs often have master's-level degrees, but many successful EDs combine a bachelor's degree with extensive experience specific to the CAC model. Trained FIs already working in CACs commonly look to CAC ED positions as logical career development paths. Alternatively, candidates can be trained as FIs after they are hired. In the absence of

experience with a CAC, experience in mental health or other fields related to CAC operations may be helpful. In addition to conducting forensic interviews, the ED will manage all aspects of the CAC in accordance with NCA Accreditation Standard 9 (Organizational Capacity), including facilitation of the MDT and both financial and programmatic oversight of the center's activities. An ED should be prepared to interact with children and families on a day-to-day basis, supervise employees, initiate contracts and purchases, forecast spending, ensure sustainable funding, oversee data collection, and guide strategies for quality improvement and ongoing development. The ED should be able to serve as the CAC's public-facing representative, spokesperson, and lead fundraiser while serving as a community champion for the multidisciplinary response to child maltreatment.

2. Victim Advocate (.5 FTE to 1 FTE)

Ideally, this position would be full-time. It may be possible in some communities to provide effective Victim Advocacy (VA) services with a half-time position that can be structured as an on-call role combined with certain regular hours in the office. It may also be possible to combine a part-time CAC VA with services obtained through an MOU with other agencies. Typically, this would involve an MOU with a Sexual Assault services organization. In these cases, the VA services covered through the MOU likely would not be sufficient to meet all your CAC's needs, because funding streams for Sexual Assault VAs typically do not cover cases of non-sexual physical abuse, which make up a substantial proportion of CAC cases. Regardless of how your CAC structures its VA services, this role is crucial to effectively serving children and families. VAs

typically take the lead in the development of the community relationships that are essential to ensuring that children and families receive the support that they need, including services that are part of the CAC/MDT response as well as concrete forms of aid such as transportation and victims' compensation that may be available under the law. Early career professionals with bachelor's degrees in social work, psychology, or related fields may be appropriate candidates. VA training on the job is common.

Positions to Consider Adding as a CAC Grows

As caseloads and management responsibilities grow, a common form of personnel expansion in CACs is the splitting of the ED and FI roles into two separate full-time positions. Depending on the service array and labor market in your community, it may also make sense to hire an in-house mental health clinician with training in trauma-focused interventions for children and families.

Physical Space

NCA Accreditation Standard 10 (Child Safety and Protection) establishes specific criteria that a CAC's physical space must meet. The space must be "a separate, child/youth focused setting that provides a safe, comfortable, and neutral place where forensic interviews and other CAC services can be appropriately provided for children and families."¹ Specifically, the space must meet each of the following guidelines:

- Be physically and psychologically safe for children and families.
- Allow CAC staff, MDT members, or volunteers to observe or supervise clients at all times.

- Be convenient and accessible to clients and MDT members.
- Be appropriate for the delivery of CAC services.
- Provide age-appropriate and culturally diverse toys and resources that are sanitized and safe.
- Allow for the separation of victims and alleged offenders.
- Be physically accessible for those who are differently abled.
- Provide separate and private area(s) for case consultation and discussion, meetings and interviews, and clients awaiting services.

Each of these requirements will have budget ramifications relating to appropriate locations for your CAC, measures that may need to be taken if your CAC shares space with another agency, the appropriate layout of offices and other rooms, [the kinds of culturally specific decorations and waiting room supplies you may need](#) to create psychological safety, and the accessibility features of the space.

Stakeholders in the early stages of planning commonly propose to house their CACs in existing public or Tribal buildings. This may be possible, but modifications to the building are usually necessary to ensure that the above requirements can be met. For example, housing a Tribal CAC in a police station without making any modifications to the space will likely fail to meet the "child/youth-focused" aspect of the accreditation standard as well as the aspect focusing on psychological safety, since children and families may associate police stations with fear, criminality, and danger to themselves. However, if a section of a police station were redesigned with a separate entrance that makes clear the facility's purpose, together with redesign of waiting areas and offices to make the space child-friendly and

representative of the local culture(s), the space could be transformed sufficiently to meet accreditation standards.

Regardless of what type of building your team settles on for your CAC, you will need to ensure that your CAC clients are able to be separate from clients or staff of other agencies; children and families can have privacy within your offices; there are separate, private rooms for conducting the forensic interview and for observing the forensic interview (via closed-circuit video); and the CAC's furnishings, decorations, resources, and toys or activities are child-friendly, age-appropriate, and reflect the client population's culture(s).

These conditions could all be satisfied in an appropriately decorated suite of offices or a small building consisting of a waiting room, an office for the Victim Advocate that is adjacent to the waiting room, a forensic interviewing room, a room for observing the closed-circuit video of forensic interviews (which could be the Executive Director's office), and a restroom. A private space where the MDT can gather is also necessary. This might be one of the aforementioned private rooms, or it might be an additional conference room if funding allows. Rooms used for forensic interviewing, for observing forensic interviews, and for MDT and other private meetings must have doors that can be closed and must be adequately soundproofed to preserve confidentiality.

Equipment and Supplies

In addition to computers and basic office supplies, a CAC must have some specialized equipment to conduct forensic interviews properly, in compliance with NCA Accreditation Standard 3 (Forensic Interview).

As noted above, interviews must be conducted by the FI in a neutral, private room while being observed by other members of the MDT team in a separate, private room. This is typically accomplished using a closed-circuit video system. Depending on a CAC's FI protocols, interviews may need to be recorded and stored on internal computer systems, as well. This requires extra measures to ensure that there is a robust firewall preventing outside access to the video files.

It is possible to use homemade systems that are wired from one room to the other if they are secure (that is, not transmitted via internet platforms that could be hacked). However, high-quality video and audio of each interview are imperative for effective investigation and prosecution, so we recommend that CACs plan to invest in the best video system they can afford. Many CACs budget for an integrated video camera, broadcast, recording, and software system that combines the real-time video feed capability with the security features that will ensure confidentiality both during the real-time recording and when storing video files. As of 2023, a CAC could expect to spend approximately \$20,000 on the purchase and installation of such a system. Because this equipment is so crucial to CAC operations, grant programs commonly fund their purchase. The NCA's annual subgrants program (funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention) annually includes a specific opportunity focused on the funding of CAC equipment.

In addition to standard computers and software necessary for day-to-day tasks in any agency, a CAC may want to consider the purchase of tablet computers for the collection of data from clients. These data collection activities are one component of the

mandatory data that CACs must collect and regularly submit to the NCA's Outcome Measurement System. While surveys can be conducted with paper and pen, when conducted with devices such as tablets, the results automatically upload to the system, saving staff time that would otherwise be spent on data entry.

CACs should also plan to purchase financial tracking and management software that will enable the ED or other staff to separate expenses according to separate grants or funding streams and to institute sound accounting practices that meet the standards established in annual audits, as required by NCA Accreditation Standard 9.

Other Expenses

In compliance with Accreditation Standard 9, CACs should budget for insurance premiums for general commercial liability, professional liability, director and officer liability, and cyber liability policies. Insurance products and prices vary substantially by state. NCARC recommends reaching out to your state chapter for recommendations about the insurance companies that serve CACs in your state.

CACs should also budget for national criminal background, sex offender registration, and child abuse registration checks for all staff,

¹ National Children's Alliance. (2023). *National Standards of Accreditation for Children's Advocacy Centers, 2023 Edition*, 64.

volunteers, and board members, in compliance with Accreditation Standard 9. These checks should occur at intake, prior to onboarding, and then again at five-year intervals for each individual.

Concluding Thoughts

We offer these suggestions as broad guidelines that may be workable in many local contexts. If this budgeting guidance fails to speak to your Tribe or community's specific needs and challenges, please don't hesitate to [reach out to NCARC](#) to discuss your situation. We also recommend that you reach out to other Tribal CACs, to CACs in your state, and/or to your state chapter for budgeting and staffing guidance specific to your location.

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