



Increasing Value for Your Solo Section Members

By Jennifer Willner, Chair, WSBA Solo & Small Practice Section

Greetings Section Colleagues! Have you taken a look at the results of the recent WSBA [Membership Study](#)? I highly recommend reading at least the [Executive Summary](#). One of the interesting statistics reported by the study is that solo practitioners are the largest single constituency by type of legal position within the WSBA. In addition, the study found that the various diversity groups that were identified in the study are disproportionately represented within the solo practitioner group.

The [Solo & Small Practice Section](#) (SSP Section) now has 749 members (whoop whoop). About 80 percent of our members also belong to one of the other 26 WSBA Sections. In addition, I learned from the WSBA that about 30 percent of all section members who identified their firm size reported being a solo practitioner. I know from talking with solo attorneys for the last 10 years that most solo and small-firm attorneys typically practice in more than one substantive area of the law. What all these statistics say to me is that *each substantive law section has an opportunity to bring value to diverse groups of attorneys who may not be reached otherwise by creating programs that address the needs of solo practitioners.* This might result in increasing your section's membership too.

Understanding the Solo Practitioner's Needs

The need of the solo practitioner differ significantly from the needs of an attorney within a law firm of several, or many, attorneys. The solo practitioner is usually the only member of his or her law firm. There are no other attorneys with whom to discuss how to handle a particular matter. There is often no support staff to assist with running the law firm and developing the business. The resources of the solo and small-firm practitioner are of necessity, and by design, somewhat limited. Especially in this economic climate, solo attorneys are practicing law on a shoestring budget. Many solo and small-firm attorneys now practice virtually, and work/life balance is becoming a significant mental health issue. Solo attorneys are very conscious of the dollars it takes to remain competent in their practice areas, and the dollars it takes to participate in professional activities. Solo attorneys are weighing the benefits of joining WSBA sections by the value their section dues return to their practices. Solo attorneys very carefully weigh their choices before spending money.

The SSP Section exists specifically to help the solo and small-firm practitioner conduct the business of running a law firm.

"Here in the WSBA Law Office Management Assistance Program (LOMAP), we assist largely solo practitioners. We always mention the Sections as a way to connect to the broader practice community. The Sections are a most important component of the Bar. I suggest that Section leaders look over their member list to spot the higher bar numbers and reach out to welcome these newer members 'into the fold.' Make your Section website resources known to your members and encourage active participation and contributions. As I like to say to the newer dmittees, 'You cannot know too many lawyers!'"

-Pete Roberts, Manager of Law Office Management Assistance Program

Our mission states:

"We help solo and small-practice attorneys to ethically conduct a profitable, satisfying business by acting as a clearinghouse for qualified law practice management and technology information."

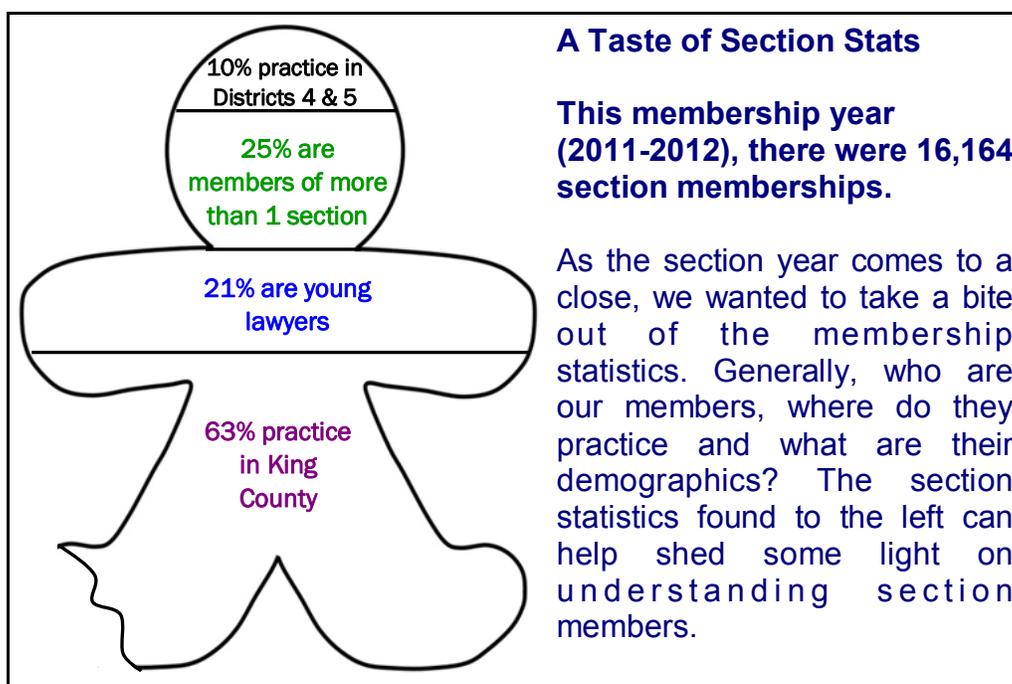
Our section is in a unique position to understand the needs of the solo and small-firm practitioner as they relate to running the business of a law firm. However, our section is not focused on a particular substantive area of the law. That's where the other substantive law sections come in. We believe that solo and small-firm attorneys need the substantive law sections to help remain competent in their field(s) of practice.

The substantive law sections in turn would greatly benefit by creating programs specifically aimed at the solo and small-firm practitioner. Such programs would benefit a large portion of your members, add value to section membership, and would also increase the attractiveness of becoming a member of your section. Win, win, right?

Reaching out to Solo and Small-Firm Attorneys

- **Co-Sponsor with the SSP Section!** One idea is to create a networking event that brings together your more seasoned members and newer members (who are disproportionately solo practitioners). These networking events benefit solo attorneys by connecting them with other practitioners for mentoring and discussing particular matters. The SSP Section has several networking events a year and they are well attended and enjoyed. We would be very interested in partnering with a practice area section for an event.
- **Plan for speakers with solo practitioners in mind.** In addition to developing a CLE program with speakers addressing the needs of solo practitioners, your section and the SSP Section could co-sponsor a social event or reception that brings in a speaker from a substantive law area who has successfully transitioned from practicing in a firm to practicing as a solo attorney (or vice versa).
- **Build a robust listserv.** Solo and small-firm attorneys benefit greatly from being able to roundtable a (hypothetical) matter. Our Section's listserv has many, many posts a day asking questions about specific substantive areas of the law. Why is this so? Why are these questions asked of their SSP Section colleagues, and not posted on the listservs of the substantive law sections? Does your section have a listserv? Is the listserv active? Are you reaching out to solo and small-firm attorneys? The SSP Section's listserv is incredibly active and I see requests for referrals every day.
- **Set a place at the table.** Lastly, your section might consider being intentional about having a solo attorney on the Section's Executive Committee who could be a voice for this growing constituency.

Please let me know if you are interested in creating a dialogue on how to serve the needs of the solo and



small-firm attorneys in your Section – a dialogue that ultimately will benefit the members of All Sections and the profession!

Fireside Chat

By Beth McCaw, Immediate Past Chair of WSBA RPPT Section

Following the license fee referendum and the subsequent discussions about the purpose of the WSBA, the Executive Committee of the Real Property, Probate & Trust Section (RPPT) thought it was time to re-evaluate our section's activities and the benefits that we provide to our members. We created an online survey using SurveyMonkey™ and we asked current, outgoing, and incoming Executive Committee members to evaluate the relevance of our section's mission and whether or not our current programs and activities are consistent with our mission. Ninety percent of the respondents strongly agreed that our mission is timely and on target. One suggested that we put our mission statement on the front page of all of our meeting agendas to help focus our discussions. Another respondent suggested that we incorporate into our mission statement our commitment to provide all of our services and programs throughout the state and not just in the greater Seattle area. As part of the survey, Executive Committee members also rated the value of our activities to our membership and provided feedback on the structure, culture, and effectiveness of our Executive Committee. We then used the survey results to develop our FY2013 budget. At our upcoming fall retreat, we will discuss how to make our Executive Committee meetings more effective and will begin working on an online survey for our full membership. Technology makes two-way communications with members so easy – we're looking forward to getting to know the needs and interests of our membership as we start another section year.



Interested in surveying your section members? The Sections Team has assisted several sections in developing and administering section surveys. Feel free to contact your section liaison to discuss ideas and see examples.

Annual Reports Due End of September

According to the WSBA Bylaws, each section must complete an annual report by the end of the current fiscal year. You can find the template on the [Section Leaders' Toolbox](#).

Please have these completed by **September 30, 2012**.

Farewell to Julie Mass

By Paris Seabrook and Tiffany Lynch

While it has proved challenging, 2012 has been a year of new conversations and new opportunities. Julie Mass, the WSBA's Deputy Director for Administration and Professional Development has chosen to embark on a new opportunity to spend more time with her family.

Julie was a strong advocate for sections. Over her 10-plus years at the WSBA, she was instrumental in building a partnership with section leaders. Julie understood the value of sections to the WSBA membership and wider legal community; she also understood the value of collaboration and lucidity.

As Julie embarks on the next chapter in her life, we wanted to use SectionLand to acknowledge her contributions to sections and thank her for the endless support she has provided to the WSBA Sections Team and all those who work for and with sections. From negotiating contracts with venues on behalf of sections to spearheading efforts to provide sections with the level of staff support they have today. It's Julie's good work that gives us great confidence that the Sections will maintain a strong foundation of organizational support well into the future.

We wish her the best of luck in her new adventures!

New and Improved: Online Section Leader's Toolbox!

We made some changes to the Section Leader's Toolbox to make it easier to find information. If you haven't stopped by lately, you might want to [check it out!](#) The Sections Team has worked hard to include documents, templates, and general information that would best help you, the Section Leader, be successful in leading your section. This is an evolving resource that we are continuing to grow, so if you have any thoughts as to something you would like to see up there, please let us know.

Section Membership Year

The new section membership year is just around the corner! [Renew](#) your memberships and remind your members to do so as well. October 1st will begin the new year.



The Sections Team volunteering at the Food Lifeline warehouse in Shoreline, WA.



CLE Updates

By Kathy Burrows, Senior Seminar Development Specialist, WSBA-CLE

Have you reserved the date for your section's 2013 seminar? Before you completely wrap up your section work plans, be sure to call Kathy Burrows at 206-727-8225 to get your seminar on the 2013 WSBA-CLE calendar. It's never too early to select the date that works best for your group – even if it's tentative. I never hear complaints from incoming CLE Chairs because their predecessor already reserved a date. In fact, they're grateful! Another advantage of scheduling ahead is that it lets great ideas for topics and faculty grow from Executive Committee meetings and section social event conversations. It also provides time to mine the evaluations from the last Section seminar for topic suggestions from members. I can also be a great partner when brainstorming ideas. Give me a call now at 206-727-8225 so you're more likely to get your section's preferred seminar date. I'm looking forward to working with you.

Save the Date—Section Leaders' Fall Meeting

This year's Fall Orientation Meeting will be held at the WSBA Offices on **November 7th from 9:00am-12:00pm**. More information coming soon!

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Upcoming BOG Meetings

**September
20-21, 2012:**
WSBA Offices

FY13 Meeting dates
will be posted soon.