

WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

Small Town and Rural Council

Small Town and Rural Council Meeting | Virtual Only

Wednesday, February 18, 2026 | 12:10 p.m. – 1:10 p.m.

AGENDA

1. Introductions and Approval of January Meeting Minutes (Pres.-Elect Kari Petrasek)
2. WSBA Updates (Pres.-Elect Petrasek and Julianne Unite)
3. Legal Deserts Problem-Solving Project (Stacy Jane, Innovation for Justice)
4. Experiential Pathways to Licensure Presentation and Discussion (Catherine Schur, WSBA OGC)
5. Project Updates
 - a. Rural Internships (Kevin Plachy)
 - b. Summit Project Team (Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy, Michele Moore, Gloria Guizar)
 - c. Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)
 - d. Rural Day of Service (Kevin Plachy, Julianne Unite)
 - e. April 2026 Legal Lunchbox (Ashley Cummins)
6. Announcements
7. Next Steps/Conclusion
8. Next Meeting: March 25, 2026
9. Adjourn

WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

CHARTER

Small Town and Rural Council

Adopted: April 17, 2021. Amended July 17, 2021; September 7, 2024; November 14, 2025.

Purpose

As an advisory entity to the WSBA Board of Governors, the Small Town and Rural (STAR) Council is committed to strengthen and support the practice of law in the rural communities throughout Washington state. Members of the STAR Council will work to ensure that the practice of law in rural communities is present, growing, and thriving.

Practitioners in rural communities are few and far between. Additionally, many of these practitioners are nearing retirement without a clear plan of succession for their clients, leaving a void of access to legal representation and counsel. The STAR Council will guide policy & program development, serves as ambassadors between the WSBA and these communities, explore and advocate for creative and innovative solutions, and regularly assess the legal landscape in rural communities to determine if WSBA policy, advocacy and program development require further resource for sustainability and improvements.

The STAR Council aligns with the authorized activities outlined in General Rule 12. More specifically, GR 12.1 (a) articulates the Washington Supreme Court's regulatory objective to provide, in part, "meaningful access to justice . . ." while GR 12.1(d) strives for "affordable and accessible legal services." In addition, the STAR Council aligns with the authorized activities outlined in GR 12.2, in particular by providing "services to members and the public," and "fostering collegiality among its members and goodwill between the legal profession and the public."

Further, the STAR Council furthers the WSBA mission to serve the public and the members of the Bar by providing focused attention on the unique needs of residents and members in rural areas both by improving access to legal practitioners in rural communities and outreach and development of a pipeline of younger rural residents to pursue a legal career and serve their communities.

Definition of "Rural"

For the purpose of the STAR Council and reflective of Washington's unique geographic and sociogeographic landscape, the definition of "rural" is as follows:

Based on the definitions produced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service (ERS) and an overview of Washington county population, we focused on counties with populations of less than 50,000 and more than 2,500. These areas are considered 'urban nonmetro areas not part of larger labor markets' by ERS. As part of the working definition, and for ease, we have termed these counties as 'rural.' Based upon WA county population data, we've pursued a hypothesis that counties with 30,000 or more are rural, but likely adjacent to a labor market and perhaps have a varying set of circumstances that may differ from counties that are less than 30,000.

This definition will serve as the "per se" definition of rural. The STAR Council has the authority to change this definition based on specific programming objectives.

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Composition

The member appointment process will follow the process for WSBA Committees. Members of the STAR Council should have demonstrated experience and/or interest in a thriving legal practice in Washington's rural communities. The STAR Council will consist of 13 members and are outlined as:

- Chair (voting member)
- 2 Current or Former WSBA Board of Governors Members (voting members)
- 1 Active WSBA Member At Large (voting member)
- 4 Active WSBA Members from rural communities - see above for definition of "rural" (voting members)
- 1 Active WSBA New Member, as defined in WSBA Bylaws (voting member)
- 3 Law School Representatives (voting members, must be currently employed with a WA Law School which is not currently represented on the Committee.)
- 1 Active WSBA Lawyer Member currently employed with a Qualified Legal Service Provider (QLSP) (voting member).

WSBA Staff Liaison: Member Services and Engagement Manager or staff member in the Advancement Department, non-voting.

Board of Governor Liaison: as assigned annually, non-voting.

Terms

- Chair: two-year term
- Members: three-year term

Initial Committee Terms

In FY21, the first appointments to the STAR Council were effectuated in a staggered rotation of STAR Council members. Therefore, the following terms were in place for the first appointment cycle only. All subsequent terms should adhere to the term limits stated above. STAR Council members serving an initial term less than three years, should be considered an incomplete term. Therefore, the member is eligible to serve two subsequent complete three-year terms per WSBA Bylaws.

- 2 Active WSBA Members
1 member with two-year term, 1 member with three-year term.
- 4 Active WSBA Members from rural communities (see above for definition)
1 member with one-year term, 1 member with two years term, 2 members with three-years term.
- 3 Law School Representatives (voting, must be currently employed with a WA Law School)
1 member with one-year term, 1 member with two-years term, 1 member with three-years term.

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The following positions will begin as a standard term as set forth in this charter.

- Chair
- 1 Active WSBA New Member
- 1 Active WSBA Lawyer Member currently employed with a Qualified Legal Service Provider (QLSP).

Scope of Work

The scope of the STAR Council's work will focus on what the WSBA is uniquely positioned to do in supporting a sustaining and thriving environment for the practice of law and increase access to justice in Washington's rural communities. The STAR Council will work with all relevant and interested stakeholders to collaborate where needed. The provision of direct legal services and civil legal aid to the public is outside the scope of the STAR Council.

Measures of Success

- Increased awareness of the issues and possible solutions to address any gap in practicing members in rural communities.
- A sustainable pipeline of legal practitioners in rural communities.
- Increased numbers of legal practitioners in rural communities.
- The establishment of funding for programs and initiatives for the practice of law in rural communities.

STAR Council Roles

1. Community Education and Outreach

Coordinated efforts to educate members and potential members about the unique needs, opportunities and benefits of a rural practice. This can include, but should not be limited to, comprehensive information on WSBA's website, features in WSBA publications, presentations at high schools, law schools and community colleges. Meetings and events, such as a summit or symposium, to highlight the issue, convene interested stakeholders to share their concerns and strategize on possible solutions.

2. Pipeline and Placement Program(s)

Develop WSBA programming, or WSBA supported/partnered programming designed to build a pipeline of practitioners in rural areas as well as an incentive program to encourage members to explore a rural practice on a time-limited or multi-year timeframe. This role should explore a possible collaboration or strategic overlap with WSBA existing and future mentorship program(s). In particular, this role will require extensive strategic planning and identification of external stakeholder support and additional funding sources. Coordinate with law schools and other stakeholders regarding economic incentives to practice in rural areas.

3. Job Opportunities and Clearinghouse

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Utilize existing and future WSBA resources to support and highlight job opportunities in rural communities. This role should include making it easier, and perhaps more cost-effective, to add job postings to WSBA's service. Develop a clearing house to assist retiring members with succession planning and the buying/selling of a practice.

Committee Evaluation

The STAR Council should conduct an assessment within five years from the date of Board of Governors' initial approval of the STAR Committee by 1) conducting a survey of rural practitioners to provide stakeholder feedback regarding the impact of this Council to effectuate change in these areas, 2) assessing the scope of work to reflect impact and progress in this area and align with trends in the greater legal community, and 3) earnestly examining if the Council is necessary to continue the scope of work.

WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

Small Town and Rural Council

Small Town and Rural Council Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, January 21, 2026

Virtual meeting via Zoom

Council Members Present: President Elect Kari Petrasek, Jesse Lamp, Travis Pietila, Ashley Cummins, Sean King, Michele Moore, Governor Mary Rathbone (arrived 12:44), Allison Foreman (arrived 12:38 p.m.), Rusty McGuire, Philip Hunsucker (arrived 12:58 p.m.)

Council Members Absent: Past President Dan Clark (excused), Gloria Guizar (non-voting)

WSBA Board of Governors Present: N/A

WSBA Staff Present: Julianne Unite, Vanessa Sweeney

Public Attendees Present: Jason Walker, Chris Fox

Introductions and Approval of December Meeting Minutes (Pres. Elect Petrasek)

STAR Council Chair and WSBA President-Elect Kari Petrasek called the meeting to order at 12:11 p.m. On motion by STAR Council Member Rusty McGuire, seconded by STAR Council Member Jesse Lamp, the Council approved by unanimous vote the December STAR Council Meeting minutes (7-0-0).

WSBA Updates (Pres.-Elect Petrasek and Julianne Unite)

BOG Update

Pres.-Elect Petrasek noted the Board of Governors (BOG) met last Friday and shared key highlights from the meeting: the BOG attended the Martin Luther King, Jr. Luncheon, and the approval of the Justice Gap Scoping Work Group charter, details on the members can be found in the materials. Additionally, some bylaw amendments were approved, setting Limited Practice Officer and Limited License Legal Technician fees for the upcoming year. A revision to Appendix B of the WISBA Indigent Defense Standards, proposed by the council for public defense was aligned with current practice, and a conflict of interest policy was also approved.

WSBA Member Services and Engagement Manager Julianne Unite reminded the Council about the upcoming license fee deadline of February 2, urging everyone to renew their licenses and join sections. Nominations for the 2026 APEX Awards are now open, highlighting categories such as Outstanding New Member, nominations can be submitted through the WSBA website, with a deadline at the end of February. Julianne encouraged attendees to participate in the nomination process and flagged an upcoming presentation on the Experiential Pathways to Licensure by the Office of General Counsel and Zaida Rivera at the February STAR Council meeting.

Vacant Position(s) Recruitment Update

Julianne noted that no applications have been received for the Qualified Legal Service Provider or New Member positions with the STAR Council and encouraged Council members to leverage their networks to help recruit.

Project Updates

Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)

STAR Council Member Sean King shared that the registration form is in progress for the job fair which is taking place on April 10. Sean raised a concern about the tabletop talks, noting that employers and job seekers aren't consistently attending these sessions. Employers often find themselves alone in Zoom rooms with no participants. Sean questioned whether the tabletop talks should continue, given the low attendance and the frustration it causes employers. Sean explained that table talks are informal sessions where interested individuals can drop in to learn more about an employer's office or firm without the formality of applying for a job. Despite efforts to set expectations, attendance has been disappointing, leading to employers' frustration. STAR Council Member Travis Pietila supported this view, noting the low turnout and suggesting that employers can still connect with students through other career fairs. The Council discussed possibly eliminating the tabletop talks to save time and streamline the registration process. Pres.-Elect Petrasek suggested that employers could draft brief descriptions of their firms to post online, making the event more efficient for everyone involved. Sean concluded, noting that when the flyer is ready, it will be circulated to the STAR Council and sent to the appropriate list serves.

Rural Internships (Kevin)

Julianne discussed the rural internship program's potential funding from WSBA Sections for prosecutor, tribal in-house counsel, and attorneys general positions if section funds are available. Julianne thanked Chris Fox for FLEC's donation. Julianne noted communications have been sent to all sections via list serves to let them know of this opportunity. Julianne added that the goal is to publish the application form in mid-February with an application deadline of April. After the STAR Council's applicant review and approval, funds will be distributed to interns in May. The sections have until the end of February to confirm their donations, which allows sections sufficient time to meet and vote on their budgets.

Rural Day of Service (Pres. Elect Petrasek, Kevin Plachy, Julianne Unite)

Julianne noted a meeting is scheduled with the Inland Empire Legal Aid (IELA) next week to begin planning for the Rural Day of Service, scheduled for May 4, in Ferry County. Julianne added, that for the September clinic, Northwest Justice Project (NJP) agreed to partner and recommended a different location than Okanogan County. Instead, NJP proposed Grant, Lincoln, or Adams County as potential locations. STAR Council Member Rusty McGuire highlighted the town of Othello in Adams County, noting that there are around 10,000 people but only one attorney in the area. Additionally, 95% of the population is immigrant, indicating a need for an interpreter. Rusty also mentioned that there is no tribal land in Adams County and that ICE cannot enter tribal land. Pres.-Elect Petrasek recommended letting NJP know that the Council prefers Adams County, specifically Othello. Given considerations for the immigrant population and ICE presence, if NJP prefers Grant County due to safety, then the Council

would opt for Grant County. It was agreed that Lincoln County should not be chosen since it is close enough to Ferry County, which is being covered with IELA in May.

April Legal Lunchbox (Ashley Cummins)

STAR Council Member Ashley Cummins noted that Brenda George and Bree Blackhorse are both confirmed as presenters for the Legal Lunchbox, and have connected with WSBA Education Programs Lead Rachel Matz.

Summit Project Team (Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy, Michele Moore)

Ashley mentioned that they had discussed a theme and a few topics they wanted to bring to the Council. She emphasized their focus on community and sustainability and added the theme description in the chat:

Justice Within Reach Sustaining Rural Practice Through Community. Justice in rural and small-town communities depends not only on access to legal service, but on the ability of attorneys and advocates to build sustainable, connected, and supported practices over time. At this year's STAR Summit centers the people who make justice possible and explores what it takes to sustain rural lawyering in the face of workforce shortages, professional isolation, economic pressures, and evolving community needs. Sessions will highlight practical strategies for strengthening rural practice, sharing resources, and building professional and community networks. The Summit will also create intentional space for connection, peer learning, and collaboration, fostering relationships that support attorneys and communities long after the event ends.

Ashley explained that the last couple of Summit events had focused on attracting new people to the practice, and now they wanted to ensure support for those already working in this area. Ashley shared the proposed title for the Summit: "Justice Within Reach, Sustaining Rural Practice Through Community." Ashley stated that they were seeking advice or opinions on the theme before including it in the Save the Date. Ashley noted that with previous summits, a speaker gave a speech during lunch, but the planning committee discussed moving away from that format. Instead, lunch can be a time for attendees to network and talk with each other, fostering community. Ashley also shared the idea of eliminating concurrent sessions, opting for a single session format that would allow everyone to stay in the same room and interact more. STAR Council Member Michele Moore agreed, noting that doing away with the keynote speaker lunch will give people more time to network and provide more opportunities for connection during the day. Julianne referenced the previously discussed partnership with the Access to Justice (ATJ) Board, and noted that there will be a liaison between ATJ and STAR, and added that combining the ATJ Thursday event and the welcome reception could make it a bigger event. Ashley closed with mentioning that the Summit planning committee is still finalizing session ideas and wanted to get feedback on the proposed topics. These include alternative payment methods, AI basics for legal practice, and accessibility issues and bias within the courts. Ashley stressed the importance of getting specific feedback early to steer away from any potentially problematic ideas. Jason Walker added that he can get a speaker for the Rule 6 program.

Announcements

None.

Next Steps/Conclusion

None.

Next Meeting: February 18, 2026

Adjournment

Pres. Elect Petrasek adjourned the meeting at 12:59 p.m.

DRAFT

Legal Deserts Problem-Solving Project

Problem Statement

Legal deserts represent a significant and growing challenge: over 50 percent of rural counties nationwide are considered legal deserts with less than one lawyer per 1,000 people.¹ Rural communities not only struggle to find enough practicing lawyers, but also lack sufficient numbers of judges and government attorneys, leaving people in rural communities with less access to critical legal infrastructure. This lack of availability creates an environment where people are unable to get the necessary help to protect their rights and navigate complex legal issues—which can lead to disparities in outcomes and a potential erosion of public trust and confidence in the legal system. Unmet legal need manifests in various forms; but whenever people are unable to secure legal representation, they face a cascade of negative outcomes in critical areas of their lives, often relating to housing, employment, and family stability.

Multiple factors beyond the lawyer shortage also contribute to state courts' ability to ensure access to justice in areas where people face challenges accessing legal resources and services due to poverty, language access, geography, technology barriers, and legal service shortages.² When these additional access metrics are included in how we define and problem-solve legal deserts, the need for actionable solutions is even more pressing.

In many rural communities, solo and small firm attorneys also play an outsized role in bridging the justice gap (as compared to urban areas). However, the advancing age of the legal profession is heightened in rural areas, where a generation of practicing attorneys are reaching retirement age without adequate numbers of younger attorneys stepping in to replace them.

Many states have studied attorney shortages and legal deserts, including [Arkansas](#), [Michigan](#), [New York](#), and [Ohio](#). The judicial branches in [Kansas](#) and [Indiana](#) have launched dedicated court-led task forces to study and develop recommendations to address the issues caused by legal deserts.

With generous funding from SJI, the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) has engaged in [extensive legal deserts mapping](#), using GIS technology, to help courts and their justice system partners gain deeper insights into the needs of people living in legal deserts. These state-specific legal desert maps consider access-to-justice risk factors, including the

¹ See, e.g., <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/news/2020/07/potlp2020.pdf>.

² <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/832501b9ffe74b21a79a5a3910d7f7e7/page/Home>

number of attorneys compared to the population, distance to a courthouse, poverty rates, limited English proficiency, and the absence of internet or broadband connectivity.

More actionable research is needed, however, to help courts and their justice system partners understand the universe of the possible for legal desert interventions across a variety of the conditions that create legal deserts (lawyer shortages, poverty rates, language access, geographic or technological access), and to assist them in selecting legal deserts problem-solving strategies that target the specific needs and resources of their jurisdictions.

"Data must also be collected to identify region-specific legal and nonlegal problems and priorities, as well as the extent to which there is overlap among the needs identified by different stakeholders (e.g., area leaders, policy makers, local attorneys, and low-income community members). We know little about how rural people access and interact with the legal system or about particular legal needs that are subsequently unrecognized or otherwise are going unaddressed."³

The Opportunity Space: Project Goals, Objectives and Timeline

The Legal Deserts Problem-Solving project will establish an expansive inventory of existing and possible legal desert interventions and then assemble a cohort of 2-3 state courts to engage in: (1) training regarding legal deserts and their possible solutions; (2) participatory action research in their jurisdictions to understand the unique conditions of the legal deserts in their state; (3) technical assistance in selecting and implementing right-sized legal desert solutions for their state.

By engaging court teams in a collaborative learning experience, the Legal Deserts Problem-Solving project will foster knowledge sharing, cross-jurisdictional skill development, and peer support – all learning to enhanced benefit for all (including i4J and NCSC). This shared learning approach engages individual courts, but also should foster a sense of shared community and accountability across participants. In addition, wraparound technical assistance will offer tailored support that will help address specific needs to maximize likelihood for success.

The Legal Deserts Problem-Solving project will also produce an actionable deliverable for courts across the US: a replicable framework capturing the research process conducted with the participating state court cohort, findings from the cohort's design and implementation of legal deserts problem-solving strategies, and recommendations for how

³ Lauren Sudeall, Lise R. Pruitt, Danielle M. Conway, Michele Statz, Hannah Haksgaard, and Amanda L. Kool, *Legal Deserts: A Multi-State Perspective on Rural Access to Justice*, 13 Harvard Law & Policy Review. 15 (2018).

other courts can apply the learnings of the Legal Deserts Problem-Solving project in their jurisdictions.

The Legal Deserts Problem-Solving project will be completed as a two-year, five-phase project:

Phase 1 (September - December 2025): Literature Review and Aggregation of Current and Potential Approaches to Greening Legal Deserts

In this phase, Innovation for Justice will survey the existing research on legal deserts, the current strategies being deployed to address legal desert challenges, and the existing literature on promising practices and recommendations for greening legal deserts. i4J's research will build upon the significant work that NCSC has already completed measuring and mapping legal deserts across the United States.⁴ i4J will aggregate this research into an inventory that identifies existing and potential legal desert solutions and the jurisdiction-specific conditions that make specific legal desert solutions more or less likely to deliver impact in the jurisdiction.

Phase 2 (September 2025 recruitment; January 2026 Landscape Training): Selection and Landscape Training of Court Cohort

In Phase 2, i4J and NCSC will recruit and select 2-3 jurisdictions to participate in the Legal Deserts Problem-Solving Cohort using a peer learning model. The cohort will be selected by application process. Applicants from states whose legal deserts have been [GIS-mapped by NCSC](#) will be prioritized, in order to leverage that extensive data collection and analysis in this project. i4J and NCSC will also prioritize selecting a cohort of courts that vary in their size, geographic location, community demographics and other factors. The cohort will meet virtually at regularly-scheduled times. In the Phase 2 Landscape Training, i4J will present the findings from Phase 1 of the project and engage jurisdictions in initial review and feedback of the landscape of current and potential legal desert solutions. The goal of Landscape Training is to expose participating courts to a broad menu of possible legal desert solutions.

Phase 3 (January 2026 - June 2026): Technical Assistance in Selecting Right-Sized Legal Desert Solutions

In Phase 3, i4J will engage in participatory action research in the cohort's jurisdictions, with cohort members serving as co-researchers in the process.⁵ The research goals will include: understanding the current legal ecosystem of the legal desert; mapping the unmet civil

⁴ <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/832501b9ffe74b21a79a5a3910d7f7e7/page/Home>

⁵ See i4J Research Methods in Organizational Capacity, below.

legal needs as well as community assets that could meet those needs in new ways; identifying the conditions that contribute to the legal desert as well as opportunities for change (community demographics, service infrastructure, existing extra-legal resources, etc); selecting from Phase 2 potential legal desert solutions that, based on the community-centered research conducted in Phase 3, could be a useful intervention in that specific jurisdiction; prototype-testing possible legal desert solutions in community to lab-validate those most likely to deliver impact. System actors we anticipate including in Phase 3 research include: court stakeholders, members of the legal profession, social services, government services, law schools and other educational institutions, and community members (particularly those likely to be self-represented). Phase 3 will be embedded in an i4J graduate-level course; approximately 12-16 graduate students enrolled in that course will participate as members of the research team and contribute their time and effort toward the research and analysis process. Cohort members will meet virtually at regularly-scheduled times throughout Phase 3.

Phase 4 (July 2026 - July 2027): Technical Assistance in Implementing Right-Sized Legal Desert Solutions

In Phase 4, once innovations have been identified based on jurisdiction-specific learning and engagement, NCSC would lead providing comprehensive technical assistance to each cohort team to successfully implement and/or pilot their chosen innovation.

By leveraging NCSC's extensive expertise in court administration and outreach and in partnership with i4J, NCSC will facilitate targeting training workshops and resources, as well as one-on-one technical assistance, designed to equip court leadership with the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to adopt innovative practices effectively. NCSC and i4J will offer each participating court with dedicated staff support to assist with project implementation. Technical assistance may include: drafting, attending committee meetings, sharing best practices, conducting rules review and revision, and connecting with peer jurisdictions outside of the cohort, and NCSC and i4J will also continue facilitating collaboration across jurisdictions through peer learning and connection. In this way, NCSC and i4J will empower participating courts to become leaders in their states and nationally to bridge the justice gap in rural communities.

Phase 5 (August 2027 - September 2027): Report Out

In Phase 5, i4J and NCSC will produce a report for courts across the US: a replicable framework capturing the research process conducted with the participating state court cohort, findings from the cohort's design and implementation of legal deserts problem-solving strategies, and recommendations for how other courts can apply the learnings of the Legal Deserts Problem-Solving project in their jurisdictions. Research team



members will be available to present this project at regional and national court conferences and engage their networks to assist in distributing the findings from this project.

OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED EXPERIENTIAL LICENSING PATHWAY

Input Session Handout

Background

In November 2020, the Washington Supreme Court created the [Washington Bar Licensure Task Force](#) to assess the efficacy of licensing new attorneys through the bar exam and to explore alternative licensure methods. Based on its research and public input, the Task Force issued a [report](#) in early 2024 recommending that the Washington Supreme Court create experiential-based methods of licensing that did not require applicants to sit for the bar exam. This recommendation was based on research indicating that the exam was at best minimally effective at measuring competence to practice law while disproportionately excluding historically marginalized individuals from the legal profession.

The Washington Supreme Court issued an [order](#) in March 2024, adopting in concept the Task Force's recommendations, and tasked the Washington State Bar Association (WSBA) with convening a committee to implement the recommendations. The WSBA assembled a Steering Committee of members from across Washington's legal and law education communities. The Steering Committee and its subcommittees have devoted significant energy to developing proposals to implement an experiential-based pathway to licensure. These proposals are outlined below and the Steering Committee is seeking your input on the proposals before submitting them to the Court. The proposals are not yet final and may change before the pathway is open for applications. For more detailed explanations of the requirements below, please see the [materials from past Steering Committee meetings](#).

Experiential Licensing Pathway Overview

Rather than testing legal skills and knowledge on an exam, in the experiential licensing pathway, competence to practice law will be determined from a person's real-life performance and work completed during a period of supervised legal practice. Candidates will be required to complete specific lawyering activities, which will be observed and assessed by their supervisors using standardized rubrics, and to submit a portfolio containing those rubrics and required written work product to the WSBA Board of Bar Examiners. The Bar Examiners and supervisors will evaluate candidates' performance and work product to determine whether candidates demonstrate the nine core competencies defined in the section below.

In total, to be admitted to practice law in Washington through the experiential licensing pathway, candidates must complete the following requirements, which are explained in greater detail below:

1. Successfully complete their legal education by graduating from law school, completing the APR 6 law clerk program, or meeting additional educational requirements for foreign-trained candidates;
2. Complete all required supervised practice time under the supervision of a licensed attorney;
3. Complete all required pathway activities, detailed below;
4. Submit a portfolio of their work and supervisor rubrics and receive a passing score on all portfolio submissions;
5. Pass the Multistate Professional Responsibility Exam (MPRE), or receive passing scores on three written reflections of real-life professional responsibility issues;
6. Pass the Washington Law Component open book exam; and
7. Undergo the character and fitness review required of all applicants to the Washington Bar.

Core Competencies

Core lawyering competencies are the minimum demonstratable skills, professional behaviors, and areas of knowledge that a candidate for licensure must possess to protect the public from harm in the provision of legal services. Candidates must show through their performance on the required activities and their portfolio materials that they possess the following core competencies:

1. An understanding of legal processes and sources of law;
2. An understanding of threshold concepts in many subjects;
3. The ability to act professionally and in accordance with the rules of professional conduct;
4. The ability to interpret legal materials;
5. The ability to identify issues;
6. The ability to conduct research;
7. The ability to apply legal authority to the relevant facts in a client matter;
8. The ability to communicate as a lawyer; and
9. The ability to interact effectively with clients.

Participant Eligibility

Candidates

The experiential licensing pathway will be open to candidates who are currently enrolled in a program of legal education, whether in a law school or WSBA's APR 6 law clerk program, and to those who have already completed their legal education.

To participate in the experiential pathway, candidates must be enrolled in a JD program at a law school approved by the WSBA Board of Governors¹ or in the APR 6 law clerk program, or have graduated with a JD from an approved law school or completed the law clerk program. If a candidate graduated from an unapproved law school or a law school outside the United States, they must meet the additional educational requirements in Admission and Practice Rule 3(b)(3) and (4).² These requirements generally reflect the eligibility requirements to take the bar exam in Washington.

In addition, if a candidate completed their legal education more than six years before applying to the experiential licensing pathway, they must complete WSBA's 15-credit reinstatement CLE. This CLE is a refresher course on legal research and writing, recent significant changes in the law, law office management, and professional responsibility.

¹ Presently, the WSBA Board of Governors approves law schools that meet ABA accreditation standards.

² APR 3(b)(3) and (4) set out the requirements for an applicant to sit for the bar exam if they have graduated from an unapproved law school or law school outside the U.S. Those individuals must provide proof of:

(3) graduation from a university or law school in any jurisdiction where the common law of England is the basis for its jurisprudence with a degree in law that would qualify the applicant to practice law in that jurisdiction and admission to the practice of law in that same or other jurisdiction where common law of England is the basis of its jurisprudence, together with current good standing and active legal experience for at least three of the five years immediately preceding the filing of the application; or

(4)(A) graduation with a Master of Laws (LL.M.) degree for the practice of law as defined below and either:
(i) graduation with a JD degree from a United States law school not approved by the Board of Governors, or
(ii) graduation from a university or law school in a jurisdiction outside the United States, with a degree in law that would qualify the applicant to practice law as a lawyer or the equivalent in that jurisdiction.

Supervisors

The eligibility requirements for supervisors participating in the experiential pathway mirror the requirements for supervisors of licensed legal interns under [Admission and Practice Rule 9](#). Supervisors must be active members in good standing of a U.S. state or territorial bar association and have been actively engaged in the practice of law in any U.S. jurisdiction for at least three years preceding the date of application. Supervisors also may not have been disbarred or subject to disciplinary suspension in any jurisdiction within the preceding ten years, have a pending or imminent disciplinary proceeding, or have received a disciplinary sanction within the last three years.

Supervised Practice Requirements

Time spent in real-life practice under the supervision of an experienced lawyer is an essential element of the experiential licensing pathway. Candidates will perform the required pathway activities and develop their written portfolio submissions during their supervised practice time, and their supervisors will observe and assess candidate's performance on required activities in the course of the supervised practice.

Timing

Candidates in the experiential pathway would be required to complete a specified amount of time in supervised practice, whether accrued during a law school experiential courses including clinics, externships, and simulation courses, or in another employment setting. WSBA is presently considering two possible proposals for the amount of supervised practice time candidates must complete. WSBA would like your input on the benefits and drawbacks you anticipate with each proposal:

Proposal 1:

Proposal 1 was developed by the original Bar Licensure Task Force as part of their initial recommendation to create experiential licensing pathways. Under this proposal, differing requirements would apply to candidates depending on where they were in their legal education:

Candidate Type	Required supervised practice hours	Required law school experiential course credits
Law student	500 hours	12 credits
APR 6 law clerk	500 hours	None required
Law school/APR 6 graduate	6 months	None required

Proposal 2:

Proposal 2 largely adopts the time requirements from Proposal 1, but creates a single standard that would apply to all candidates regardless of where they are in their legal education. This proposal would require all candidates to complete 825 hours of supervised practice time, up to 475 of which could be accrued while enrolled in a law school experiential course.³ Candidates could accrue up to 40 hours per week. Recorded time must be spent on legal work in connection with a current or prospective client matter or working on pathway requirements

Candidates may begin accruing their required supervised practice time after they apply to the pathway and receive approval from WSBA to participate. Once the candidate is approved to participate, they will

³ 825 hours equates to approximately 6 months of practice time allowing for typical holidays and leave, and 475 hours is approximately the amount of practice time students are required to perform in 12 credits of experiential coursework.

have 18 months in which to complete all pathway requirements. A candidate, however, may request an extension of that time for good cause, for instance if their supervised practice time was interrupted by medical leave. Just as with the bar exam, there will be no limit on the number of times a person may attempt the experiential licensing pathway.

Compensation

One of the goals of the experiential pathway is to make a legal career possible for people who may not be able to afford the bar exam, bar preparation courses, or to take time off from work to study for the exam. Compensating candidates while they work towards licensure is an important step towards this goal. WSBA, however, recognizes that not all employment settings might be able to provide compensation and did not want to prevent candidates from completing their supervised practice in those settings.

Therefore, the host employer will be required to provide compensation to candidates during the candidate's supervised practice time, unless one of the exceptions below applies. The amount of compensation is determined by the employer and candidate, but must be no less than the equivalent amount provided by the employer to similarly qualified and experienced employees.

Host employers will be encouraged, but not required, to provide compensation if:

1. The candidate is receiving credit for their work for the employer as part of a law school externship;
2. The candidate is performing the work as part of a law school clinic;
3. The candidate has a grant or stipend from a third party that will compensate them for their work;
4. The employer is a non-profit organization or government agency; or
5. The candidate volunteers to provide pro bono services to the employer's clients and the employer does not bill the client for those services.

Required Candidate Activities

As part of the experiential pathway, candidates will be required to complete specific activities before they may become licensed to practice law. Other than completion of the MPRE, these activities will take place during supervised practice. The required activities—and the written portfolio materials described below—are intended to be adaptable to a variety of practice settings and provide opportunities for candidates to demonstrate and be evaluated on all nine core competencies.

Candidates will be required to complete the following activities during their supervised practice:

- Two client interviews or counselling sessions;
- One negotiation, which may include any discussion aimed at reaching an agreement. The negotiation need not focus on final resolution of the matter and may address preliminary or interim matters;
- Demonstrate the use of research tools to develop the facts of a client matter; and
- Demonstrate competence in professional responsibility by:
 - Either:
 - Achieving a passing score on the Multistate Professional Responsibility Exam, or
 - Engaging with their supervisor in three discussions of professional responsibility issues they encounter in practice. The candidate will write a reflection documenting each discussion that will be submitted as part of their portfolio and graded by the Board of Bar Examiners. The reflection must identify the ethical

question they encountered, the applicable rules of professional responsibility, and how they resolved the question.

- And completing the following activities:
 - Complete WSBA CLE covering:
 - Common stressors in legal practice, including secondary trauma, and strategies and resources available to manage them;
 - Strategies for managing a law-related workload;
 - Resources for answering ethics questions during practice; and
 - The intersection of technology tools, client privacy, and data security.
 - Spend 10 of their supervised practice hours on client-facing activities;
 - Observe or work with an office manager or other staff who handle billing, trust accounts, client payments, or grant management and reporting; and
 - Keep detailed, contemporaneous timekeeping records.

Candidates' supervisors will observe the client interviews/counselling sessions, negotiation, and candidates' use of factual research methods and will complete standardized rubrics assessing candidates' performance on these activities. Supervisors will also certify that candidates have completed the 10 hours of client-facing time, observation of office manager or other business-side staff, and that candidates kept timekeeping records appropriate for their practice setting. WSBA will develop the required CLE and will record whether a candidate has completed it.

Candidate Portfolios

Required Submissions

Candidates will be required to submit a midpoint portfolio with half of their required materials and a final portfolio containing all required materials. Candidates will submit their own work for evaluation by the WSBA Board of Bar Examiners and will also include their supervisors' rubrics assessing their performance on the above activities. In all, candidates' must submit the following materials:

- Candidates work product:
 - Two written client counselling communications;
 - Two persuasive legal documents;
 - Two objective legal memoranda; and
 - If electing not to take MPRE, three reflections on discussions of professional responsibility issues.
- Supervisor rubrics assessing the candidate's performance on their:
 - Client interview/counselling session;
 - Negotiation;
 - Use of research tools to develop the facts of a client matter; and
 - Candidate's ability to delegate when appropriate, spend their time appropriately, plan for and meet deadlines, manage client files, and manage multistep projects.

Portfolio Parameters

Candidate's work must fit within several parameters to be included as part of the portfolio:

- All portfolio submissions must be between 350 and 4200 words and at least two submissions must be 1500 words or more. In all, this means each candidate will submit at least 4400 words, or around 15 pages, of material for assessment.

- Individual portfolio submissions must each address at least one distinct legal issue not addressed in the other portfolio submissions. Application of the same legal standard, rule, or test to different facts would not be considered addressing a distinct legal issue. Rather, a submission must analyze some unique legal inquiry—such as application of a distinct statutory provision, administrative rule, or legal test—not present in other portfolio submissions. This requirement is intended to ensure candidates demonstrate they can apply the core competencies across multiple legal issues.
- Candidates must identify whether they used AI, a template, or other model to create any portfolio submission, and, if so, the modifications they made to make the work their own. If they used an AI tool, they must describe how they ensured they met their ethical obligations in generating the work.
- To protect client confidentiality, candidates must redact all party names, including client and opposing party names, other information that is reasonably likely to lead to identification of the client, and any other confidential information, such as trade secrets or proprietary information.
- Each work product submitted as part of the portfolio will be accompanied by an attestation cover sheet. The candidate and supervisor will attest that the material is the candidate's own work, note any use of AI or templates as needed; identify the distinct legal issue addressed in the work; and provide context for the piece if they believe that to be necessary.

Portfolio Grading

Portfolio materials will be assessed by the WSBA Board of Bar Examiners on a quarterly schedule. Candidates may submit materials to WSBA on a rolling basis. Once a candidate has submitted enough material to constitute a midway or final portfolio, it will be sent to the Bar Examiners for assessment at the next quarterly grading session.

If any work submitted with the midpoint portfolio is deemed not passing, candidates may correct or replace the work for the final portfolio. If any work submitted as part of the final portfolio is graded not passing, the candidate will have two subsequent opportunities to correct or replace that work. This requirement would not preclude a candidate from reapplying and making a successive attempt to become licensed through the experiential pathway if they are unable to successfully complete all the program requirements within the required timeframe.

The WSBA Small Town and Rural (STAR) Council Presents:

RURAL PRACTICE: Small Towns, Big Opportunities

2026 SPRING VIRTUAL HIRING EVENT FRIDAY, APRIL 10, 2026

This FREE event connects attorneys and law students with Washington State legal employers with offices more than 40 miles from Spokane, Seattle/Tacoma, or Vancouver/Portland urban areas. This event is hosted by Gonzaga University School of Law, in partnership with the WSBA Small Town & Rural Council, Seattle University School of Law, and University of Washington School of Law.

**Registration
Now Open!**

EMPLOYERS

Please complete [this form](#) if you are a **small town or rural Washington employer** with open attorney or law student job opportunities or are interested in speaking with attorneys and law students who want to learn more about rural practice in Washington State.

**Employer Registration Closes
on March 6, 2026, at 5:00 p.m.**

[Employers form](#)

JOB SEEKERS

Please complete [this form](#) if you are a **small town or rural Washington employer** with open attorney or law student job opportunities or are interested in speaking with attorneys and law students who want to learn more about rural practice in Washington State.

**Job Seeker Registration Closes
on March 15, 2026, at 5:00 p.m.**

[Job Seekers form](#)

QUESTIONS? Email: lawcareers@gonzaga.edu