

WASHINGTON STATE B A R A S S O C I A T I O N

Small Town and Rural Council

Small Town and Rural Council Meeting I Virtual Only
Wednesday, July 22, 2026 | 12:10 p.m. – 1:10 p.m.

AGENDA

1. Introductions and Approval of June Meeting Minutes (Pres.-Elect Kari Petrasek)
2. WSBA Updates (Pres.-Elect Petrasek and Julianne Unite)
 - a. Board of Governors updates
 - b. WSBA Committee Applications
3. STAR Council Presentation to the Board of Governors (Pres.-Elect Kari Petrasek)
4. ATJ Conference
5. STAR Charter Revisions
6. Project Updates
 - a. Summit Project Team (Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy, Michele Moore, Gloria Guizar)
 - b. Rural Day of Service (Kevin Plachy, Julianne Unite)
 - c. FY27 Legal Lunchbox
7. Announcements
8. Next Steps/Conclusion
9. Next Meeting: September 23, 2026
10. Adjourn

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.

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.

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, June 24, 2026 *Virtual meeting via Zoom*

Council Members Present: President-Elect Kari Petrasek, Travis Pietila, Philip Hunsucker, Ashley Cummins (arrived 12:15), Past-President Dan Clark, Hyun-Ji Lee, Rusty McGuire, Allison Foreman

Council Members Absent: Sean King (excused), Governor Mary Rathbone (unexcused), Gloria Guizar (non-voting), Michele Moore (unexcused)

WSBA Board of Governors Present: N/A

WSBA Staff Present: Kevin Plachy, Julianne Unite, Vanessa Sweeney

Public Attendees Present: Chris Fox, Rachel Cortez

Introductions and Approval of May Meeting Minutes (President Elect Petrasek)

STAR Council Chair and WSBA President-Elect Kari Petrasek called the meeting to order at 12:14 p.m. On motion by STAR Council Member Dan Clark, seconded by STAR Council Member Rusty McGuire, the Council approved by unanimous vote the May STAR Council Meeting minutes (7-0-0).

WSBA Updates (President-Elect Petrasek and Julianne Unite)

Board of Governors updates

President-Elect Kari Petrasek noted that the next Board of Governors (BOG) meeting, which will include the new governors orientation, is scheduled for July 23-24, in Tulalip.

WSBA Member Services and Engagement Manager Julianne Unite shared a reminder that the STAR Council did not receive enough applications during the first round, the deadline to apply was extended to June 30. The positions the Council is currently recruiting for include: Rural member, At-large, New Member, and Seattle University representative.

STAR Council Presentation to the Board of Governors (Pres.-Elect Petrasek)

Survey

Julianne noted that the survey was sent to rural members in Washington as well as future lawyers, and has received over 100 responses so far between the two audiences. Julianne thanked the subcommittee, which includes President-Elect Petrasek, STAR Council Member Travis Pietila, STAR Council Member Phil Hunsucker, and Past President Daniel Clark, for their work on the survey.

Project Updates

Small Town and Rural Practice Day Proclamation (President-Elect Petrasek, Ashley Cummins)

President-Elect Petrasek shared that June 2026 has officially been proclaimed as Rural and Small-Town Legal Practice Month by Governor Ferguson.

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

STAR Council Member Ashley Cummins reported that the finishing touches are being finalized in preparation in getting materials out to registrants, as well as faculty presentations. WSBA Advancement Department Director Kevin Plachy confirmed that there are 61 people registered to attend, which is a slight decline compared to last year's registration.

Chris Fox asked about eligibility for council membership for individuals with pro bono status. Julianne noted the charter defines who can qualify for positions. Julianne explained that expanding eligibility could be possible, but would require amending the charter and securing approval from the Board of Governors. Julianne clarified that most of the upcoming open positions require active WSBA membership, with the exception of the Seattle University seat. President-Elect Petrasek mentioned perhaps continuing the discussion at next month's STAR Council meeting.

Rural Day of Service (Kevin Plachy, Julianne Unite)

Julianne noted that the planning remains on track for the July 27th Day of Service in partnership with IELA in Chewelah, with further details expected after the next meeting with IELA. Efforts to recruit clients have involved outreach through PR and communications, including radio ads and local news, as well as direct community engagement. Volunteer attorney sign-ups are sufficient, but additional volunteers are welcome, and a flyer with a sign-up link is available for sharing. The second Day of Service is scheduled for September 18th at Moses Lake Community Health Center, in partnership with Northwest Justice Project. The medical facility setting offers enhanced security, and marketing materials are being prepared for distribution. Marketing for this event will be staggered, with broader outreach to the WSBA community planned for mid-July. Lessons learned from previous events highlight the need to prioritize client recruitment before attorney recruitment, as volunteer sign-ups have consistently been strong.

Rural Internships (Kevin Plachy)

Kevin noted that all internship grants have been distributed, and there has not been any feedback received from anyone. Julianne added that a number of the interns will be attending the Summit.

Announcements

None.

Next Steps/Conclusion

None.

Next Meeting: July 22, 2026

Adjournment

President-Elect Petrasek adjourned the meeting at 12:39 p.m.

Some material in this document was generated using Microsoft Copilot and was reviewed and modified by Vanessa Sweeney, WSBA Member Services and Engagement.

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