

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 23, 2025 | 12:10 p.m. – 1:10 p.m.

Via [Zoom](#) / Meeting ID: 873 3538 6159 / Passcode: 595209 / Call-in: 888-788-0099

AGENDA

1. Introductions and Approval of June Meeting Minutes (Gov. Kari Petrasek)
2. WSBA Updates (Gov. Petrasek and Julianne Unite)
3. Council Member Removal Discussion
4. Entity Regulation (Craig Shank)
5. Project Updates
 - a. Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)
 - b. Summit Project Team (Merf Ehman, Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy)
 - c. Council Position - Hybrid Hub Student (Ashley Cummins)
 - d. Rural Day of Service (Judge Kathryn Burke, Kevin Plachy, Julianne Unite)
6. Announcements
7. Next Steps/Conclusion
8. Next Meeting: September 24, 2025
9. Adjourn

CHARTER

Small Town and Rural Council

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

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 Young Lawyer 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 Young Lawyer 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 25, 2025 *Virtual meeting via Zoom*

Council Members Present: Governor Kari Petrasek, Philip Hunsucker, Judge Kathryn Burke, Jesse Lamp, Rusty McGuire, Travis Pietila, Sean King, Ashley Cummins

Council Members Absent: Thomas Garvey (unexcused), Governor Mary Rathbone (unexcused), Merf Ehman (unexcused), Past President Dan Clark (unexcused), Allison Foreman (unexcused)

WSBA Board of Governors Present: Matthew Dresden, Emily Arneson (arrived 12:19 p.m.)

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

Public Attendees Present: Jonathan Patnode, Jason Walker, Chris Fox, Rachel Cortez, Sara Robbins

Introductions and Approval of May Meeting Minutes (Gov. Petrasek)

STAR Council Chair, Governor Kari Petrasek called the meeting to order at 12:12 p.m. On motion by STAR Council Member Philip Hunsucker, seconded by STAR Council Member Travis Pietila, the Council approved by unanimous vote the May STAR Council Meeting minutes (8-0-0).

WSBA Updates (Gov. Petrasek and Julianne Unite)

BOG Update

Gov. Petrasek noted the next Board of Governor's meeting is July 18-19 in Walla Walla, WA, and welcomed folks to attend in person or virtually. There were no additional updates from STAR Council Member and BOG Liaison Matthew Dresden or WSBA Member Services and Engagement Manager Julianne Unite.

Project Updates

Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)

STAR Council Member Sean King noted a previously discussed idea about efforts to increase interest and visibility in these types of jobs. It has been proposed to hold a fall hiring fair, similar the spring event. A recent survey sent to employers received limited response, but Sean and STAR Council Member Rusty McGuire discussed that holding more events generally increases visibility. Sean noted that while not all employers will participate in both spring and fall events, it is feasible to hold a fall job fair given the lead time. Sean continued, if considering November, that would allow planning to begin and have registration and a flyer available for late August/early September. Sean is seeking input from other Council members.

Rusty commented that the fall timeframe is great exposure and can align with in-house recruiting events. STAR Council Member Travis Pietila asked if this would replace the spring fair or be in addition. Sean confirmed that holding both is reasonable, and the calendar appears to support it. Travis supports the approach and added that the November timeframe is great for 2Ls and 3Ls, although it may be early for 1Ls. STAR Council Member Ashley Cummins agreed and added that a November event can help get a spring event on students' radar. Sean will coordinate with Seattle University and University of Washington and work with Ashley and Travis on scheduling. Gov. Petrasek suggested including Rusty in planning, given his past involvement with hiring.

Council Position – Hybrid Hub Student (Ashley Cummins)

Ashley noted that the position has been posted and has heard from one student who is planning to apply. As the July 11 application deadline get closer, a bigger push to market will be considered. Julianne confirmed there have been two applicants.

Rural Day of Service (Judge Kathryn Burke, Gov. Petrasek, Kevin Plachy)

WSBA Advancement Director Kevin Plachy noted that an initial meeting with Coco Holbrook at Northwest Justice Project (NJP) has taken place. Julianne reported that 12 Tribes Casino is being considered as the event venue due to its reasonable cost, on-site security, and access to a business center. Monthly planning meeting with NJP will begin in early July until the clinic date. NJP will take the lead on securing the venue, staffing, set up, materials preparation, and providing malpractice insurance for volunteer attorneys. WSBA will focus on attorney recruitment which will begin in mid-July once the venue is confirmed. Travis asked whether there is a flyer available to include with outreach efforts. Julianne confirmed there will be a flyer available in July, which will be circulated to the STAR Council. Travel reimbursement will be offered to volunteer attorneys. Kevin noted WSBA's strength in targeted attorney recruitment, both by geographic region and estate planning practice area. STAR Council Member Judge Kathryn Burke added that the 12 Tribes Casino is suitable venue choice as there is a hotel attached, it is located on the reservation, it is air-conditioned, ample parking, and easily accessible as it is located between Okanogan and Omak. Clients will be pre-screened by NJP to ensure eligibility. Those who qualify will receive complete estate planning documents at the clinic, with no follow up required. Sara Robbins asked about NJP's screening criteria. Gov. Petrasek clarified that screening will be done through CLEAR and is based on income eligibility. Sara asked whether people ineligible for NJP services could still participate in the clinic. Kevin noted that since NJP receives federal funding there are certain limitations.

Announcements

Gov. Petrasek noted there was an email circulated to STAR Council Members regarding the nomination of STAR Council Member Merf Ehman, for the Access to Justice Leadership Award based on the work they have been doing on the STAR Council. Gov. Petrasek will send in the nomination letter.

Next Steps/Conclusion

None.

Next Meeting: July 23, 2025

Adjournment

Gov. Petrasek adjourned the meeting at 12:39 p.m.

DRAFT