

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, May 28, 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 April Meeting Minutes (Gov. Kari Petrasek)
2. WSBA Updates (Gov. Petrasek and Julianne Unite)
 - a. [Volunteer Applications](#)
3. Project Updates
 - a. Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)
 - b. Summit Project Team (Merf Ehman, Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy)
 - i. [Registration](#)
 - ii. Lodging and expenses
 - c. Council Position - Hybrid Hub Student (Ashley Cummins)
 - d. Rural grant internships (Ashley Cummins, Sean King, Travis Pietila, Kevin Plachy)
 - e. Rural Day of Service (Judge Kathryn Burke, Gov. Petrasek, Kevin Plachy)
 - f. Legal Lunchbox – April 2025 (Ashley Cummins)
 - g. OAH Presentation (Gov. Petrasek, Julianne Unite)
4. Announcements
5. Next Steps/Conclusion
6. Next Meeting: June 25, 2025
7. 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.

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

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, April 23, 2025 *Virtual meeting via Zoom*

Council Members Present: Governor Kari Petrasek, Merf Ehman (joined at 12:23), Ashley Cummins, Philip Hunsucker (departed 12:53), Sean King, Judge Kathryn Burke, Jesse Lamp, Governor Mary Rathbone, Past President Dan Clark (departed 12:32)

Council Members Absent: Thomas Garvey (unexcused), Allison Foreman (unexcused), Travis Pietila (excused), Rusty McGuire (excused)

WSBA Board of Governors Present: Matthew Dresden, Emily Arneson

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

Public Attendees Present: Sophia Bird McSherry, Rachel Cortez, Chris Fox

Introductions and Approval of March Meeting Minutes (Gov. Kari Petrasek)

STAR Council Chair, Governor Kari Petrasek called the meeting to order at 12:16 p.m. On motion by Council Member and Past President Dan Clark, seconded by STAR Council Member Philip Hunsucker, the Council approved the March STAR Council Meeting minutes (8-0-0).

Council Position for Central WA Hybrid Hub Student Updates (Gov. Petrasek and Ashley Cummins)

There have been no changes made to the Central Washington Hybrid Hub student position description since the Council last met. On motion by Philip, seconded by Dan, by unanimous vote (9-0-0) the Council approved the position description.

Rural Grant Internships (Ashley Cummins, Sean King, Travis Pietila, Kevin Plachy)

A total of 15 applications were received this year, three of which did not qualify due to employment with a state or government agency that does not provide direct representation to individual clients, e.g., Attorneys General Offices (AGO) and Prosecutors. The selection team consisted of Gov. Petrasek, STAR Council Member Jesse Lamp, and STAR Council Member Judge Kathryn Burke. The team reviewed redacted applications and decided to not offer to Applicants 2 and 15. The selection team asked the Council to approve awarding a grant to all other applicants. WSBA Member Services and Engagement

Manager Julianne Unite noted that the three Council members who represent law schools recuse themselves from the vote because the applicants are law students. Additionally, if any voting members are internship employers, they should also recuse themselves. Philip moved to approve recommendation as stated, Jesse seconded. STAR Council Member and Past President Dan Clark mentioned concerns that have been raised, some via the Washington Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, who feel it's not a fair process. There is a barrier because there are law students who want to come to an area with unmet needs, to work for the government, but this grant won't allow that. The STAR Council and WSBA should consider a workaround because at the end of the day, there is an unmet need, and there are law students that would not otherwise come here, but would because of the grant, which warrants support. Dan continued, an argument can be made that when you work for the government as a summer intern, you're representing taxpayers, and serving the public. Gov. Petrasek agreed and turned to WSBA Director of Advancement Kevin Plachy to help provide a better overall understanding. Kevin explained the disqualification of the three applicants is similar to last year. Under the Washington state constitution, WSBA's license fees for our organization are treated as a tax to members. Because of that, there are restrictions placed on the WSBA's ability to donate funds. It's a constitutional restraint on the organization, and the framework under which funds can be donated is that the funds must go to support the infirm and poor, which is the verbiage in the constitution. The AGO and Prosecutor's offices that were disqualified as an employer, represent the state or the government, and the government is not considered infirm and poor. Kevin added, there can be consideration to investigate with WSBA General Counsel, as there may be a way for funds to be donated through the WSB Foundation. The issue is that the Foundation is 501(c)(3), but partially funded by WSBA and it's not a truly separate entity. Governor Emily Arneson asked whether sections' funds are subject to the same constitutional restriction. Kevin replied that sections are treated differently as dues are voluntary and do not operate on mandatory license fees. Gov. Petrasek asked since a section donated funds for the grants, could sections who donate money allow us to give away grants to those applicants who would otherwise not qualify? Kevin said it all goes back to putting money into the Foundation and reiterated there is the need to gain a deeper understanding with the help of the Office of General Counsel. Other avenues aside from license fees need to be explored, either through sections donations and Foundation donations. Kevin will look into this internally. Philip asked if the grant is given to the individual, why couldn't an individual be poor and infirm even though they work for the AGO or prosecutors' office. Kevin restated this will need to go to General Counsel to help provide a deeper understanding. Kevin's understanding is that it's not just the person receiving it, it's the purpose they are receiving it for.

Julianne asked whether the Council would like to consider alternate grant recipients in case a grant awardee does not fulfill the requirements by the deadline outlined in application. Judge Burke stated if there is still enough time, another applicant should be selected. The selection team felt that Applicant 2 didn't demonstrate a financial need, and suggested Applicant 15 as the first alternate, and Applicant 2 as the second alternate. Gov. Petrasek and Jesse agreed. The Council approved the qualified applicants who were chosen by the selection team. Abstained/recused: STAR Council Member Merf Ehman, STAR Council Member Sean King, STAR Council Member Ashley Cummins. On motion by Judge Burke, seconded by Philip, the Council voted to approve that if any applicant(s) do not submit the required materials by the deadline, Applicant 15 shall be selected as the alternate (6-0-3).

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

Julianne noted that the Council must select a date for the Rural Day of Service. Survey results showed that Friday September 12 and Friday, September 19, received the most votes. Since the Access to Justice Conference is scheduled for September 19, there may be a conflict with volunteer availability. As a result, on motion by Philip, seconded by STAR Council Member Merf Ehman, by unanimous vote (9-0-0) the Council approved September 12 as the date for the Rural Day of Service.

FY26 Budget (Julianne Unite)

Julianne reminded the Council that during the last meeting, a \$2000 increase was added for Rural Day of Service. Since then, other budget items have been suggested, including a travel stipend for STAR internship grant recipients, which was not included in this year's budget. And any other potential budgetary increases or decreases that the Council would like to consider for FY26. Kevin asked whether the Council will plan to repeat the same activities next year or add anything new. Gov. Petrasek is in favor of doing a summit again depending on how successful it is this year. As travel stipends were offered for this year's grant recipients, but not budgeted for, they can be considered to be included for next year to help encourage attendance. There was a question whether a vote was necessary, but Kevin stated it is not necessary as long as everyone is in agreement, and it is captured in the meeting minutes. The suggestion was to keep the budget the same as last year with increases for the rural day of service and stipend amounts for internship grant recipients.

Gov. Petrasek asked if there is a motion to approve the budget based on keeping the budget the same as last year and adding an increase for the Rural Day of Service of \$2,000, and additional \$1,000 stipend funds for internship recipients to attend the summit. On motion by Philip, seconded by Judge Burke, the Council approved the FY26 budget (9-0-0). Ashley asked whether an increase to the summit budget should be made as costs were higher this year, to allow for cushion. This year's budget is \$12,000 for expenses, which is the same as last year. To date, expenses are already above that without the stipends. Kevin explained that the budget is a bucket of funds that covers several things, there is \$7,500 for Council meetings, and travel, and there is the ability to move funds around. There is not a concern for significant overspend this year as there is flexibility in moving unused funds around. Philip accepts the amendment to add \$2,000 to the budget to account for increased costs, as does Judge Burke, the Council unanimously approved the FY26 budget (9-0-0).

WSBA Updates (Gov. Petrasek and Julianne Unite)

Gov. Petrasek shared that there is a Board of Governors (BOG) meeting on May 2, in Port Angeles. The agenda is posted on BOG website. You may contact Gov. Petrasek, Gov. Mary Rathbone, or Gov. Matthew Dresden with questions. Julianne mentioned the link included in the meeting agenda to a Yale Law Review which discusses Washington's rural communities. Julianne concluded the update noting the

STAR webpage has been updated by Vanessa, which includes a STAR Resources page with information on past events and STAR related articles.

Project Team Updates

a. Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)

STAR Council Member Sean King reported the virtual Job Fair held on April 4 went well despite a few technical difficulties, and a few employers dropping out. Sean is aware of two Gonzaga students offered internships but doesn't have visibility on the results of other interviews. A survey will be sent to employers, including gauging interest in participating in an additional hiring event in the fall.

b. Summit Project Team (Merf Ehman, Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy)

Kevin reported that the Summit project team has been meeting regularly and that the Summit schedule is nearly finalized, although a few speakers have yet to be confirmed. Kevin expressed concern about the Ethics session, as a Gonzaga professor who was contacted has yet to respond. The WSBA staff is on schedule to open registration around April 28, and a link will be sent out to the Council to help spread the word. Hotels will be available to book, including a room block at the Hilton Garden Inn for Council members and faculty, which will be sent out via email. A reception is planned to be held at Cowiche Canyon Kitchen and Icehouse on the evening of June 26. The Hilton Garden Inn is the closest hotel within walking distance. Kevin continued with an update on sponsorships: the WSBA Solo & Small Practice Section has agreed to sponsor for \$1000, Umpqua Bank is contributing \$1000 as it did last year, Fette Trust is sponsoring \$1000, and a new sponsor, Larson Griffie and Pickett PLLC is sponsoring \$1000. Kevin concluded with asking anyone with potential speaker recommendations for the Ethics session to please follow up with anyone from the project team.

Legal Lunchbox – April 2025 (Ashley Cummins)

Ashley provided an updated on the upcoming Legal Lunchbox, scheduled for April 29th, which will include a panel discussion on APR6. All components are confirmed, with a final push for registration until the event.

Announcements

None.

Next Steps/Conclusion

None.

Next Meeting: May 28, 2025

Gov. Petrasek asked the Council if the scheduled June 25 meeting works for everyone. The Council agreed that June 25 works. Gov. Petrasek noted that last year's August meeting was canceled due to summer travel among many Council members and asked if the August 2025 meeting should be canceled. The Council agreed to cancel the August meeting. Jesse asked if the August meeting should be kept as it will occur a few weeks prior to the September 12 Rural Day of Service. As much of the planning will be conducted by the Northwest Justice Project, there likely is no need to meet prior to the scheduled Day of Service date.

Adjournment

Gov. Petrasek adjourned the meeting at 1:05 p.m.

DRAFT