

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, October 22, 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 September Meeting Minutes (Pres. Elect Kari Petrasek)
2. WSBA Updates (Pres. Elect Petrasek and Julianne Unite)
3. Vacant Position(s) Recruitment
4. Project Updates
 - a. Small Town and Rural Practice Day Proclamation (Pres. Elect Petrasek, Ashley Cummins)
 - b. Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)
 - c. Summit Project Team (Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy)
 - i. Date and location selection
 - d. Rural Day of Service (Kevin Plachy, Julianne Unite)
 - i. Date(s) and QLSP(s) selection
 - e. April 2026 Legal Lunchbox (Ashley Cummins)
5. Announcements
6. Next Steps/Conclusion
7. Next Meeting: November 26, 2025
 - a. FY26 meeting schedule: Dec. 24? Feb. 18
8. 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, September 24, 2025 *Virtual meeting via Zoom*

Council Members Present: Governor Kari Petrasek, Jesse Lamp, Rusty McGuire, Travis Pietila, Sean King, Ashley Cummins, Past President Dan Clark, Governor Mary Rathbone, Gloria Guizar

Council Members Absent: Allison Foreman (unexcused), Philip Hunsucker (excused), Judge Kathryn Burke (unexcused)

WSBA Board of Governors Present: Matthew Dresden

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

Public Attendees Present: Sara Robbins, Pilar Tirado Murray

Introductions and Approval of July 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 Rusty McGuire, seconded by STAR Council Member Jesse Lamp, the Council unanimously approved the July STAR Council Meeting minutes.

WSBA Updates (Gov. Petrasek and Julianne Unite)

BOG Update

Gov. Petrasek reported that the Board of Governors Meeting (BOG) is scheduled to take place this weekend and will be approving the FY26 budget. STAR Council BOG Liaison Governor Matthew Dresden added that Gov. Petrasek is being sworn in as President-Elect.

WSBA Member Services and Engagement Manager Julianne Unite reminded the Council members to submit any outstanding FY25 expenses by mid-October.

Legal Lunchbox

Julianne informed the Council that April, June, and July of 2026 are available months to hold a Legal Lunchbox CLE, if the STAR Council would like to do so for FY26. A decision will need to be made on which month the Council would like. STAR Council Member Ashley Cummins volunteered to participate again, and suggested April is an ideal time as it is prior to the STAR Summit. The Council agreed on April and Gov. Petrasek advised that a topic could be selected at the next meeting.

May 2025 WSBA Rural Initiative Letter

An anonymous letter addressing rural practice initiatives sent to Julianne's attention at WSBA is included in the meeting materials. The letter contains critical feedback about the work of the STAR Council. Julianne invited the Council to determine whether any formal response or action is necessary. STAR Council Member Jesse Lamp commented that the letter reflected a lack of understanding about rural legal practice and suggested it is not worth the STAR Council's time. WSBA Advancement Director Kevin Plachy agreed and noted inaccuracies in the letter but added there are things we can extract from it to help inform the Council's work.

Small Town and Rural Practice Day Proclamation

Gov. Petrasek reported that former STAR Council Member Merf Ehman, who held the Qualified Legal Service Provider (QLSP) seat, in year's past contacted the Governor's Office to establish a rural month of service and obtain an official proclamation. Julianne added, since Merf was the only one involved in the process, the Council needs a new volunteer to continue this annual proclamation process. As the process can take time, it should begin early next month. Gov. Petrasek agreed to reach out to Merf to obtain details on the process. Ashley volunteered to help.

Vacant Position(s) Recruitment

Gov. Petrasek noted that at the last meeting the STAR Council approved removing the Young Lawyer representative, leaving a vacancy. The QLSP seat, previously held by Merf, is also vacant. Gov. Petrasek asked whether a notice will go out to WSBA members to request applications. Julianne clarified that as these are interim appointments, the application process is a little different and managed through email (barleaders@wsba.org), not through the website. Applicants can send resumes with no identifying information to the barleaders email, or to Gov. Petrasek and Julianne.

Julianne also shared the update regarding the recent WSBA Bylaws amendment redefining and renaming "young lawyer," which directly impacts the "Young Lawyer" seat being renamed "New Member." As of October 1, the term "young lawyer" is no longer a defining term for the Bar. The qualification has been expanded to include all new members, including lawyers, LLLTs, and LPOs, in their first 10 years of practice in Washington. The Council needs to decide whether to rename the seat as a "New Member" position or keep the "Young Lawyer" title and add a definition to the STAR Council charter as the Bar will no longer have a definition for it.

Kevin noted a point of discussion for the Council is whether the "New Member" seat be an attorney, or do preference for a 'new member' which is broader and could be open to anyone including a LLLT or LPO. STAR Council Member Dan Clark supports the position to be open to all under the new member definition. Ashley noted that a broader definition can be beneficial since the Council has considered alternate pathways to licensure, and supports the new definition. Travis agrees. Gov. Petrasek asked if there was a way to restrict eligibility to those practicing in their first 10 years in Washington. Kevin noted this allows the pool to accept more people, but the Council is still free to select who they feel is the best fit.

On motion by STAR Council Member Travis Pietila, seconded by Dan, the Council unanimously approved amending the STAR Council charter to change the "Young Lawyer" position to "New Member", as defined in the WSBA Bylaws.

Julianne confirmed that the Council can choose its own timeline for accepting applications for the vacant Council positions. October 31st was suggested as a deadline. The opportunity can be promoted via the New Member and ATJ list serves, as well as posting on the WSBA website and in the “Take Note” newsletter.

Rule of Law Ambassador Program presentation by Heather Sprouse

WSBA Community Engagement Specialist Heather Sprouse presented an overview of the Rule of Law Ambassador Program. Heather’s role involves listening to community perspectives, identifying trends, and recommending initiatives to explore. The program was conceived in 2023 and approved in 2024. It aims to empower legal professionals to engage in meaningful ways with the legal community. Among initiatives launched under the program is “Lawyers in the Classroom,” modeled after “Judges in the Classroom.” This provides lawyers with pre-designed lesson plans and can count as pro bono service hours.

The Ambassador Tool Kit is available in the meeting materials, and anyone interested can contact ambassadors@wsba.org.

Project Updates

Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)

STAR Council Member Sean King provided an updated on the Job Fair. There are currently 34 jobs posted from 28 employers, and 45 job seekers registered. No applications have been submitted yet, but they are expected to roll in soon as they have until October 27 to apply. Ashley asked how many postings are post-graduate opportunities; Sean confirmed it is a mix, with the majority being summer associate or externship opportunities. Gov. Petrasek noted a job fair is still being planned for the spring.

Summit Project Team (Gov. Petrasek, Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy)

Ashley reported that the June STAR Summit went well, with positive feedback on the location. Ashley noted that the Council is considering making the FY26 Summit the last annual one, and then alternating with the Access to Justice (ATJ) Conference each year. Gov. Petrasek asked for feedback, and the Council agreed to shift the Summit schedule to every other year, alternating with the ATJ Conference.

Sara Robbins noted that Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA) conducts their statewide Legal Advocates Training in off years of ATJ, typically in March, and suggested following up with OCLA to avoid potential date conflicts. Kevin added that at the next meeting, the Council should finalize a location for the 2026 Summit to let research begin for available venues and dates. This will allow for Save the Date communication to be distributed earlier.

Council Position – Hybrid Hub Student (Ashley Cummins)

Ashley introduced Gloria Guizar, the new STAR Council HUB Liaison member. Gloria, is enrolled in the Flex JD program at Seattle University, currently resides in Kennewick and works as paralegal in immigration law.

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

Kevin shared an update on the September 12 Rural Day of Service held in Omak. There were seven volunteer attorneys, including Jesse, who served a total of 14 members of the public, with more put on a waitlist with NJP. All left with completed documents, primarily wills. The Northwest Justice Project is interested in partnering again on a future clinic, timing yet to be determined. The Council can explore ideas on a new location, and other QLSPs to potentially partner with for future clinics.

Announcements

Regarding the FY26 STAR Council meeting schedule, Gov. Petrasek noted the fourth Friday in February will need to move up a week as Gov. Petrasek will be unavailable. The Council agreed to keep the same cadence for FY26 with meetings to be held on the fourth Wednesday of each month, 12:10-1:10 p.m.

Next Steps/Conclusion

None.

Next Meeting: October 22, 2025

Adjournment

Gov. Petrasek adjourned the meeting at 1:09 p.m.

WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

WSBA ENTITY ANNUAL REPORT

FY 2025: October 1, 2024 – September 30, 2025

The mission of the Washington State Bar Association is to serve the public and the members of the Bar, to ensure integrity of the legal profession, and to champion justice.

Instructions: In accordance with the WSBA Bylaws, Committees, Other Bar Entities (excluding Regulatory Boardsⁱ), Councils, and Sections must submit an annual report to the Executive Director. The information below should reflect the activities and outcomes from the fiscal year October 1, 2024 – September 30, 2025. Information in the annual report will be provided to the Executive Director and Board of Governors, and may be published for other purposes, such as *Bar News*, volunteer recruitment messaging, and other WSBA activity-based reporting.

It is recommended that completion of the annual report be a collaborative effort with members of your entity, the BOG liaison, and staff liaison.

Submission Deadline is Friday, October 17: please submit by emailing barleaders@wsba.org or requesting that your staff liaison submit the report internally.

Name of Entity:	Small Town and Rural (STAR) Council
Chair or Co-Chairs:	Kari Petrasek
Staff Liaison: <i>(include name, job title, and department if known)</i>	Julianne Unite
Board of Governors Liaison:	Matthew Dresden
Purpose of Entity: <i>May be stated in Bylaws, Charter, Court Rule, etc.</i>	
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 work to ensure that the practice of law in rural communities is present, growing, and thriving.	
Strategy to Fulfill Purpose:	
The STAR Council continued to execute their three-phase strategic plan adopted in May 2022 by the full STAR Committee (NKA STAR Council), expanding their deliverables for FY25.	
How does the entity's purpose help further the mission of the WSBA "to serve the public and the members of the Bar, to ensure integrity of the legal profession, and to champion justice"?	

The STAR Council directly supports the WSBA’s mission by helping address the issue of “legal deserts” in Washington, strengthens the quality of legal practice in underserved areas, and serves as a critical “force multiplier” for rural practitioners throughout Washington.

2024-2025 Accomplishments:

Legal Lunchbox: APR 6 Law Clerks in Rural Practice. Delivered April 29, 2025. There were approximately 1556 attendees.

The STAR Council resubmitted for the Rural Practice Month Proclamation from the Governor’s Office. It was declared that November 2024 would serve as Rural Practice Awareness Month.

Rural Practice Virtual Job Fair: In partnership with Gonzaga Law School, the STAR Council conducted their second rural practice virtual job fair, in attempts to connect rural employees with qualified applicants who may not have otherwise known about rural opportunities. 28 employers were initially registered for the spring job fair. They posted 31 jobs, six of those did not receive any applications and six other employers withdrew prior to the job fair either due to declining to interview the applicants or the posted job was filled by other means. 77 applications were received in total from 75 registered job seekers. At least 2 students were offered internships as result of the job fair.

Internship Stipends: The STAR Council awarded 10 stipends in the amount of \$5,000 each to law students to help them offset their living expenses during their summer internships.

STAR Summit: The STAR Council hosted the 2nd Annual Small Town and Rural Practice Summit, in-person, at Heritage University in Toppenish. The all-day seminar was approved for 6.0 CLE credits, which includes 4.0 Other credits, 1.25 Law and Legal Procedure credits, and .75 Ethics credits. The Washington State Small Town and Rural Practice Summit convened a broad range of stakeholders, including judges, attorneys, and law school students from across Washington State, to discuss and learn about the challenges and opportunities facing rural communities and the legal professionals practicing within them. This event was thought-provoking and solution-driven as participants explored rural legal needs, resource allocation, access to justice issues, career fulfillment, and the opportunities and challenges associated with small town and rural law practice. The event included keynote presentations, panel discussions, and breakout sessions. The summit had over 100 registrants and featured a very popular Welcome Reception the evening before the CLE. The STAR Council is currently in discussion of how to host this event again for FY26.

Rural Day of Service: On September 12, 2025, the STAR Council hosted a Rural Day of Service in partnership with Northwest Justice Project in Okanogan County. There were 7 attorney volunteers who served 14 clients who walked away with completed estate planning documents in hand.

Next Fiscal Year: 2025-2026 Top SMART Goals & Priorities:

SMART Goals can be an effective framework for the creation of goal; they detail the work you and your team hope to accomplish and help to foster and communicate clear expectations.

SMART Goals are: Specific, Measurable, Relevant and Time-Bound

[Use the WSBA SMART Goals Worksheet](#) to detail the groups 2024-2025 goals. After using the worksheet to describe your goals, summarize the top three SMART Goals in 2-3 sentences below.

1	Host a statewide Summit in Spring 2026, bringing together stakeholders to create goals on how to increase the number of lawyers in “legal deserts.”
2	Host a rural day of volunteering with a QLSP in one or two rural areas.
3	Host 2 virtual job fairs in FY26 and continue to offer career center discounts. We will also present another Legal Lunchbox CLE.
Looking Ahead: <i>Please share any long-term goals and/or priorities your entity seeks to address, beyond the next fiscal year.</i>	
1	Continue to carry out the STAR Council’s three-phase strategic plan.
2	Work with state organizations to create policy regarding student loan forgiveness for lawyers who work in “legal deserts.”
3	Ensure greater visibility for the STAR Council in the statewide legal practice.
Please describe how this entity is addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion: <i>How have you elicited input from a variety of perspectives in decision-making? What techniques do you use to promote a culture of inclusion within the board or committee? How do you seek to elicit inclusive decision-making amongst your group? What more would you like to see done in this area to better support the needs of your entity?</i>	
The STAR Council actively seeks participation, input, and feedback from attorneys in traditionally under-represented areas of the state, including rural counties, Native American reservations, and areas outside the I-5 corridor. The STAR Council comprises a mix of private and public attorneys and comprises predominately attorneys outside the greater Seattle area.	
Please share feedback regarding the support and engagement provided by WSBA. <i>For example:</i> • <i>Quality of WSBA staff support/services, including technology solutions</i> • <i>Involvement with Board of Governors, including assigned BOG liaison</i> • <i>Ideas you have on ways WSBA can continue to strengthen/support your entity.</i>	
WSBA staff provide exemplary support for the WSBA STAR Council. Julianne Unite, Kevin Plachy, Chelle Gegax, and Vanessa Sweeney are all essential to the Council’s success to date.	
Entity Detail & Demographics Report: <i>To Be Completed by WSBA Manager of Volunteer Engagement</i>	
Size of Entity: <i>(Include voting and non-voting members)</i>	Click or tap here to enter text.
Number of Vacancies for FY26: <i>The number of OPEN positions with terms beginning October 1, 2025 (FY26) if any.</i>	Click or tap here to enter text.
Number of Applicants for FY25: <i>Applications were submitted in the Spring-Summer of 2025 for terms beginning October 1, 2025 (FY26)</i>	Click or tap here to enter text.

Budgeted Direct Expenses: <i>As of September 30, 2025.</i>	Click or tap here to enter text.
Total FTE Support:	Click or tap here to enter text.
Indirect Expenses: <i>As of September 30, 2025.</i>	Click or tap here to enter text.

FY25 Demographics:

The WSBA promotes diversity, equality, and cultural competence in the courts, legal profession, and the bar, and is committed to ensuring that its committees, boards, and panels reflect the diversity of its membership.

Aside from the factors marked (*), demographic information was provided voluntarily and individuals had the option to not respond to any or all of the factors below.

Disability	No	%
	Chose Not to Respond	%
District*	0	%
	1	%
	2	%
	3	%
	4	%
	5	%
	6	%
	7N	%
	7S	%
	8	%
	9	%
	10	%
Ethnicity	White or European Descent	%
	Middle Eastern Descent	%
	Multi Racial or Bi Racial	%
	Chose Not to Respond	%
Gender	Female	%
	Male	%
	Chose Not to Respond	%
Sexual Orientation	Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Pansexual, or Queer	%
	Heterosexual	%
	No	%
	Chose Not to Respond	%

The Yes/No response for the Sexual Orientation category is data from a previous demographic question ‘Do you open identify as a sexual minority to include the following: gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender?’ This question was on the volunteer application when some of the current members submitted their application and therefore, is still included.

ⁱ Supreme Court Boards (Access to Justice Board, Disciplinary Board, LLLT Board, Limited Practice Board, MCLE Board and Practice of Law Board) provide annual reports to WSBA to support its responsibility under [GR 12.3](#), to provide oversight and monitor compliance with applicable rules and orders. Boards have the option to use the WSBA template or to share their annual reports to the Washington Supreme Court.

DRAFT