

WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

Small Town and Rural Council

Small Town and Rural Committee Meeting | Virtual Only

Wednesday, January 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 December Meeting Minutes (Gov. Kari Petrasek)
2. WSBA Updates (Gov. Petrasek and Julianne Unite)
3. Council Position for Central WA Hybrid Hub Student
4. Project Team Updates
 - a. Job Fair at Gonzaga
 - b. Summit Project Team (Kevin Plachy & Merf Ehman)
 - c. Rural Day of Service (Judge Kathryn Burke, Gov. Petrasek, Kevin Plachy)
5. Summit Venue Planning Discussion
6. Legal Lunchbox – April 2025
7. Announcements
8. Next Steps/Conclusion
9. Next Meeting: February 19, 2025
10. Adjournment

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, December 18, 2024

Virtual meeting via Zoom

Committee Members Present: Governor Kari Petrasek, Merf Ehman, Rusty McGuire, Ashley Cummins, Philip Hunsucker, Sean King, Travis Pietila

Committee Members Absent: Judge Kathryn Burke, Thomas Garvey, Dan Clark, Matthew Dresden, Allison Foreman, Jesse Lamp, Governor Mary Rathbone

WSBA Staff Present: Kevin Plachy, Vanessa Sweeney

Public Attendees Present: Anthony Varona (12:40 p.m. departure), Jason Walker, Chris Fox, Nat Jacob, Michael Chin, Sophia Byrd McSherry

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

STAR Council Chair, Governor Kari Petrasek called the meeting to order at 12:18 p.m. On motion by Council Member Philip Hunsucker, seconded by Council Member Rusty McGuire, the council voted (7-0-0) to approve the November STAR Council Meeting minutes.

WSBA Updates (Gov. Petrasek and Kevin Plachy)

Governor Petrasek announced that an At-large governor resigned on the Board of Governors (BOG). Applications are open to fill the position, the deadline to apply is Friday December 20, 2024. This is to fill the seat until September 30, 2025. Additionally, Kari shared that bar dues will increase in 2026 to avoid a significant jump in two to three years. The last dues increase was seven years ago. Please reach out to Kari with questions.

WSBA Advancement Director Kevin Plachy stated that he does not have any updates.

State Law School Hubs & Rural Access (Dean Anthony Varona)

Kari introduced Seattle University Law School Dean Anthony Varona. Dean Varona joined the council meeting today to ask for advice and guidance on a couple of initiatives. First, Seattle University's Incubator Program Director Stan Perkins has decided to retire. Stan is considering putting together an Incubator 2.0 and exploring what the program might look like, potentially making it more hybrid or completely online. The goal is to address several issues for new Solo & Small Practice practitioners. The program is led by alumni and open to both recent and not-so-recent graduates, many of whom live in small towns and rural areas. He is asking the council for suggestions on how to evolve the incubator program for statewide use.

The second 2nd initiative is the Hybrid Hubs. All three have launched: South Sound in partnership with UW Tacoma and University of Puget Sound, Director Patricia Sully; Central Washington in partnership with Heritage University, Director Bree Black Horse; and Alaska in partnership with University of Alaska, Anchorage and Alaska Pacific University, Director Connor Smith, aided by Professor Whitney Brown. This program is a true hybrid law school presence in legal deserts. The Alaska hub received significant media attention as the last state without a law school presence. The hubs offer adjunct courses, events, externships, clinical opportunities, use of libraries, and other campus resources.

Kari asked if anyone had comments or feedback on the Incubator Project for Dean Varona. STAR Council Member Travis Pietila asked how the program is promoted to students. Tony replied that it has traditionally been offered to Seattle University Law graduates but is now available to anyone who is a member of the Washington State Bar. The feedback on the program has been positive, crediting Stan and the program for the success. Some negative criticism has been that gathering participants in person in Seattle or Issaquah is impossible. There may be a need for the program to be more hybrid or fully online.

Tony asked the council if there are further efforts beyond what Stan is doing, as WSBA has taken on substantive mentoring of small and solo firm practitioners, with more coaching and instruction. Kari suggested it likely is what sections are doing. Kevin explained that WSBA does not have a structured mentoring program on the programming side, but on the regulatory side, APR 11 has established a structured mentorship framework where mentors can gain CLE credit.

STAR Council Member Merf Ehman asked about the online model for clinical work. Dean Varona explained that they are continuing to develop this, with some current clinical opportunities already hybridized, such as the digital lawyering clinic and new patent law clinics, which are mostly online but offer opportunities for in-person connections.

Dean Varona closed with sharing that the Seattle University Incubator Program is looking for a new leader as Director Stan Perkins is retiring. If anyone would like to volunteer or nominate someone for the successor role, please contact Dean Varona.

Merf proposed adding a Central Washington Hybrid Hub (Heritage University) law student to the STAR Council. Kevin added that this would require an amendment to the charter, Board approval, and recruitment. Kari will reach out to the Director of the Central Washington Hybrid Hub, Bree Black Horse, to gauge student interest. This topic can be addressed at January's meeting. First step would be for the council to vote to change it, followed by present to the BOG, potentially in May.

Project Team Updates

a. Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean)

STAR Council Member Sean King confirmed Friday April 4th as the date and is working on finalizing the registration form with Laurie Powers for distribution. Kari asked if notifications for employers will be sent in January, Sean confirmed that this will happen. STAR Council Member Ashley Cummins asked when will details around grant funds be shared, Kevin replied that the goal is to communicate internship information earlier this year, and he, Sean, and Chelle will coordinate with law school representatives to establish timelines. Kari noted a lack of awareness among several Eastern Washington lawyers about the scholarships and online job fair. We will want to ensure all attorneys receive communication through email, *Bar News*, and Take Note, and commit to include scholarship details into the messaging, and to

distribute early. Sean and Kevin will work on this. Deadlines for scholarships from this year's event will be determined by Sean, Kevin, Ashley, and Travis.

b. Summit Project Team (Kevin Plachy & Merf Ehman)

Kevin shared that the dates to consider are June 6th or 27th. There is the least staffing conflict for June 6th, and there is less student presence for June 27th. Heritage University is available only on June 27th and offers classrooms for breakouts, good parking, and reasonable costs though is a dry county, requiring a welcome reception with alcohol to be held in Yakima, which is 20 minutes away. Central Washington University can accommodate either date and is closer, parking is \$6 per vehicle. Ashley noted that hosting at Heritage could support recruiting a student for the council. Kari expressed interest in the June 27th date to avoid student presence and is drawn to hosting at Heritage for exposure for hybrid students.

c. Rural Day of Service (Kathryn Burke, Kevin Plachy)

Kevin has contacted Judge Burke, who has a QSLP in mind to work with, and will meet with Judge Burke and Kari after the new year to discuss details. There is approval to move forward with planning, more information on the timing and location will be determined after the meeting.

Summit Venue Planning Discussion

Discussed during summit project team update.

Legal Lunchbox – April 2025 (Ashley Cummins)

Ashley shared that they are moving forward with the topics fleshed out at last meeting, and reached out to Zaida Rivera, chair of Pathways to Licensure Implementation Steering Committee, who shared there is a CLE incorporating APR 6 in development, they will touch base to figure out timing and ensure there isn't a large overlap.

Announcements

None.

Next Steps/Conclusion

None.

Next Meeting: January 22, 2025

Adjournment

Kari adjourned the meeting at 1:02 p.m.

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

RURAL PRACTICE: Small Towns, Big Opportunities

3rd ANNUAL VIRTUAL HIRING EVENT FRIDAY, APRIL 4, 2025

- ▶ MORNING: Pre-Scheduled Virtual Interviews
- ▶ AFTERNOON: Drop-In Information Session

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.

This two-part event features pre-selected and scheduled interviews for open positions (AM segment) and “drop-in” sessions to connect participants informally (PM segment). You may register to participate in either one, or both, segments of the event.

**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 February 28, 2025, at 5:00 p.m.**

JOB SEEKERS

Please complete [this form](#) if you are an attorney or current law student **seeking job** opportunities in small town or rural communities throughout Washington State.

**Job Seeker Registration Closes on
March 9, 2025, at 5:00 p.m.**

QUESTIONS? Email: lawcareers@gonzaga.edu