

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, September 24, 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 July Meeting Minutes (Gov. Kari Petrasek)
2. WSBA Updates (Gov. Petrasek and Julianne Unite)
 - a. Legal Lunchbox (April, June, or July)
 - b. May 2025 WSBA Rural Initiative Letter
3. Small Town and Rural Practice Day Proclamation
4. Vacant Position(s) Recruitment
5. Rule of Law Ambassador Program presentation by Heather Sprouse
6. Project Updates
 - a. Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)
 - b. Summit Project Team (Gov. Petrasek, Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy)
 - i. Date and location for FY26
 - c. Council Position - Hybrid Hub Student (Ashley Cummins)
 - d. Rural Day of Service (Judge Kathryn Burke, Kevin Plachy, Julianne Unite)
7. Announcements
8. Next Steps/Conclusion
9. Next Meeting: October 22, 2025
10. 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, July 23, 2025 *Virtual meeting via Zoom*

Council Members Present: Governor Kari Petrasek, Jesse Lamp, Rusty McGuire, Travis Pietila, Sean King, Ashley Cummins, Merf Ehman (arrived 12:21 p.m.), Past President Dan Clark

Council Members Absent: Thomas Garvey (unexcused), Governor Mary Rathbone (unexcused), Allison Foreman (excused), Philip Hunsucker (excused), Judge Kathryn Burke (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: Sophia Byrd McSherry, Jason Walker, Sara Robbins, Craig Shank, Blanca Rodriguez

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

STAR Council Chair, Governor Kari Petrasek called the meeting to order at 12:13 p.m. On motion by STAR Council Member and Past President Daniel Clark, seconded by STAR Council Member Rusty McGuire, the Council unanimously approved the June STAR Council Meeting minutes.

WSBA Updates (Gov. Petrasek and Julianne Unite)

BOG Update

Gov. Petrasek reported that the Board of Governors met July 18-19, in Walla Walla, WA. Key notes from the meeting include: the license fee policy (\$10 increase in active-attorney license fee) was approved; Gov. Nam Nguyen will be the new Treasurer for FY26; the proposed fees for entity regulation project were approved; the recommendation from the Member Engagement Council to allow sections to use section funds to purchase alcohol at certain events was approved; the WYLC proposed Bylaws amendments to change the title and definition from “Young Lawyers” to “New Members”, defined as 10 years of admittance to practice in Washington state (currently the definition is 5 years of admission to practice in any jurisdiction or 36 years of age, whichever is later). WSBA Member Services and Engagement Manager Julianne added, as there is a STAR Council “Young Lawyer” seat, the Council’s Charter will need to be amended to rename the seat to “New Member” to be consistent with WSBA Bylaws. The preferred effective date for these amendments is October 1, 2025, pending Supreme Court approval. Julianne added the CLE Summer is currently active, with all on-demand CLEs available at half price. Dan added the BOG retreat took place during this time.

Council Member Removal Discussion

Gov. Petrasek announced the grounds for potential removal of an individual STAR Council member who currently occupies the STAR Council Young Lawyer Member seat. Under the WSBA Boards and Committees policy, members may be removed for specific reasons, including more than two consecutive unexcused absences (unexcused absence is defined as not notifying Gov. Petrasek, Julianne, or Vanessa in advance of being unable to attend a meeting). We have reached out to this member asking if they plan to attend a meeting or engage with the Council and no response was received. The removal process allows the Council to vote the individual off the council. If the Council votes in favor of removal, it moves to the WSBA Nominations Committee, which can ultimately decide, and act to remove a member from the Council.

If the vote passes today to remove, Gov. Petrasek will draft a cover memo with the STAR Council's recommendation. The WSBA Nominations Committee will review at its August meeting; if approved the New Lawyer seat will be vacant. If vacancies occur, applications are opened for eligible candidates, and the STAR Council Recommendations Team (Gov. Petrasek, Gov. Dresden, and Julianne) review applicants and submits recommendation(s) to the WSBA Nominations Committee to fill the seat. The process can take some time, and Council Members are asked to help spread the word and encourage qualified people to apply for any vacant seats. On motion by Dan, seconded by Rusty, the Council voted, with one abstention, to recommend removal of the member in the Young Lawyer seat.

Entity Regulation – Craig Shank

Gov. Petrasek introduced Craig Shank, who is in attendance to share WSBA's entity regulation overview. Craig currently is involved in solo practice and engages in volunteer work with the Practice of Law Board and WSBA. Craig shared high level information about the Entity Regulation Pilot Project, which is designed to help address gaps in access to legal services problem; and the Legal Tech Taskforce which is designed to learn of opportunities and challenges for practitioners related to technology. Craig spoke about this technology [survey](#), which outlines key takeaways and shared next steps for the Task Force which includes presenting the Task Force report to the BOG in September. The Entity Regulation Pilot Project is currently building the overall model with the plan to launch in mid to late fall, and receive the first round of applicants by early spring 2026.

Gov. Petrasek asked if there is anything in the pipeline that the STAR Council can take part in that would further our goals. Craig replied that any contacts and ideas that might be advanced and scaled to reach rural clients in need. Merf added links in chat ([Frontline Justice](#) and [Policy Briefs - Center on the Legal Profession](#)), and noted that the biggest issue is legal organizations and private attorneys likely find it difficult to find time and resources to consider what a proposal might look like. Small or rural firms may be ready and this Council can provide model applications and ideas and share how this is being used in other states, and how it can be used in Washington. Sara Robbins commented that any technical support or connections that can be made is a helpful step. Craig volunteered to be a resource. Gov. Petrasek referenced a conference that was put on by the National Judges Association and noted there are funds from the State Justice Institute (SJI) that can be provided to various states to help implement programs in rural areas, to address the justice gap and lack of attorneys. If there is something Craig anticipates the STAR Council is trying to do, like legal kiosks in rural counties, then that's something to be considered.

Craig added that creative matchmaking can be done and will reach out when he comes across ideas that may be suitable for STAR Council engagement.

Project Updates

Council Position – Hybrid Hub Student (Ashley Cummins)

Gov. Petrasek noted that two applications were received, an individual has been selected. WSBA Member Services and Engagement Program Coordinator Vanessa Sweeney will send an email to selected applicant. A follow up will be reported at the September STAR Council meeting.

Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)

STAR Council Member Sean King connected with STAR Council Member Travis Pietila and STAR Council Member Ashley Cummins to identify potential dates for the Fall Job Fair and settled on November 14, 2025. The Gonzaga University team is building registration forms, and a draft will be shared for review and then outreach can begin. Rooms will be reserved at Gonzaga University Law School for Rusty's firm and others who may want to attend in person, and the remaining firms will be virtual. In following the timeline from the job fair earlier this year, outreach to employers will happen in mid to late August, then outreach to students in mid-September – following a staggered approach to avoid overwhelming them at the start of the school year.

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

Kevin noted the location for next year's Summit will need to be decided soon and the team will aim to send save-the-dates earlier. This year's event was well-received, and there was positive feedback about holding it in the Yakima area. When compared to last year's Summit in Spokane, both locations had strengths – Spokane had higher attendance due to its larger size, earlier June date, and strong attendance. In comparison, Yakima's central location drew more attendees from across the state, including many from the west side. Gonzaga offered a nicer facility and food, though Heritage also provided an excellent experience. The hotel and reception venue were convenient, and not too far from Heritage. Ashley noted it was meaningful to host in a rural community, adding that Seattle University's HUB location is in Yakima. Further discussion will take place at the September meeting.

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

Julianne reported on the status of the September 12 Rural Day of Service clinic, which is being held in partnership with the Northwest Justice Project. Attorney recruitment is underway - an eblast has been sent and five volunteer attorneys, all experienced in estate planning, have signed up. A volunteer attorney orientation will be held immediately ahead of the clinic, and a floating attorney will be available during the clinic to answer questions. Client recruitment will begin in August. Volunteer attorneys will have their reasonable travel expenses reimbursed, per WSBA policies, and may be eligible to obtain MCLE credit for pro bono hours.

Announcements

Next Steps/Conclusion

None.

Next Meeting: September 24, 2025

Adjournment

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

DRAFT



SEATTLE WA 980

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Ms. Julianne Unite
Member Services and Engagement Manager
Washington State Bar Association
1325 Fourth Avenue, Suite 600
Seattle, WA 98101-2539

SCANNED

MAY 05 2025

MAILROOM

98101-253950





May 1, 2025

Julianne Unite

Member Services and Engagement Manager

Washington State Bar Association

1325 Fourth Avenue, Suite 600

Seattle, WA 98101-2539

Re: Misguided Rural Practice Initiatives and Misplaced Priorities

Dear Ms. Unite,

I fully expect you to ignore this letter and for nothing to change. Nonetheless, the Washington State Bar Association's continued efforts to "solve" rural legal shortages by pushing lawyers to relocate or take on unrealistic mentorship burdens are frustrating enough that I felt compelled to write.

The rural legal crisis in Washington is not due to lawyers refusing to serve these areas. It is due to the refusal of rural courts and rural residents to **modernize**. Many rural courts still reject Zoom hearings and remote appearances. Many rural clients continue to insist on outdated, in-person service, even though virtual options are faster, more affordable, and more accessible. If courts refuse to adopt basic technology, and if residents refuse to engage with it, then the problem lies with them — not with the lawyers who decline to build their lives around that resistance.

Residents in rural areas need to take responsibility as well. In 2025, nearly everyone is capable of using Google to search for lawyers, check online reviews, and schedule a Zoom consultation. If they are unwilling to take those basic steps, then they are choosing to remain underserved. That is not a shortage of lawyers — it is a refusal to engage with tools that already exist.

I once heard an attorney say rural clients "want to see you at the grocery store" — as if physical proximity somehow builds trust and friendship. In reality, that often means they want to **monitor you**, confront you, or retaliate against you if their case doesn't go the way they hoped. That's not about community — it's about control. It reflects the same small-town pressure dynamics that have historically enforced conformity, racial exclusion, and social hierarchy. No one expects to run into their lawyer at the grocery store in Seattle or Bellevue, and there is no reason rural clients should feel entitled to that level of access either. Respect for professional boundaries should not depend on geography.

Meanwhile, the Bar's "grow your own lawyer" APR 6 clerk process to become a lawyer continues to shift responsibility away from systems and onto individual attorneys. Law clerks are expected to work full-time and study full-time. Mentors are expected to teach the equivalent of law school for free, in their spare time. The reality of these time demands will deter most people, and frankly, it should.

I say this not as someone speculating from the sidelines, but as a solo practitioner who has **done the work professionally for years**. I've taken care of clients, managed risk, and upheld my responsibilities without complaint — while watching the Bar ignore or actively work against the interests of solo attorneys like me. Now they're doing it again: pushing more burdens onto those of us who've already held the line, with no recognition of what we've carried just to keep our practices afloat.

This is part of a larger pattern. The Bar continues to chase hollow “solutions” that sound good on paper but fail in practice. The **LLLT program** was a perfect example — sold as a way to improve access to justice, but in reality a politically driven, bureaucratic project that offered little practical relief and collapsed under its own weight. And now, despite that failure, there is clear momentum to revive it or some version of it— backed not by frontline practitioners, but by **grant-funded nonprofits, law school administrators, and legal tech interests** that want to create a cheaper, “streamlined” legal workforce to absorb low-fee clients. Let’s not pretend this is about the public. It’s about creating a two-tiered system: real lawyers for corporations and those who can pay, and limited-scope technicians for everyone else. And solos are expected to quietly absorb the fallout — again.

Similarly, with its ongoing “lawyers should move to the country” rural initiative, the Bar is once again demonstrating how deeply out of touch it is with the day-to-day realities of legal practice.

Rather than pretending that relocation or unpaid mentorship are solutions, the Bar could invest in efforts that actually modernize access to justice:

- Encourage and support rural courts to implement remote hearing systems statewide.
- Launch public outreach programs — through libraries, community centers, and senior centers—to teach rural residents how to find and work with lawyers online, including how to use Zoom and access legal information.
- Invite non-rural lawyers to deliver **free Zoom seminars** to rural audiences as a form of public education. This gives the public access to legal information and gives lawyers free exposure —a win-win. If there are ethical concerns around lawyer advertising or WSBA involvement, the Bar can address them appropriately.
- Help rural communities get better technology. If residents have poor internet access, **invest in solutions** — grant funding for tech hubs, public VPN access, training on remote use, and computers available at local resource centers. If people need to use computers in public settings, find ways to protect their privacy and functionality. Spend Bar resources solving *that* — not shaming lawyers into going to live in the sticks.

It is not noble to sacrifice your network, stability, and career to serve a system that refuses to meet you halfway. If rural courts and communities will not work with lawyers remotely then the “legal desert” lack of lawyers problem is their own fault and the Bar should quit wasting resources and our membership dues on people who won’t be reasonable. It is not the job of the legal profession to compensate for their unwillingness to adapt. **Rural practice is a perfectly valid path for those who genuinely want that lifestyle — but for those who don’t, the Bar should not shame, pressure, or try to trick us into relocating, as if we’re too naïve to see what we’re giving up, or too stupid to recognize what’s really being asked.**

RULE OF LAW AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

TOOL KIT



SCAN TO ACCESS
THE WSBA'S
RULE OF LAW
AMBASSADOR
WEBPAGE

The Rule of Law Ambassador Program provides guidance and resources for legal professionals to champion and defend legal institutions in our constitutional democracy. Here are three steps you can take now to help rebuild trust in the U.S. Constitution and Rule of Law:



STEP ONE

Make sure you're versed in the U.S. Constitution, the rule of law, and the functions of our democracy.

The Washington Supreme Court calls on the WSBA, in GR 12.2, to "maintain and foster programs of public information and education about the law and the legal system."



American Bar Association
What is the Rule of Law?



WSBA CLE
"Rule of Law and Constitutional Crises for Lawyer Ambassadors"

Presented May 6, 2025, live; register or watch the recorded version of this free CLE at www.wsba.org/ambassadors.



STEP TWO

Prepare to connect rather than correct when dispelling misinformation about the legal system.

Lawyers have a unique and solemn obligation, as stated in the preamble to their Rules of Professional Conduct: "A lawyer should further the public's understanding of and confidence in the rule of law and the justice system because legal institutions in a constitutional democracy depend on popular participation and support to maintain their authority."



Divided Community Project
Speaking Out to Strengthen the Guardrails of Democracy



Guidance from UW's Information School
"To Combat Misinformation, Start with Connection not Correction"



STEP THREE

Demonstrate a non-partisan commitment to civil discourse about democracy in your community.

The same laws apply to everyone, and everyone is treated equally under the law; government power is bound by law; and human rights are guaranteed to all. This is the promise of the rule of law in our constitutional democracy, and what we strive for in Washington.



Divided Community Project, Moritz College of Law
Key themes for speaking out



Ted Talk by Stephen J. Cox, Republican governor of Utah
"How to Disagree with Respect, not Hate"

This list is for accessible, daily actions. It is just the start of an evolving, dynamic tool kit.

If you're ready to go further, both the WSBA and American Bar Association are here to support our Ambassadors. Please reach out if you'd like to brainstorm about a step you're ready to take. You can request presentation templates, a speaker for a community or civic presentation, guidance for writing op-eds, and more. > ambassadors@wsba.org

Oath of Attorney

I, _____ do solemnly declare:

- **I am** fully subject to the laws of the State of Washington and the laws of the United States and will abide by the same.
 - **I will** support the constitution of the State of Washington and the constitution of the United States.
 - **I will** abide by the Rules of Professional Conduct approved by the Supreme Court of the State of Washington.
 - **I will** maintain the respect due to the courts of justice and judicial officers.
 - **I will** not counsel, or maintain any suit, or proceeding, which shall appear to me to be unjust or any defense except as I believe to be honestly debatable under the law, unless it is in defense of a person charged with a public offense. I will employ for the purpose of maintaining the causes confided to me only those means consistent with truth and honor. I will never seek to mislead the judge or jury by any artifice or false statement.
 - **I will** maintain the confidence and preserve inviolate the secrets of my client, and will accept no compensation in connection with the business of my client unless this compensation is from or with the knowledge and approval of the client or with the approval of the court.
 - **I will** abstain from all offensive personalities, and advance no fact prejudicial to the honor or reputation of a party or witness unless required by the justice of the cause with which I am charged.
 - **I will** never reject, from any consideration personal to myself, the cause of the defenseless or oppressed, or delay unjustly the cause of any person.
-