

WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

WSBA Sections: A Guide for Section Leader Volunteers

WELCOME to Washington State Bar Association (WSBA) section leadership. The below guide is intended to introduce you to the WSBA's 29 sections and governance. In addition to this guide, we recommended new section Executive Committee members connect with current and/or out-going Executive Committee members, read the section's bylaws and budget (found online), and review the materials found in the [WSBA Volunteer Toolbox](#).

SECTIONS HISTORY/BACKGROUND

Sections were first mentioned in the WSBA Bylaws in 1955 but were not officially formed until the 1970s as a mechanism to connect more broadly with the membership as well as provide opportunities for practice-based communities to connect with each other. Some of the sections that were created in the 1970s still exist today.

As entities of the WSBA, WSBA has fiduciary, legal, and fiscal responsibility for section activities. Sections do not have independent legal status and are subject to the policies and procedures applicable to all WSBA entities.

WHAT ARE WSBA SECTIONS

WSBA Sections Provide:

- A community of legal professionals with shared practice areas, practice settings, or characteristics
- Legal and practice updates on relevant topics, usually through newsletters
- Low-cost (sometimes free) CLEs with educational content focused on relevant topics
- The opportunity to communicate with other professionals and tap into their knowledge (via webpages, list serves, online communities, etc.)
- Opportunities to connect and network across the state
- Opportunities to comment on relevant Washington State legislation
- Leadership opportunities in the WSBA

What Section Members Value:¹

- High quality CLEs with intermediate to advanced content (discounts to members are always appreciated)
- Sharing resources and knowledge with other section members
- Updates on law and legislation

WSBA's 29 SECTIONS

Administrative Law
Alternative Dispute Resolution
Animal Law
Antitrust, Consumer Protection & Unfair Business Practices
Business Law
Cannabis Law
Civil Rights Law
Construction Law
Corporate Counsel
Creditor Debtor Rights
Criminal Law
Elder Law
Environmental & Land Use Law
Family Law
Health Law
Indian Law
International Practice
Intellectual Property
Juvenile Law
Labor & Employment Law
Legal Assistance to Military Personnel
LGBT Law
Litigation
Low Bono
Real Property, Probate & Trust
Senior Lawyers
Solo & Small Practice
Taxation
World Peace Through Law

¹ Based on direct feedback to staff and past surveys done by individual sections.

- Practice tips
- Access to list serves
- Newsletters
- Colleagues' involvement in legislative process (benefits all practitioners in practice area)
- Opportunities to get involved

Benefits for Volunteers Serving in Leadership Roles:

- The chance to provide service to other members with shared interests
- Camaraderie with other section leaders
- Satisfaction in accomplishing the group's goals
- The opportunity to meet/network with established practitioners in their fields
- Visibility at WSBA and among peers
- The opportunity to establish a statewide professional network
- Professional growth/development
- Leadership experience

SECTION GOVERNANCE

Each section has its own set of bylaws and is governed by an Executive Committee. WSBA bylaws and policies provide overall direction and parameters for sections; individual section bylaws outline Executive Committee structure, the election cycle, terms of office, voting eligibility, and membership criteria. While each Executive Committee has some discretion in how it operates, each section must have a Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer (or Secretary/Treasurer). Many sections also find the Chair-Elect and Immediate Past Chair positions to be helpful in terms of succession planning and continuity.

ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL SECTION

- ✓ Strong Value Proposition for Members
- ✓ Regular Communication with Members
- ✓ Effective Executive Committee (meets regularly, shares responsibilities, and makes decisions)
- ✓ Good Management and Allocation of Resources (volunteer time & funds)

Chair: The function of the Chair is to guide the Executive Committee in its work consistent with WSBA policies and the section's bylaws. Responsibilities include:

- Scheduling and facilitating regular meetings of Executive Committee and ensuring information is available to all Executive Committee members, WSBA staff, and the public consistent with WSBA's Open Meetings Policy
- Preparing meeting agendas and submitting the required annual report
- Providing leadership and focus with respect to the section Executive Committee's annual work plan and goals
- If desired, developing a strong process for commenting on relevant legislation, including the process for ensuring all advocacy work is consistent with General Rule 12 restrictions
- Cultivating leadership and participation among Executive Committee members
- Preparing for succession at the end of the term

Chair-Elect: The Chair-Elect should be prepared to take on the responsibilities of the Chair as needed and/or as outlined by section bylaws.

Treasurer: The Treasurer should be familiar with all WSBA fiscal policies as they relate to sections. Responsibilities include:

- Understanding the section's monthly financial statements, including *summary*, *detailed*, and *fees* statements
- Providing a financial status report at each Executive Committee meeting
- Preparing the annual budget and narrative based on historical spending patterns and the future goals of the Executive Committee

Secretary: The function of the Secretary is to take meeting minutes and prepare them for review and approval by the Executive Committee.

Immediate Past Chair: Most sections maintain an Immediate Past Chair position in order to retain institutional knowledge and strong leadership succession. Some section bylaws also designate the Immediate Past Chair to run the nominations committee as part of the annual election cycle.

LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

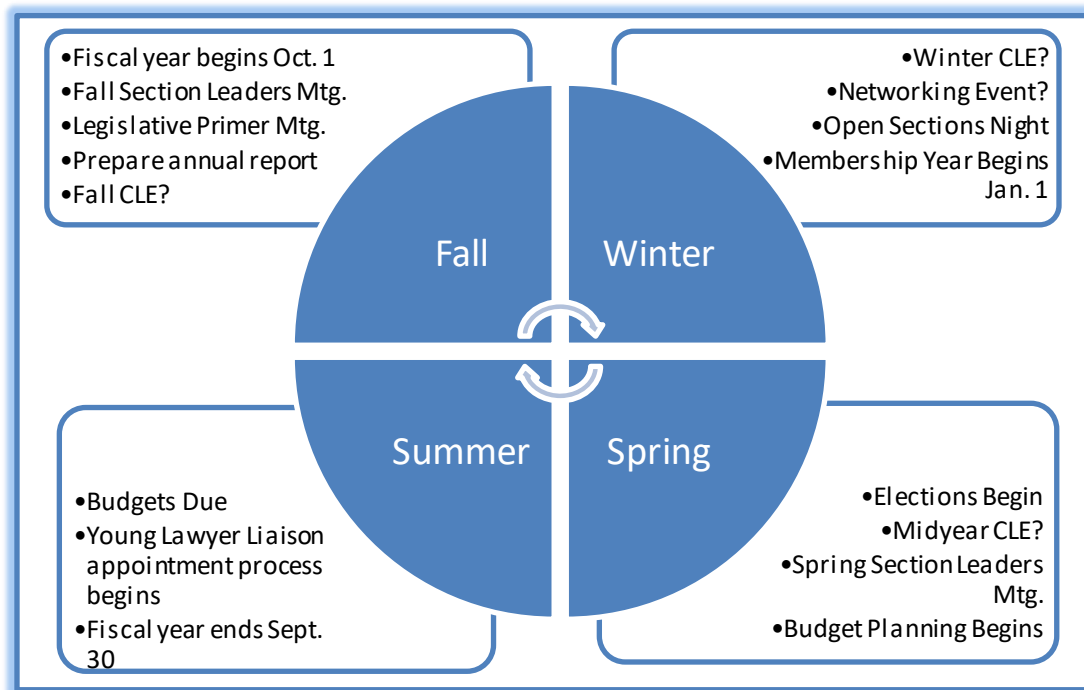
Sections Team/Sections Program Specialists: The WSBA Sections Team is comprised of three (3) employees responsible for supporting activities across all WSBA sections. Each section has a designated “Sections Program Specialist” who will attend as many Executive Committee meetings as possible and act as a resource for conducting section business. In general, the Sections Team is responsible for:

- Connecting the Executive Committee to WSBA resources to help meet annual work plan goals
- Staying apprised of section activities and decisions and maintaining master files
- Acting as a “hub” between sections and other WSBA teams, including Finance, Communications, General Counsel, and/or Legislative
- Reviewing/routing all contracts and expense reports for proper approvals/signatures
- Reviewing/routing all formal communications from Executive Committee to section members (e.g., mailings, e-blasts, or surveys)

Board of Governors (BOG) Liaison:

Each year, members of the Board of Governors are appointed to serve as liaisons between the Board of Governors and one or more sections. The function of the Board of Governors liaison is to assist the operation of the section’s Executive Committee by acting as an information conduit between the Executive Committee and the Board of Governors. The Board of Governors liaison is not a voting member of the Executive Committee unless otherwise stated.

‘TYPICAL’ SECTION GOVERNANCE CYCLE



MORE INFORMATION

- [WSBA Bylaws](#), Articles
- **Section Bylaws** (individual section webpage)
- **Section Budget** (individual section webpage)
- **Section Annual Report/Info Sheet** (individual section webpage)
- **Volunteer Toolbox** | <https://www.wsba.org/connect-serve/volunteer-opportunities/Toolbox>

The Volunteer Toolbox is designed to provide many of the tools needed to effectively lead a section. Tools and resources are added and updated on a regular basis and suggestions for what to include are welcome.

Topics include:

- GR 12
- WSBA policies and procedures (including expense form and fiscal policies)
- Marketing and outreach resources (list serves, e-blasts, newsletters, etc.)
- Legislative process information
- CLE seminar timelines and guidelines
- Executive Committee best practices

QUESTIONS?

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