

WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

Small Town and Rural Committee

Small Town and Rural Committee Meeting I Virtual Only

Wednesday, June 12, 2024, | 12:10 p.m. – 1:10 p.m.

Via [Zoom](#) | Meeting ID: 815 7000 4025 | Passcode: 684632 | Call-in: 888-788-0099

AGENDA

1. Introductions and Approval of May Meeting Minutes (Gov. Kari Petrusek)
2. WSBA Updates (Gov. Petrusek and Julianne Unite)
3. Project Team Updates
 - a. Job Fair at Gonzaga (Laurie Powers)
 - b. Summit Project Team (Laurie Powers)
 - c. Rural Day of Service (Kathryn Burke, Kari Petrusek)
4. Legal Desert Summit in Las Vegas (Kari Petrusek)
5. STAR Charter Amendments
6. Announcements
7. Next Steps/Conclusion
8. Next Meeting: July 17, 2024
9. Adjournment

WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

Small Town and Rural Committee Charter

Effective: July 16, 2021
as approved by the
WSBA Board of
Governors

Purpose

The WSBA Small Town and Rural (STAR) Committee is committed to strengthen and support the practice of law in the rural communities throughout Washington state. Members of the STAR Committee 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 Committee 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 Committee 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 Committee 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 Committee 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 Committee and reflective of Washington’s unique geographic and socio-geographic 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 non-metro 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 as rural, but likely more

adjacent to a labor market and perhaps have a varying set of circumstances that may differ from counties that are less than 30,000.

Composition

Members of the STAR Committee should have demonstrated experience and/or interest in a thriving legal practice in Washington's rural communities. The STAR Committee 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

The first appointments to the STAR Committee should effectuate a staggered rotation of STAR Committee members. Therefore, the following terms are in place for the first appointment cycle only. All subsequent terms should adhere to the term limits stated above. STAR Committee member 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 in 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 Committee’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 in Washington’s rural communities. The STAR Committee 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 Committee.

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 Committee 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 Committee should conduct an assessment within five years from the date of Board of Governors' approval by 1) conducting a survey of rural practitioners to provide stakeholder feedback regarding the impact of this Committee 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 Committee is necessary to continue the scope of work.

WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

Small Town and Rural Committee

Small Town and Rural Committee Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, May 15, 2024 | 12:18 p.m. – 1:03 p.m.

Virtual meeting via Zoom

Committee Members Present: Elizabeth Penoyar, Jesse Lamp, Governor Kari Petrasek, Judge Kathryn Burke, Merf Ehman, Laurie Powers, Ashley Cummins

Committee Members Absent: Erin Lloyd (Excused), Rusty McGuire (Excused), Allison Foreman, Erin Fullner, Hunter Abell, Sarah Cuellar, Sunitha Anjilvel, Zachary Bryant

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

WSBA Board of Governors Liaisons Present: Matthew Dresden

Public Attendees Present: Sophia Byrd McSherry, Michael Chin, Leone Reinbold, Jason Walker, Chris Fox

Introductions and Approval of March Meeting

Governor Kari Petrasek called the meeting to order at 12:18 p.m. Jason Walker, Washington Association of Prosecuting Attorneys advised the committee that he was a first-time attendee. Jason commented that there has been legislation passed within last year to get prosecutors into rural and underserved counties and attending that he is attending for informational purposes.

On motion by STAR Committee Member, Elizabeth (Betsy) Penoyar, seconded by STAR Committee Member, Jesse Lamp, the STAR Committee voted unanimously to approve the April meeting minutes.

WSBA Updates (Gov. Petrasek and Julianne Unite)

WSBA Member Services and Engagement Manager, Julianne Unite, advised that applications volunteer positions are now open and will close May 31, 2024. Several STAR committee members have expiring terms and will need to reapply if interested in remaining on the committee. Julianne advised that there are seven (7) upcoming openings for the next fiscal year and encouraged anyone not intending to apply to help recruit for open positions. STAR Committee Member, Merf Ehman, asked if someone applied who was better qualified than themselves, who determines which applicants would be sent forward? Julianne responded that herself, Kari and Governor Matthew Dresden will review applicants and make recommendations for the board.

Subcommittee Report Updates, if any (Subcommittee chairs Laurie Powers, Gov. Petrasek, Betsy Penoyar)

Nothing to report.

Project Team Updates

Job Fair at Gonzaga (Laurie Powers)

STAR Committee Member, Laurie Powers, reported that at the Rural Job Fair at Gonzaga, there were 20 employers and 24 positions available, with a total of 33 applications received. It's uncertain if the drop-in portion of the event functioned as intended, but there's consideration for restructuring it if the event recurs next year. Jason Walker from WAPA expressed his desire to participate in the future, representing offices that are too small to send a delegate.

Summit Project Team (Laurie Powers)

Laurie mentioned that the materials and presentations are being finalized and will soon be sent to WSBA. Menus and catering arrangements are set to be finalized this week and into the next. The main focus currently is on securing attendees for the event. Kevin informed that there are presently 36 attendees, including committee members, and 17 speakers, totaling 53 attendees. Another registration e-blast is scheduled to be sent out the week prior to the event. Kevin can distribute the e-flyer created by the WSBA Communications Team to committee members for further dissemination through their networks.

Laurie inquired if it's possible to determine where registrants are coming from to help target recruitment efforts more effectively. Kevin indicated that most registrants seem to be from the east side of the state but can provide a list with location information redacted. He also encouraged panel leaders to finalize materials by reaching out to their participants. Kevin, Laurie, and Kari discussed layout ideas for the event classrooms, with Laurie noting that finalizing numbers would aid in determining specific room assignments.

Kevin suggested that panel leaders have pre-drafted questions in case the Q&A portion of the panel is brief, ensuring sessions meet the required time for CLE accreditation. Julianne mentioned that two partners from Rusty's firm will attend the summit and are willing to participate in the panel that Merf is leading.

Rural Day of Service (Kathryn Burke, Kari Petrusek)

Kari informed that the committee has included a placeholder in the budget for the next year to advance this initiative. Kevin mentioned that although the committee still needs to develop a proposal, they should be able to offer a grant to the legal aid provider collaborating with the committee to organize the Rural Day of Service. In the FY25 budget, there's a placeholder for two events with a \$3000 grant allocated per event, along with funds for committee member reimbursements as outlined by the WSBA Fiscal Policy. Kevin added that the committee should start identifying legal aid providers as potential partners for FY25.

STAR Committee Member, Judge Kathryn Burke, mentioned that she has already reached out to the NW Justice Project in Omak, and they are enthusiastic about partnering with the committee. Although Judge Burke wasn't aware of the plan for two events, she is willing to assist in finding a second partner. Judge Burke proposed forming a project team for planning and asked Leone Reinbold if she would be interested in joining efforts. Leone expressed her willingness to join and is happy to meet with Katie to further discuss the event. Katie invited other committee members to join if interested. Kari remarked that it would be beneficial to provide grant funds to legal aid partners for their collaboration with the committee.

Rural Internship Grants Update (Gov. Kari Petrusek)

Kari reported that the committee received a total of seven applicants. Among them, three applicants were approved for grants. During the discussion, there was a suggestion to update the application information to provide more specific details about the types of positions and employers accepted.

Laurie noted that one recipient from Gonzaga expressed gratitude for receiving the grant, stating that they wouldn't have been able to attend otherwise. WSBA Member Engagement Specialist, Chelle Gegax, suggested reaching out to this recipient to inquire if they would be interested in writing an article for the WSBA blog.

Legal Desert Summit in Las Vegas (Julianne Unite)

Julianne informed that some committee members, along with Kevin, will be attending a summit in Las Vegas focused on Legal Deserts. Specifically, Kevin, Merf, and Kari will be representing the committee. Additionally, Sophia mentioned in the chat that Liz Mustin from the Office of Public Defense will also be present at the summit, and Kari will make a connection with Liz during the event.

Kevin stated that he will gather information during the summit and share it with the committee for feedback once the event concludes.

Announcements

None.

Next Steps/Conclusion

None.

Next Meeting: June 12, 2024

Adjournment

Adjourned at 1:03 p.m.