

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, December 17, 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 November Meeting Minutes (Pres.-Elect Kari Petrasek)
2. WSBA Updates (Pres.-Elect Petrasek and Julianne Unite)
3. Vacant Position(s) Recruitment Update
4. Project Updates
 - a. Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)
 - b. Rural Internships (Kevin Plachy)
 - c. Rural Day of Service (Kevin Plachy, Julianne Unite)
 - d. April 2026 Legal Lunchbox (Ashley Cummins)
 - e. Small Town and Rural Practice Day Proclamation (Pres.-Elect Petrasek, Ashley Cummins)
 - f. Summit Project Team (Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy, Michele Moore)
5. Announcements
6. Next Steps/Conclusion
7. Next Meeting: January 28, 2026
8. Adjourn

CHARTER

Small Town and Rural Council

Adopted: April 17, 2021. Amended July 17, 2021; September 7, 2024; November 14, 2025.

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 New 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 New 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, November 26, 2025 *Virtual meeting via Zoom*

Council Members Present: President Elect Kari Petrasek, Jesse Lamp, Travis Pietila, Sean King, Ashley Cummins, Past President Dan Clark, Philip Hunsucker, Michele Moore, Governor Mary Rathbone, Allison Foreman, Gloria Guizar (non-voting)

Council Members Absent: Rusty McGuire (excused)

WSBA Board of Governors Present: Jordan Couch

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

Public Attendees Present: Chris Fox, Stephen Foster, Jason Walker

Introductions and Approval of October Meeting Minutes (Pres. Elect Petrasek)

STAR Council Chair and WSBA President-Elect Kari Petrasek called the meeting to order at 12:13 p.m. On motion by STAR Council Member and WSBA Past President Dan Clark, seconded by STAR Council Member Allison Foreman, the council approved by majority vote the October STAR Council Meeting minutes (10-0-0).

WSBA Updates (Pres. Elect Petrasek and Julianne Unite)

BOG Update

Pres.-Elect Petrasek reported that the Board of Governors approved the council on Public Defense Letter of Support for the Office of Public Defense 2026 Supplemental Budget Request. The conflict of interest policy bylaw articles were updated, and the WSBA CLE committee was dissolved due to inactivity. Additionally, a new pass score for the NextGen Bar Exam was proposed, and amendments to the APR4 rules were approved. Additionally, 2027 license fees were approved.

WSBA Member Services and Engagement Manager Julianne Unite added that the amendments to the STAR Council Charter reflecting the change from 'young lawyer' to 'new member' were approved, and is now posted on the website. STAR Council Member Travis Pietila asked Julianne if there is a sense of the number of responses received for the recent future legal professionals survey that was distributed. Julianne indicated there will be an update at a future meeting once the data is reviewed and proposals are determined on ways for the bar to better engage with future lawyers. WSBA Advancement Department Director Kevin Plachy added that the Committee on Professional Ethics issued an advisory opinion on artificial intelligence which was approved. Kevin asked council members to share it around where possible, and provided a [link](#) to the advisory opinion in the chat.

Vacant Position(s) Recruitment Update

Julianne announced there are currently no applicants for the QLSP or New Member positions with the STAR Council and encouraged council members to leverage their networks to help recruit. While the positions remain open, announcements will continue to be posted via list serves and other communications.

Community Justice Workers (Jordan Couch)

Governor Jordan Couch addressed the STAR Council to share two significant developments aimed at improving access to justice in rural communities. Jordan began by introducing the Community Justice Workers Program, which originated in Alaska through their version of the STAR Council. This initiative was developed after years of unsuccessful efforts to recruit attorneys to remote areas. Recognizing the limitations of that approach, Alaska shifted its focus to training individuals already embedded in rural and tribal communities—such as those working in community-based organizations—to provide limited legal services. These individuals, though not attorneys, are trained by legal aid providers and authorized to deliver specific legal support within their communities. Jordan emphasized that Washington State now has a similar opportunity through the Entity Regulation Pilot Project, which could enable the authorization of such community justice workers, and noted that some organizations in Washington are already exploring this possibility.

In addition to the Alaska model, Jordan shared news about a new national initiative led by the National Center for State Courts and Innovation for Justice. This program is designed to help state courts expand access to justice in rural areas. Washington's Pacific and Wahkiakum counties were selected as part of the initial cohort of three jurisdictions. The application process was expedited and received the approval of the Washington Supreme Court. Jordan explained that this selection could serve as a "backdoor" for other counties in the state to join the initiative. The Administrative Office of the Courts has already begun reaching out to additional counties. The program will involve collaboration with two other state courts across the country and aims to build scalable models for rural justice delivery. Jordan expressed enthusiasm about Washington's inclusion in the pilot and encouraged STAR Council members to stay informed and consider getting involved.

Jordan mentioned that the Alaska team is eager to share their model with other states and would even be willing to speak with the STAR Council directly. Jordan offered to send a flyer and additional materials to Julianne for broader distribution, especially to those who were not present at the meeting. Jordan concluded by affirming that he would continue to keep the group updated through Pres.-Elect Petrasek and reiterated his willingness to support further engagement with these initiatives.

Project Updates

Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)

STAR Council Member Sean King provided an update on the Job Fair at Gonzaga, which took place last week. There were three to four employers who had posted jobs, but unfortunately either had to pull out or stopped responding, which is frustrating for applicants. Sean noted that the table talk aspect of the event likely needs to be rethought in some way. Sean has spoken to employers and they're currently doing second rounds and deciding on offers. Gov.-elect Petrasek asked if this event should be held again in April or is it oversaturation with doing three in a calendar year. Sean remarked that if the next job fair

is scheduled for April, and the flyer and registration is released by the end of January, this follows the same timeline as last year. Travis asked about numbers, and the 1Ls who participated. Sean noted doing a deeper dive on the actual numbers, but mentioned that application numbers were stronger initially but it became clear that one applicant submitted 25 applications; and employer registration numbers were stronger than in the spring. Sean will look into possible April dates and consult with the other law schools.

Rural Day of Service (Pres. Elect Petrasek, Kevin Plachy)

Kevin, Julianne, and Vanessa met with the Inland Empire Legal Aid (IELA) organization in Spokane through a connection made by Governor Emily Arneson. IELA has agreed to partner with the STAR Council for a wills and estate planning clinic to be held in Ferry County on either April 27 or May 4 - with a heavy preference for May 4. Pres.-Elect Petrasek noted that the Children's Justice Conference will be in Spokane at that time. Kevin added that a clinic in partnership with Northwest Justice Project will be held in Omak this September, similar to the event that took place earlier this year in September.

April Legal Lunchbox (Ashley Cummins)

STAR Council Member Ashley Cummins noted collaborating with WSBA Education Lead Rachel Matz to complete the speaker request before the end of the year. The topic will cover the basics of practicing Indian law and its differences, with Bree Blackhorse, adding that this was a session originally scheduled for the Summit. Additionally, the program will be recorded so that QLSPs can access it after the event.

Small Town and Rural Practice Day Proclamation (Pres.-Elect Petrasek, Ashley Cummins)

Ashley commented that at the last council meeting it was agreed that the proclamation would be timed to correspond with the Summit. The draft is the same with minimal tweaks, and once the Summit dates are confirmed the draft will be updated to reflect the rationale for tying the proclamation to that month.

Summit Project Team (Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy)

Julianne mentioned that during the last meeting, two dates were proposed: June 5 and June 26. June 26 was chosen as WSBA's Broadcast Services Manager, Rex Nolte, is unavailable on June 5. Additionally, the Real Property Probate Trust Mid-Year event is occurring at that time. Since Rex is needed to record the Summit, June 26 is the best option. WSBA Member Services and Engagement Program Coordinator Vanessa Sweeney presented various available venue options for the summit including venues located in and around Yakima, Ellensburg, and Wenatchee. Venue research was also conducted for Grant County/Moses Lake, and Tri-Cities however, there was no availability. President-Elect Petrasek commented that Heritage University is the most affordable option and expressed concerns about Wenatchee Valley College having limited space. Jason Walker shared his positive experiences with multiple events at Central Washington University (CWU) in Ellensburg, noting that the space is great and there are convenient hotels nearby. Michele added that Ellensburg offers good options for an off-campus welcome reception.

Ashley raised a question about the budget, specifically regarding the summer grant program which includes potential funds to offset travel costs for students attending the summit. Ashley asked whether this funding comes from the Summit budget or another source when considering the \$16,000. Kevin clarified that it would come from the Summit budget and explained that part of the reason for increasing

the budget was to cover these costs. Julianne clarified that there is a \$14,000 budget allocated for the Summit.

Dan highlighted the success of last year's event at Heritage University, noting positive feedback. Dan stated that the two final venue options are CWU or Heritage, mentioning that more people tend to attend central locations such as Ellensburg, while Heritage's encompasses the rural setting. Michelle agreed with Dan, sharing her positive impression of Heritage when she attended last year's Summit. Michele supported the idea of alternating venues and agreed with Jason on the quality of CWU's facility. It was suggested to consider alternating the venue with Heritage every other year, aligning with the Access to Justice conference schedule. The council agreed to hold the 2026 Summit at CWU.

Kevin and Ashley are currently chairing the event and Kevin encouraged at least one more member of the council to join the planning committee. Michele volunteered. Ashley requested theme ideas for the Summit be shared with planning committee members. Ashley is unable to attend the December STAR Council meeting but will coordinate with Kevin and Michele and suggested finalizing the theme by January. Pres.-Elect Petrasek ask if STAR Council Member Gloria Guizar would like to participate in planning, contributing a law school perspective to the event, and Gloria agreed to help. Ashley suggested creating a "save the date" notice for the ATJ list serve before the end of the year. Kevin also recommended including this information in WSBA's Take Note and BarNews.

Announcements

Ashley commented that Legal Services Corporation released a rural service impact report, and recommended the council take a look at it.

Kevin provided an update on the internship program, which is set to relaunch at the beginning of the year, with applications likely opening in February. Kevin reminded the council that due to constitutional restrictions on the use of license fees, WSBA has been unable to fund internships in government agencies that do not represent clients. Kevin consulted with the Office of General Counsel (OGC), and a new pathway has been identified: sections within WSBA can donate funds specifically to support internships in government offices such as prosecutors' offices, the Attorney General's office, and tribal organizations. Kevin emphasized that this route is viable provided the sections agree to earmark their contributions for this purpose. Kevin acknowledged Chris Fox, noting that the Family Law section had contributed last year and could potentially do so again.

Jason Walker explained that his office already runs a state-funded internship program that supports eight prosecutor positions in rural and underserved counties. The program, initiated by legislative funding a year or two ago, was implemented for the first time last year and includes both prosecution and defense internships. Jason noted that while the program is active during the summer, he has also received requests from offices for interns during the school year. A key challenge he highlighted is the mismatch between the state fiscal year (starting July 1) and the typical internship start dates (late May or early June), which creates uncertainty about funding continuity. This timing issue forces him to either reserve funds for the following year or risk leaving interns unfunded if the legislature does not renew the budget. He expressed interest in "GAAP funds" or bridge funding to cover this gap and confirmed that he has demand for such support, citing a recent request from Grays Harbor County for three winter interns.

Pres.-Elect Petrasek clarified that WSBA does not restrict grant recipients from receiving additional funding from other sources, such as Jason's program, and affirmed that recipients could still qualify for the \$5,000 grants even if they receive external support. Kevin reiterated the limitations imposed by license fee restrictions but emphasized that the new approach—using section-donated funds—offers a way to support internships in government and tribal offices. Jason concluded by expressing interest in any available funds, stating awareness of counties ready to participate.

Chris Fox noted in the chat to Kevin that this will be addressed at the next FLEC meeting; Kevin confirmed getting in touch with Chris.

Next Steps/Conclusion

None.

Next Meeting: December 17, 2025

Adjournment

Pres. Elect Petrasek adjourned the meeting at 1:19 p.m.