

WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

Small Town and Rural Council

Small Town and Rural Council Meeting | Virtual Only

Wednesday, January 21, 2026 | 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 (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. Summit Project Team (Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy, Michele Moore, Gloria Guizar)
5. Announcements
6. Next Steps/Conclusion
7. Next Meeting: February 18, 2026
8. Adjourn

WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

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.

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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.

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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, December 17, 2025

Virtual meeting via Zoom

Council Members Present: President Elect Kari Petrasek, Jesse Lamp (arrived 12:17 p.m.), Travis Pietila, Ashley Cummins, Past President Dan Clark, Philip Hunsucker, Michele Moore, Governor Mary Rathbone, Gloria Guizar (non-voting), Allison Foreman (arrived 12:18 p.m.), Rusty McGuire

Council Members Absent: Sean King (excused)

WSBA Board of Governors Present: N/A

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

Public Attendees Present: Jason Walker, Jonathan Patnode, Michael Chin (arrived 12:29 p.m.)

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

STAR Council Chair and WSBA President-Elect Kari Petrasek called the meeting to order at 12:12 p.m. On motion by STAR Council Member and WSBA Past President Dan Clark, seconded by STAR Council Member Governor Mary Rathbone, the Council approved by unanimous vote the November STAR Council Meeting minutes (9-0-0).

WSBA Updates (Pres.-Elect Petrasek and Julianne Unite)

BOG Update

Pres.-Elect Petrasek announced that the next Board of Governors meeting is scheduled for January 16-17 in Seattle, and encouraged Council members to attend if possible. WSBA Member Services and Engagement Manager Julianne Unite reminded the Council that the licensing season is approaching and encouraged members to renew their licenses, and also renew and/or join a section. Julianne also noted that the Powerful Communities Grant application has been launched, funded by private donations through the Washington State Bar Foundation. This grant aims to support communities denied justice due to systemic repression, advance the WSBA's mission as outlined in GR12, encourage WSBA members' public service, and implement the state plan for coordinated legal aid delivery to low-income individuals. Julianne shared the application link in the chat.

Dan noted that the Supreme Court has reduced the Uniform Bar Exam score requirement retroactively to 2020 and asked if the bar staff would track this change. WSBA Advancement Department Director Kevin Plachy added that this topic was discussed at an internal executive leadership team meeting, and that the Office of the Executive Director and the Regulatory Services Department are coordinating with the court on communication and implementation processes. Kevin confirmed the retroactive nature of the score reduction, stating that it goes back to 2020 and will benefit many individuals.

Vacant Position(s) Recruitment Update

Julianne noted that there are still no applicants for the Qualified Legal Service Provider 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 listservs and other communication channels.

Project Updates

Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)

STAR Council Member Sean King was not in attendance, but provided an update through Pres.-Elect Petrasek. The spring rural practice hiring event is scheduled for April 10, 2026. Sean's office is currently preparing the registration forms for both employers and job seekers.

Rural Internships (Kevin)

Kevin noted that the application is being prepared. The next step is determining if there are section funds available for internships and which sections to contact—specifically the Solo and Small Practice and Family Law Sections. Kevin plans to reach out to executive committee chairs, including Chris Fox for the Family Law Section. STAR Council Member Travis Pietila commented that challenges have arisen with government roles over the past few years, preventing some students from participating. Travis suggested reaching out to sections related to government offices, or perhaps public defenders, prosecutors, like the Indian Law Section, noting past issues with tribal internship students. Julianne suggested contacting the Administrative Law, Indian Law, and Litigation Sections, given their broad scope and numerous government positions. Julianne clarified that last year only the Family Law Section donated for the grant, while the Solo and Small Practice Section sponsored the STAR Summit. Pres.-Elect Petrasek offered to address the subject further with the Solo and Small Practice Section. Kevin mentioned that if the Solo and Small Practice Section cannot fund both initiatives, they should prioritize whether to allocate \$5,000 to internships or the Summit. STAR Council Member Michele Moore proposed reaching out to all sections to solicit funds, regardless of the amount, as any contribution would increase resources for internships or the Summit. Kevin advised identifying sections most aligned with their goals, reminding the Council that each internship grant is \$5,000; therefore, the total contributions need to sum up to \$5,000 per intern supported. Pres.-Elect Petrasek agreed that all sections should be approached and suggested drafting a letter explaining the importance and benefits of contributing. Kevin concurred, confirming that messaging will be drafted for Pres.-Elect Petrasek to send, streamlining communication to the sections. The section leader's list serve can be utilized for targeted outreach to the sections most likely to donate. Pres.-Elect Petrasek agreed, and added the need to send this message soon.

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

Julianne confirmed that the Inland Empire Legal Aid (IELA) has agreed to partner with the STAR Council for a Rural Day of Service on May 4, in Ferry County, offering wills and estate planning. A letter of agreement is in process and a grant letter will follow, then planning will begin. Pres.-Elect Petrasek recommended distributing a save the date soon.

April Legal Lunchbox (Ashley Cummins)

STAR Council Member Ashley Cummins noted that Bree Blackhorse is confirmed to give the presentation and a request has been sent to Brenda George. Ashley mentioned that WSBA Education Programs Lead Rachel Matz confirmed that the presentation will be recorded and available post event to view at no cost for Qualified Legal Service Providers.

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

Ashley mentioned that she would be sharing the edited proclamation draft with Pres.-Elect Petrasek for review before sending the request to the Governor's Office for approval. Ashley confirmed that June is the target month to align with the STAR Summit and noted that the Governor's Office needs to receive the request at least 45 days ahead of time.

Summit Project Team (Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy, Michele Moore)

Ashley mentioned that the planning team will meet in January and shared some initial theme ideas, including sustaining justice through rural practice, justice within reach, and community-centered rural lawyering. The focus will be on topics such as sustainability, workforce challenges, technology use, and creative service delivery models with an emphasis on relationships and place-based practices shaped by local needs. Pres.-Elect Petrasek added that the Legal Technology Taskforce has issued their final report and suggested incorporating relevant portions into the Summit, specifically for rural areas. Kevin proposed addressing this at the first planning meeting followed by distributing a save-the-date message. Julianne confirmed that the Summit will be held June 26 at Central Washington University.

Kevin introduced Michael Chin, Chair of the Access to Justice (ATJ) Board, mentioning that for this year's Summit, there may be an opportunity to collaborate with the ATJ Board. Michael shared an idea discussed at their board meeting about visiting a rural area as part of their "on-the-road" initiative. This sparked Michael's request to Pres.-Elect Petrasek to see if there were plans for such a visit in the next year and if it might be an opportunity for partnership. During these visits, the ATJ Board usually spends a day meeting with community and legal organizations to understand local issues. ATJ holds a reception on Thursday afternoon, during which they acknowledge a community member or organization with an ATJ Promoter of Justice award. On Fridays, they typically have their regular Board meeting, coinciding with the time the STAR Summit takes place, which Michael expressed interest in participating in. Michael highlighted the importance of focusing on access to justice in rural areas, recognizing that it varies significantly across the state. Pres.-Elect Petrasek agreed that this collaboration was a great idea. Michael added that depending on the topics, the ATJ Board could consider relevant issues related to access to justice in rural areas. Kevin noted that the planning team would determine the best timing to involve Michael in planning meetings.

Announcements

None.

Next Steps/Conclusion

None.

Next Meeting: January 28, 2026

Adjournment

Pres. Elect Petrasek adjourned the meeting at 12:44 p.m.

DRAFT

Some material in this document was generated using Microsoft Copilot and was reviewed and modified by Vanessa Sweeney, WSBA Member Services and Engagement.



[External][section-leaders] Sections Opportunity to Fund a \$5,000 Rural Internship Grant

From WSBA Section Leaders <section-leaders@list.wsba.org>

Date Wed 1/14/2026 5:44 PM

To WSBA Section Leaders <section-leaders@list.wsba.org>

Sent by: Carolyn MacGregor

[Forwarded on behalf of the WSBA Small Town and Rural Council]

Dear Section Leaders,

The WSBA [Small Town and Rural \(STAR\) Council](#) is continuing its effort to build a pipeline of rural attorneys and reduce the access-to-justice gap across Washington. One effective way sections can help these efforts is by funding a **\$5,000 summer internship** for a law student placed in a rural **prosecutor's office or tribal legal department** that directly serves rural communities.

Why this matters. The Rural Practice Summer Internship Grant aligns with WSBA's mission and authorization under GR 12.2(a)(2) & (8) by promoting an effective and accessible legal system and administering programs of legal education.

How sections can participate. Due to constitutional restrictions on the use of license fees, WSBA license fees cannot be used to fund certain government placements itself. However, section funds may be used to support internships in government offices, such as prosecutors' offices and tribal organizations. This pathway has been vetted with WSBA's Office of General Counsel.

STAR Rural Internship Program snapshot:

- Grant amount: \$5,000 per intern (sections may fund one or more grants).
- Eligible students: 1Ls, 2Ls, and non-graduating 3Ls who will intern with organizations providing legal services in rural Washington. Government and nonprofit placements qualify; private firms must primarily serve underserved and underrepresented individuals.
- Application and Selection Process: The STAR Council drafts and disseminates the application form and selects the internship grant recipients in spring 2026.

Our ask. Would your section be willing to commit \$5,000 to fund one rural internship in a prosecutor's office or tribal legal department for the upcoming cycle? If you'd like to co-fund with another section, we can help coordinate pooled support to create additional placements. Please **complete [this form](#) by February 27, 2026** to confirm your section's donation.

For questions or more information, email memberbenefits@wsba.org.

Thank you for supporting rural communities and the next generation of rural practitioners.

Disclaimer: This message was drafted with the assistance of Microsoft Copilot. It has been reviewed and approved for accuracy and appropriateness by WSBA staff before distribution.



Carolyn MacGregor (she/her) | Sections Program Specialist

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