

# WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

## Small Town and Rural Council

**Small Town and Rural Council Meeting I Virtual Only**

**Wednesday, February 19, 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 January Meeting Minutes (Gov. Kari Petrasek)
2. WSBA Updates (Gov. Petrasek and Julianne Unite)
3. Council Position for Central WA Hybrid Hub Student Updates (Gov. Petrasek, Ashley Cummins)
4. Project Team Updates
  - a. Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)
  - b. Summit Project Team (Merf Ehman, Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy)
    - i. Sponsorships
  - c. Rural grant internships (Ashley Cummins, Sean King, Travis Pietila, Kevin Plachy)
  - d. Rural Day of Service (Judge Kathryn Burke, Gov. Petrasek, Kevin Plachy)
5. Legal Lunchbox – April 2025 (Ashley Cummins)
6. 2025 DOJ Access to Justice Challenge Discussion cont. (Julianne Unite)
7. Announcements
8. Next Steps/Conclusion
9. Next Meeting: March 26, 2025
10. Adjourn

## **CHARTER**

### **Small Town and Rural Council**

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**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.*

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**

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, January 22, 2025

*Virtual meeting via Zoom*

**Committee Members Present:** Governor Kari Petrasek, Merf Ehman, Rusty McGuire, Ashley Cummins, Philip Hunsucker, Sean King, Travis Pietila, Past President Dan Clark, Jesse Lamp (departed 12:26 pm), Governor Mary Rathbone

**Committee Members Absent:** Judge Kathryn Burke (excused), Thomas Garvey (unexcused), Allison Foreman (unexcused)

WSBA Board of Governors Present: Governor Matthew Dresden, Governor Christopher Bhang

**WSBA Staff Present:** Kevin Plachy, Julianne Unite, Chelle Gegax, Vanessa Sweeney

**Public Attendees Present:** Jason Walker, Chris Fox, Rachel Cortez, Jonathan Patnode

## Introductions and Approval of December Meeting Minutes (Gov. Kari Petrasek)

STAR Council Chair, Governor and Treasurer Kari Petrasek called the meeting to order at 12:13 p.m. On motion by Council Member Rusty McGuire, seconded by Council Member Philip Hunsucker, the Council approved the December STAR Council Meeting minutes. Gov. Petrasek welcomed the return of WSBA Member Engagement Manager Julianne Unite and allowed time for introductions among new meeting attendees: Rachel Cortez, OPD Recruitment, Jonathan Patnode, OPD Recruitment, and Christopher Bhang, who recently filled the open At-Large Board of Governors (BOG) seat.

## WSBA Updates (Gov. Petrasek and Julianne Unite)

Governor Petrasek provided an update on the recent BOG meeting, which occurred last weekend. The day before the meeting, she received notification that a senate bill put forward and if passed will give up to \$120k (\$20k/year over six years) in student loan forgiveness, with the emphasis on those in rural areas. The BOG voted allowing a letter to be drafted in support of the bill, with Gov. Petrasek, WSBA Executive Director Terra Nevitt and WSBA President Sunitha Anjilvel signing the letter for submission to the Senate. Gov. Petrasek continued, the BOG meeting was relatively short and included a MLK Lunch hosted by the King County Bar Association, an update on WSBA's equity and justice plan, and an update from WSBA's Legal Technology Taskforce, which has been working to create a plan on the use of technology and artificial intelligence. Governor Matthew Dresden added that the BOG conducted interviews with six candidates, and Christopher Bhang was appointed to fill the vacant At-Large seat. Julianne discussed the forthcoming round of BOG elections and mentioned anyone interested in applying for an open seat to note they all have different timelines. Julianne continued, the APEX (Acknowledging Professional Excellence) Awards are seeking nominations, which are open until February 28. Julianne encouraged those who may know a legal luminary to submit nominations. STAR Council Member and

WSBA Past President Dan Clark added the BOG honored former President Hunter Abell for his service as WSBA President and handed out FY24 President Awards at the close of the BOG meeting.

## Council Position for Central WA Hybrid Hub Student

WSBA Director of Advancement Kevin Plachy shared a reminder of the idea that was brought up at last meeting to add a position to the Council for a student from the hybrid hub program. Gov. Petrasek reached out to Bree Black Horse at Heritage University but hasn't yet received a response. Ashley mentioned she has a meeting with Bree Black Horse today and may have the opportunity to raise this topic. The Council will discuss this again at the next meeting.

## Project Team Updates

### a. Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean)

STAR Council Member Sean King shared an update on the status of job fair planning: they are in good shape right now, the flyer is finalized, registration forms complete, and the previous employer list is available for review. The next step is to put together communication for employers including scholarship information. Kevin shared that he is in process of drafting message regarding internships and will send to Sean after today's meeting. Kevin added, we will send an eblast to rural practitioners with a similar message, encouraging sign-ups and will include internship details. Sean confirmed the event date is April 4 and will be completely virtual. STAR Council Member Travis Pietila asked if there will be a template available to be sent to students, and Sean confirmed this will be available. Rusty asked if there will be an opportunity for in-person presence at Gonzaga, and Julianne replied that it is up to the host. Sean added that if there is interest from Spokane centric employers, the potential to use study rooms to conduct interviews is possible.

### b. Summit Project Team (Kevin Plachy & Merf Ehman)

Kevin began with a reminder that at the Council's last meeting, the STAR Summit date of June 26-27 was agreed upon. WSBA Member Engagement Specialist Chelle provided an update on both the Central Washington University (CWU) and Heritage University venues. Dates are available at both, and both venues restrict alcohol at events on campus, requiring off-campus venues to be used for a welcome reception. Chelle provided quotes received for each venue: approximately \$11,000 for CWU and \$10,000 for Heritage University. Neither quote includes cost estimates for an arrival/welcome reception.

Chelle added that there are nearby hotels that can host a reception and where attendees can book guestrooms. Local area wineries are an option but are small, and at a much higher cost. If event has similar attendance as last year, there may be capacity concerns. Kevin stated that the Council should decide today where to hold the event to allow us to begin securing speakers. Past President Clark added that nearby Toppenish is a possibility, and that there have been other Bar events held at the Red Lion in Yakima. Past President Clark continued that the BOG has met at the Cowiche Icehouse Restaurant, which has a large private room, and Yakima Steak Company is another option. Gov. Petrasek suggested a Thursday evening welcome reception at a downtown Yakima venue and a Friday evening reception at the end of the session at Heritage. STAR Council Member Merf Ehman raised the concern that the closing reception may have fewer people in attendance as most people will probably just want to leave at the conclusion of the summit. The Council came to a consensus to host the STAR Summit at Heritage

University. Both Gov. Petrasek and Past President Clark have ideas on hotels and event space that will work. Kevin will schedule a meeting next week for the summit planning team (Kevin, Merf, Ashley).

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

Gov. Petrasek shared an update that she, Kevin, and Julianne met with STAR Council Member Judge Kathryn Burke, who has identified a Qualified Legal Service Provider (QLSP) in Omak to potentially partner with for the rural day of service. The plan has been approved by WSBA General Counsel and is available to submit to the QLSP. Judge Burke will consult with them to determine whether they are interested in partnering and looking to schedule the event for late April or early May. The practice areas the rural day of service team is considering are criminal law/vacating sentences, estate planning, and family law. Kevin noted that the QLSP is the Northwest Justice Project. Kevin added that the program is fashioned after the Veterans Day of Service done years ago, and a \$3000 grant is available to cover costs. The QLSP will provide space, coordinate logistics, and provide malpractice insurance for volunteers handling cases. WSBA will recruit volunteers and reimburse costs to the volunteers. Northwest Justice Project will identify the most critical needs. Judge Burke is connecting the rural day of service team with Northwest Justice Project to kick off planning.

#### Legal Lunchbox – April 2025 (Ashley Cummins)

STAR Council Member Ashley Cummins provided an update on the upcoming Legal Lunchbox, scheduled for April 29<sup>th</sup>. The topic involves attracting lawyers in rural practice, and how law firms can support new attorneys and APR 6. Ashley continued that after connecting with the Pathways to Licensure Implementation Steering Committee, who is developing a CLE incorporating APR 6, they proposed combining STAR and the law clerk program to assist in finding a speaker on APR 6. Ashley proposed this to the Council, asking if there are strong feelings either way. Gov. Petrasek commented that this sounds great. Ashley will move forward in putting together the collaboration.

#### Announcements

Julianne shared information about a [challenge](#) hosted by the Department of Justice, adding the description of the Challenge: “The 2025 Access to Justice Prize is a prize competition to promote innovative solution to address the access to justice crisis. The 2025 Prize will focus on solutions that impact rural communities.” The goal is to present ideas to bridge gap between rural communities and access to justice, and the winner will be invited to present ideas in December. Julianne asked if the STAR Council would like to consider applying. Past President Clark asked if the Council wants to do this, would the BOG have to say yes? Kevin stated he’s not sure and there is the question of whether the Council would put themselves in it, since people may want to get involved individually. Gov. Petrasek added that it may be hard for individuals to do it and that it’s primarily organizations. Kevin mentioned it would be WSBA entering this and if there is interest in the council participating, we’d need to pull in WSBA General Counsel Laurie Powers and get clarification. After Gov. Petrasek asked the Council if there is interest to pursue, the Council decided to review the website and briefly discuss this at the February meeting. Kevin will ask Laurie and have more information available by the next meeting. Ashley commented that Seattle University’s Access to Justice is looking into it. Travis asked can Council members help get word out about with other communications they’re sending out? Kevin advised the WSBA has list serves, and



asked Julianne if she can obtain this information. Julianne will follow up and see what their plan is to communicate, and suggested this can be distributed to the friends of STAR Council list.

### Next Steps/Conclusion

None.

Next Meeting: February 18, 2025

### Adjournment

Kari adjourned the meeting at 12:59 p.m.

The WSBA Small Town and Rural (STAR) Council Presents:

# RURAL PRACTICE: Small Towns, Big Opportunities

## 3<sup>rd</sup> ANNUAL VIRTUAL HIRING EVENT FRIDAY, APRIL 4, 2025

- ▶ MORNING: Pre-Scheduled Virtual Interviews
- ▶ AFTERNOON: Drop-In Information Session

***This FREE event*** connects attorneys and law students with Washington State legal employers with offices more than 40 miles from Spokane, Seattle/Tacoma, or Vancouver/Portland urban areas. This event is hosted by Gonzaga University School of Law, in partnership with the WSBA Small Town & Rural Council, Seattle University School of Law, and University of Washington School of Law.

This two-part event features pre-selected and scheduled interviews for open positions (AM segment) and “drop-in” sessions to connect participants informally (PM segment). You may register to participate in either one, or both, segments of the event.

**Registration  
Now Open!**

### EMPLOYERS

Please complete [this form](#) if you are a small town or rural Washington **employer** with open attorney or law student job opportunities or are interested in speaking with attorneys and law students who want to learn more about rural practice in Washington State.

**Employer Registration Closes  
on February 28, 2025, at 5:00 p.m.**

### JOB SEEKERS

Please complete [this form](#) if you are an attorney or current law student **seeking job** opportunities in small town or rural communities throughout Washington State.

**Job Seeker Registration Closes on  
March 9, 2025, at 5:00 p.m.**

**QUESTIONS?** Email: [lawcareers@gonzaga.edu](mailto:lawcareers@gonzaga.edu)

## **Rural Practice Summer Internship Grant Application Requirements and Instructions**

1/27/2025

### **Purpose and Eligibility**

This program aligns with the WSBA mission and is authorized through GR12.2(a)(2)&(8) by promoting an effective and accessible legal system and in administering programs of legal education. The purpose of this pilot internship program is to assist in building a pipeline of rural attorneys who will help narrow the legal services gap in rural communities throughout the State of Washington.

This internship grant is open to law students (1Ls, 2Ls, and non-graduating 3Ls) who:

1. Will be participating in a summer internship for an organization providing legal services to individual members of the public in a nonprofit, government, or private<sup>1</sup> setting located within a rural community as defined by the WSBA Small Town and Rural Council (see Attachment A for a list of WA counties that qualify).
2. Interns working in a private firm setting must primarily serve individuals from underserved and underrepresented groups. These groups may face economic, geographical, cultural, or language barriers to legal services.
3. Demonstrate commitment to practicing in a rural community.
4. Articulate a desire to practice within a rural community upon graduation from law school.
5. Preference will be given to law students from rural communities.

### **Applicants will be Evaluated Based On:**

1. Articulated financial need and consideration of any other sources of support for the internship.
2. Articulated or demonstrated commitment to practicing law within rural areas in Washington after graduation.
3. Lived experience in a rural community.
4. The Council will not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, national origin, citizenship or immigration status, sex, honorably discharged veteran or military status, sexual orientation, or the presence of any sensory, mental, or physical disability or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability.

### **Amount of the Grant**

- The award amount is \$5,000.00 and up to ten grants will be awarded.
- The recipient of the grant will also be eligible for free registration and a travel stipend (in the form of reimbursement) to help defray costs to attend the STAR Rural Practice Summit at Heritage University in Toppenish, WA which takes place on June 27, 2025.

### **Individual Application Requirements and Materials**

To apply for the internship, please submit the following materials in PDF format to [memberbenefits@wsba.org](mailto:memberbenefits@wsba.org) no later than 11:59p.m. on **April 13, 2025**.

### **Include your name & relevant contact information on these items:**

- Signed application form.

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<sup>1</sup> To be eligible, interns working in the private firm setting must primarily serve individuals from underserved and underrepresented groups. These groups may face economic, geographical, cultural, or language barriers to legal services.



- ❑ Resume.
- ❑ Cover letter (maximum of 3 pages) articulating your knowledge, experience, interest, and commitment to rural practice, as well as the purpose, location, and nature of the internship or position and how it relates to your career goals. Please indicate any financial need and other sources of support for the internship<sup>2</sup>.
- ❑ If you have accepted an offer for a summer internship, please include the name of the organization, the details of the work that you are expected to perform and the legal and personal experience that you hope to gain from the internship. Students still in the application and interview process may still apply. Please share the name of the organization you have applied to, the details of the work that you are expected to perform, and the legal and personal experience that you hope to gain from the internship. Applicants must have received an offer from the employer, and must notify the WSBA of this offer, no later than May 3, 2025, to be awarded the grant.
- ❑ If available at the time of application, a letter from your prospective employer confirming that they have offered you an internship position within a rural community. By May 7, 2025, private law firms must also attest that the intern will be **primarily serving individuals from underserved and underrepresented groups** for the summer of 2025. These groups may face economic, geographical, cultural, or language barriers to legal services.

### **Candidate Selection Process**

Applications will be reviewed, and grant recipients selected, by members of the WSBA Small Town and Rural (STAR) Council (the law school representatives on the Council are recused from grant selecting recipients). The STAR Council may, at its discretion, hold telephone interviews with leading candidates. The STAR Council anticipates selecting candidates for the internship grant and announcing the awards by April 25, 2025.

### **Internship Grant Recipient Requirements**

Each fellowship recipient must complete at least 240 hours of work with his or her approved organization during the summer of 2025 (an average of 30 hours per week for a minimum of 8 weeks). The offer and acceptance of the internship opportunity must be confirmed by the employer before disbursement of funds is made to the intern. The intern should be physically located in a rural community, but allowance may be given for remote service provided interns are directly serving clients in rural communities. The intern should be employed by an organization providing legal services to individual members of the community in a rural area. Successful completion of the internship must also be confirmed by the employer. If an intern does not start or finish their internship, then they may be required to return the funds based on an assessment by the STAR Council.

Please submit this signed application along with the other requested documents (resume, cover letter and letter from prospective employer) to [memberbenefits@wsba.org](mailto:memberbenefits@wsba.org) no later than 11:59pm PT on April 13, 2025.

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<sup>2</sup> This grant is supplemental to any other sources of income or support for the internship. Additional financial support will be taken into consideration but doesn't preclude an applicant from receiving the grant.

**I hereby acknowledge the requirements outlined in this application:**

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Applicant Signature Date

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Printed Name of Applicant

**ATTACHMENT “A” – DEFINITION OF RURAL**

For purposes of the WSBA Rural Practice Summer Internship Grant rural areas are defined as: “Employers not located in Thurston, Clark, Pierce, King, Snohomish, Spokane, and Whatcom counties, WITH the provision that if the employer is in a town of 5,000 or less within said counties it will qualify.