

APRIL 2025

WSBA Technology Survey Report: Preliminary Findings

This memo summarizes key findings from the WSBA Legal Technology Survey, providing an overview of the WSBA Legal Technology Task Force's (Task Force) analysis and next steps.

INTRODUCTION

We have also included in these findings the **Final WSBA Technology Survey Report**, an overview report by National Business Research Institute (NBRI), the vendor that ran the survey (the NBRI Report), together with a slide deck called "WSBA Tech Task Force Member Survey — results overview," containing additional analysis performed by the Task Force. The Survey was prepared by the Task Force with support from WSBA staff and NBRI, and administered by NBRI from September 30-October 23, 2024. The survey received responses from 516 members (5% response rate), yielding a 98% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. For additional methodology and demographic information from the survey, please see the NBRI Report.

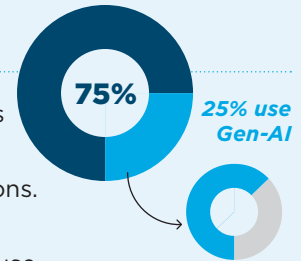
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FAST FINDINGS

Current AI Usage

75% of WSBA members do not currently use Generative AI applications.



Of those who do, 63% use free public versions for tasks like:

- > Legal research and analysis
- > Drafting and summarizing documents

63% of those who do use free versions

The members surveyed prioritize legal research for technology improvements.

Ethics, Knowledge & Training Needs



Members' self-assessed

Gen-AI knowledge: 36% rate as "Fair," 28% as "Poor." Only 9% rate themselves as "Good" or Better."



Members prefer CLEs and

hands-on workshops to learn new technologies. 72% support adding an MCLE requirement for technology.



A majority (69%) believe

Generative AI will require additional training and skills.

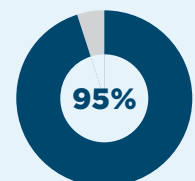


Only 23% of members

believe ethical rules adequately cover the use of Gen-AI.

Courts, Court Rules & Procedures

95% of WSBA members have not encountered AI-related issues in their cases and 97% are not practicing in courts with specific AI rules. Members expressed interest in clearer guidelines for AI use in legal contexts.



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PURPOSE

The WSBA Board of Governors established the Task Force under one of WSBA's FY2023-2024 strategic priorities to "Assess technology-related opportunities and threats and determine WSBA's role vis-a-vis regulation, consumer protection, and support to legal professionals."

The Task Force is specifically tasked to:

- > assess the legal technology landscape, identifying threats and opportunities across various legal sectors, and
- > make recommendations that support and strengthen the understanding and use of technology in members' practice, emphasizing effective, efficient, and ethical use of technology that enhances equitable access to justice.

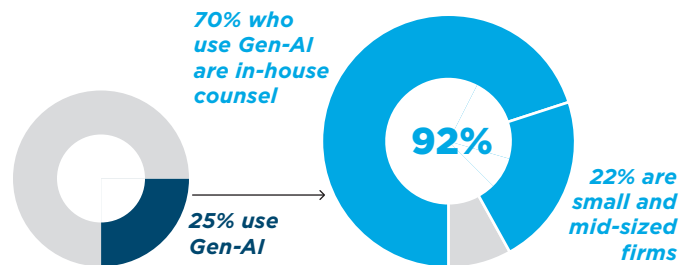
The Charter calls for identifying practical ways to integrate technology into legal services while supporting professionals across all practice settings. The initiative is not a review of technology for its own sake: at this critical point in technology development and growing legal needs, WSBA's strategic objectives aim to advance capabilities, quality, and availability for both legal professionals and those they serve.

As part of this mission, the Task Force developed a survey to evaluate how WSBA members are currently engaging with technology. Recognizing that technology adoption is becoming widespread in society, the survey aimed to assess WSBA members' use and awareness of technology, and how best to support them in the use of technology that benefits both them and the public they serve.

KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

The WSBA Technology Survey offers valuable data on how legal professionals in Washington State are engaging with technology, and the challenges and opportunities they face.

Highlights from the findings include:



Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within legal practice

AI usage remains limited, with only 25% of respondents reporting use on a regular basis. However, there are substantial differences between practice settings: for example usage is far higher among in-house counsel (70%) compared to small and mid-sized firms (22%).

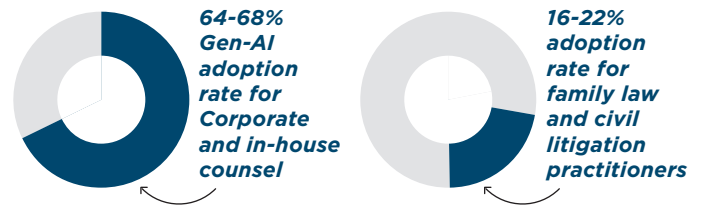
- > Early adopters cited improved efficiency, particularly in legal research and document drafting and summarization.
- > Non-users expressed concerns about fundamental trust issues: accuracy, ethical implications, and data security. Some non-users also noted that they did not see a relevant use case for AI or believe it would add value to their work. In addition, some noted concerns about AI diminishing the value of legal expertise. Sentiment analysis of verbatim comments also indicates that some have a reluctance or skepticism regarding new technologies, possibly related to concerns about trust, security, and efficacy of these tools in a legal setting. Several indicated they had made

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unsuccessful early attempts to use generative AI, informing their views on its utility.

- > Of those who are using Generative AI applications, **63%** are using free public versions for tasks such as (a) legal research and analysis and (b) drafting and summarizing documents. Some respondents also found high utility in other uses such as training, risk assessment, and strategy development, in addition to more mundane tasks.
- > Looking forward, members interested in using AI prioritized legal research as an area for technology improvement in their practice.
- > Most respondents (**69%**) believe use of AI in the legal practice will require additional training and skills. Only about **26%** of respondents indicated their current knowledge of how to use AI was at least “good” — over **60%** indicated their knowledge was “fair” or “poor”.
- > Members prefer CLEs and hands-on workshops to learn new technologies. A substantial majority (**72%**) support adding an MCLE requirement for technology. A significant portion of members (**45%**) also favored WSBA support in the form of technology due diligence guidelines, checklists, and repositories of legal technology tools and resources.
- > Only **25%** of members believe ethical rules adequately cover the use of Generative AI. Notably, the groups that use AI most in practice (in house) are least confident, by a modest margin, in current ethical rules and guidelines for legal professionals.



Practice Area Disparities in Technology Adoption

AI adoption and confidence varies substantially across practice areas. Corporate and in-house counsel show higher adoption rates (64-68%) compared to family law and civil litigation practitioners (16-22%).

- > Self-reported knowledge gaps follow similar patterns: corporate and contracts practitioners rate their AI knowledge higher compared to civil litigation practitioners.
- > These disparities extend to cybersecurity implementation, with smaller practices and specific practice areas showing lower adoption rates of essential security measures.



Cybersecurity Practices

Responses gave a mixed signal on cybersecurity. A substantial majority of members (79%) express confidence in their organization's ability to protect the organization and client data from cybersecurity threats.

- > Despite high confidence levels among respondents, significant gaps remain in critical cybersecurity

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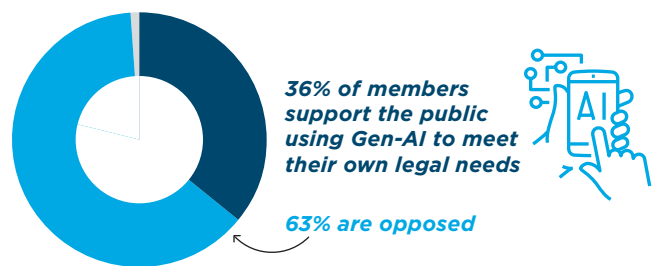
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best practices (identified by NIST, CISA, ABA, and WSBA), indicated by lower rates of their use, including regular audits (34%) and data encryption (37%). While multi-factor authentication (MFA) scored higher at 68%, given the critical importance of this practice the response is concerning – see materials through the [U.S. Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency \(CISA\)](#), [Federal Trade Commission \(FTC\)](#), [National Institute of Standards and Technology \(NIST\)](#), [American Bar Association](#), and [WSBA's Law Firm Guide to Cybersecurity](#).

- > Survey data reveals practice-specific variations in security measure implementation, with civil litigation and family law practices showing notably lower adoption rates of basic security tools compared to corporate and larger firms. Larger firms, government, and in-house practitioners had higher levels of cybersecurity infrastructure in place, compared to solo and small firms.
- > The confidence-implementation gap is particularly pronounced in smaller practices and specific practice areas like family law, where actual implementation of common security measures is significantly lower than reported confidence levels.
- > It is possible that some of these gaps are in reality smaller than indicated because respondents are unaware of cybersecurity technologies already included in their IT environment. Nonetheless the existence of the gaps and the relatively low reported usage rates of basic, recommended cybersecurity practices signals an area for focus, particularly in light of the important data practitioners receive from clients, and the trust placed in legal professionals to safeguard that data.

Non-AI Legal Technologies

Tools such as practice management systems, forms automation, and e-discovery platforms are underutilized, particularly in smaller and rural practices. Barriers include cost, lack of training, limited awareness, and a perception of low rate of return on investment.



Access to Justice

Members were slightly more positive (36%) in their support of the public using generative AI to meet their own legal needs (e.g., self-representative litigants) than the rate at which members themselves have adopted generative AI in their practices (25%), but those opposed (63%) held very strong views.

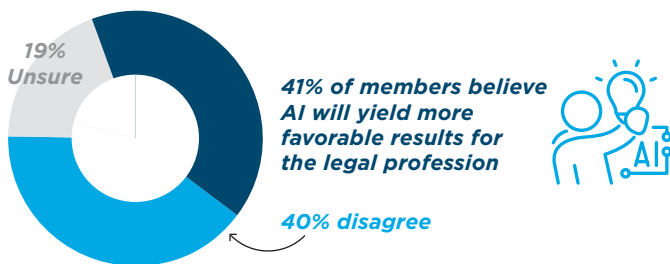
- > Those supporting public use to meet their own legal needs said AI can help bridge the gap for individuals who cannot afford legal services, and that AI can serve as a cost-effective and highly available option, especially in rural or otherwise underserved areas, delivering legal services to those who would otherwise have no help.
- > Those opposed echoed the same concerns cited by those concerned about use of generative AI directly in the legal profession: accuracy, reliability, and lack of ethical guidance or standards. In addition, they noted that the general public lacks the foundational legal knowledge to understand AI-generated information properly, what questions to ask, how to fact-check

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AI responses, or how to apply the information.

- > Slightly more members supported the view that AI will yield more favorable results in narrowing the access to justice gap (**41%**) than those who disagreed (**38%**). Responses of “unsure” were **18%**.



Impact on Legal Profession

Respondents generally have a favorable view of technology-driven changes in the legal profession, but opinions are divided on the impact of generative AI on the court system and the legal profession.

- > Respondents had a generally favorable view about technology-driven change, with **55%** supporting the view that those changes will improve the experience of being a lawyer in Washington compared to the last two decades, **25%** not supporting the view, and **18%** unsure.
- > At the same time, views were more divided about specific impacts of generative AI. A significant plurality (**about 40%**) disagreed with the statement “Generative AI will have a positive impact on the court system, both in terms of efficiency and fairness,” with **38%** supporting the statement and **20%** unsure. Similarly, **41%** of respondents supported the statement that “Overall, I believe AI will yield more favorable results for the legal profession.” About **40%** disagreed with the statement and **19%** were unsure.

The Final WSBA Technology Survey Report provides a full breakdown of the data, including visuals, demographic trends, and quantitative insights.

ANALYSIS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

Building on the survey findings, the WSBA Technology Task Force has conducted an initial analysis, identifying areas where deeper consideration is needed:

1 Technology understanding is a necessity — technology is not an end in itself. Restating a key theme for the Task Force — the Task Force is not evaluating technology for its own sake, nor does the Task Force believe that any specific level, type, or application of technology adoption is necessary for all practice members. At the same time, as these technologies become increasingly ubiquitous in society, they are also critically important to understand, both as a part of what happens in our world as the subject of legal issues, disputes, contracts, and harms, and as a part of the toolkit that may be necessary to serve clients effectively. Generative AI is rapidly becoming both a tool for enhancing legal practice and an essential competence for legal professionals in this rapidly changing world. Understanding and usage of such technology could soon become a requirement for legal professionals to discharge a variety of ethical obligations to clients.

2 WSBA members represent significant diversity in practice types, needs, and technology usage.

Survey responses reflect the varied nature of legal practices across Washington, from large in-house counsel teams to solo practitioners and rural firms. This diversity leads to widely differing technology requirements. For instance, while some members benefit from robust AI and data analytics tools, others prioritize basic practice management systems.

The survey breakout data reveals that these differences are particularly pronounced between practice areas. While corporate and in-house counsel show higher technology adoption rates and confidence

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levels, civil litigation and family law practitioners consistently report lower adoption rates, knowledge levels, and implementation of security measures.

The survey supports the need for tailored approaches to technology resources and training. WSBA's technology support strategy needs to take into account differences in capabilities, supporting a spectrum of experiences, practice area, firm size, and geographic location.

3 Diverse Needs Require Diverse Solutions. The diversity of practices also means there is no universal “right” technology. Survey comments suggest that smaller firms and rural practitioners require simpler, cost-effective solutions, while larger organizations may demand sophisticated, scalable, or even bespoke platforms. This diversity underscores the importance of offering scalable and adaptable technology resources, consumable in different ways. It also means that driving awareness across the entire membership, not just part of it, will be an important part of next steps.

4 Resources should include ready access and availability to small firms, rural practices, and solo practitioners. Smaller and rural practices face significant barriers, including financial constraints, limited access to training, and resource gaps. These disparities were consistently highlighted in the survey as critical obstacles to technology adoption. Supporting these members will require targeted, affordable solutions that address their unique challenges.

5 Members called out an interest in awareness and capabilities. Survey responses centered on training and resources suggest that the biggest investment for WSBA should not be in technology itself but in the skills, awareness, and capabilities of its members. Practical training programs, clear guidelines,

and accessible resources will support members as they navigate technological changes. Respondents emphasized the importance of practical, hands-on training opportunities, including CLEs, peer-led workshops, and tools tailored to their specific needs. A significant majority of respondents said they support a technology-related MCLE requirement.

6 Bridging gaps will help with awareness and competence at key technology skills for legal professionals. Understanding of AI remains limited among many segments of members, limiting use of potentially helpful tools. Many respondents, particularly those in small firms, indicated they are overwhelmed by day-to-day practice demands and lack the time and in-house support to explore and implement new tools. This highlights the need for targeted education and support to make AI and other technology adoption feasible and relevant.

7 Trust is fundamental, especially in the legal profession. Many respondents articulated fears about generative AI replacing lawyers entirely, overshadowing its potential as a tool to support and augment legal work. Respondents expressed a lack of understanding about effective use cases for generative AI, both within their practices and for potential use by the public to meet their own legal needs. Addressing fears of both members and the public and demonstrating valuable uses will be critical to help legal professionals gain improvements and efficiencies from these tools.

8 Generative AI has a dual role for legal professionals — both as a tool in the practice and as an essential area in the subject matter of daily lives, and hence, the practice of law. Generative AI is increasingly becoming part of daily life in business, in government, and in society. Its implications for the legal profession extend far

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beyond direct legal applications of technology. Even for those not using generative AI in their practice, understanding its operations and its role is critical for issues like evidence authentication, procedural rules, and overall professional competence. Note for example [proposed new federal rules of evidence addressing AI, deepfakes, and machine generated evidence](#) and a recent Florida state case [allowing a virtual reality simulation of a crime scene reconstruction into evidence](#) — with the judge viewing the scene through VR goggles. As technology evolves, basic fluency in AI will be a fundamental skill for legal representation.

9 Many members are not confident the current Rules of Professional Conduct effectively address AI technologies, and are unsure they know how to spot and resolve ethical considerations in the use of generative AI. Respondents frequently voiced concerns about ethical challenges, particularly around data privacy and client confidentiality. Many emphasized the need for clear, WSBA-led guidelines, checklists, and potentially even approved technologies to ensure AI tools are used responsibly and in compliance with ethical obligations under the Rules of Professional Conduct.

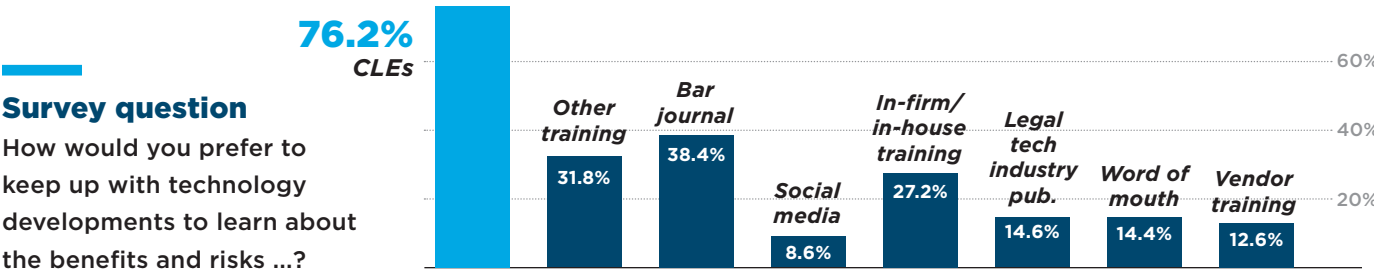
10 Improved Cybersecurity readiness is both urgent and important. A significant gap exists between members’ confidence in their cybersecurity practices and the reality of their implementation. Many respondents lack foundational measures like multi-

factor authentication and regular security audits. Solo practitioners and smaller firms are especially vulnerable due to resource limitations. The survey underscores the need for practical cybersecurity tools and education tailored to these groups. They also point to limited awareness of tools already available from WSBA, the ABA, and other resources.

11 Using technology tools to improve access to justice requires developing public trust in the technology. For technology to improve access to justice, it must earn the trust of the public, WSBA members, and the Courts. This is true whether the technology user is a legal professional or someone in the general public accessing legal information. Survey responses emphasized the importance of transparency, reliability, and ethical use of technology to avoid misuse or over-reliance. Public-facing legal tools must be rigorously tested and clearly communicated to build confidence among users, and to ensure consumer protection.

12 WSBA members will need more assistance and support as additional tools and capabilities come on line — WSBA will need to develop robust, sustained capabilities to support members with these changes. The technology environment continues to change. The needs expressed in the survey indicate training and support for members are not a “one and done” experience. WSBA will need to adapt to these needs, which are likely beyond current resourcing levels.

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COMPARISON TO OTHER SURVEYS

The results from the WSBA Legal Technology Task Force Survey are generally in line with other recent technology surveys, both in the US and internationally, highlighting similar patterns in technology adoption (and costs/benefits), barriers, and opportunities across jurisdictions. Several industry players have also done surveys — those tend to focus on more specific segments of the legal technology market and have not been considered here.

> **AI Usage:** Nationally, the [2023 ABA Legal Technology Survey Report](#) found generative AI usage among lawyers at approximately 10%, indicating a lower baseline nationally. However, recognizing the speed of uptake of generative AI since 2022, it is likely that adoption has grown since the report's publication, reflecting broader technological trends. That growth is mirrored in an [ALPS study](#) in 2024, finding that 20% of its lawyer respondents were using AI in their day to day business. In the UK, a [2023 survey](#) found [13% of lawyers using AI, growing to 26% by 2024](#). Subsequent polling suggests that a [significant portion of UK lawyers plan to adopt AI tools in the near future](#), pointing to rapid acceptance and integration.

One recent [consumer survey that included questions on use of AI for legal purposes from LexisNexis](#) offered an interesting comparison point. While the WSBA Tech Task Force survey found 25% of legal professionals are using generative AI in their practice, the LexisNexis survey found that 27% of consumers have used generative AI to answer legal questions for themselves.

> **Barriers to adoption:** Similar barriers are reported in several surveys. In particular, the above referenced surveys from the ABA and the UK highlight cost, lack of expertise, and concerns about ethical implications as common challenges to the adoption of useful technology tools.

> **Cybersecurity Practices:** Similar to the WSBA Legal Technology Task Force Survey, the ABA's [2021 Legal Technology Survey Report](#) underscores that many firms fail to implement fundamental security measures despite rising threats. Cybersecurity remains a universal challenge, particularly for smaller firms without dedicated IT resources.

> **Access to Justice:** Across jurisdictions, there is growing interest in using technology to enhance access to legal services. The UK surveys [highlighted pilot projects aimed at leveraging AI for pro bono services and self-help resources](#), generally supported by bar members.

NEXT STEPS FOR THE TASK FORCE

The Task Force is using these findings and the underlying survey responses to help guide its priorities. The work is part of the Task Force's overall research and analysis to inform final recommendations for the WSBA Board of Governors. The Task Force has reviewed these results within its Working Groups and at the full Task Force level.

For additional survey results and quantitative analysis, please refer to the Final WSBA Technology Survey Report from NBRI and the slide deck called "WSBA Tech Task Force Member Survey – results overview."