

# WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

## Small Town and Rural Committee

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

**Wednesday, September 27, 2023, | 12:10 p.m. – 1:10 p.m.**

Via [Zoom](#) | Meeting ID: 879 0573 6111 | Passcode: 811616 | Call-in: 888-788-0099

## AGENDA

1. Introductions, July Meeting Recap, and Approval of July Meeting Minutes (Gov. Kari Petrasek)
2. WSBA Updates (Gov. Petrasek and Julianne Unite)
3. Subcommittee Report Updates, if any (Subcommittee chairs Laurie Powers, Gov. Petrasek, Betsy Penoyar)
4. Project Team Updates
  - a. Summit Project Team (Laurie Powers)
  - b. Financial Project Team (Michelle Lucas, Sophia Byrd McSherry)
5. Seattle U Hybrid Hubs (Ashely Rae Cummins)
6. Proposed Meeting Schedule for FY24
7. Announcements
8. Next Steps/Conclusion
9. Next Meeting: October TBD
10. Adjournment

# WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

## Small Town and Rural Committee Charter

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

### ***Purpose***

The WSBA Small Town and Rural (STAR) Committee is committed to strengthen and support the practice of law in the rural communities throughout Washington state. Members of the STAR Committee will work to ensure that the practice of law in rural communities is present, growing, and thriving.

Practitioners in rural communities are few and far between. Additionally, many of these practitioners are nearing retirement without a clear plan of succession for their clients, leaving a void of access to legal representation and counsel. The STAR Committee will guide policy & program development, serves as ambassadors between the WSBA and these communities, explore and advocate for creative and innovative solutions, and regularly assess the legal landscape in rural communities to determine if WSBA policy, advocacy and program development require further resource for sustainability and improvements.

The STAR Committee aligns with the authorized activities outlined in General Rule 12. More specifically, GR 12.1 (a) articulates the Washington Supreme Court’s regulatory objective to provide, in part, “meaningful access to justice. . .” while GR 12.1(d) strives for “affordable and accessible legal services.” In addition, the STAR Committee aligns with the authorized activities outlined in GR 12.2, in particular by providing “services to members and the public,” and “fostering collegiality among its members and goodwill between the legal profession and the public.”

Further, the STAR Committee furthers the WSBA mission to serve the public and the members of the Bar by providing focused attention on the unique needs of residents and members in rural areas both by improving access to legal practitioners in rural communities and outreach and development of a pipeline of younger rural residents to pursue a legal career and serve their communities.

### ***Definition of “Rural”***

For the purpose of the STAR Committee and reflective of Washington’s unique geographic and socio-geographic landscape, the definition of “rural” is as follows:

Based on the definitions produced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service (ERS) and an overview of Washington county population, we focused on counties with populations of less than 50,000 and more than 2,500. These areas are considered ‘urban non-metro areas not part of larger labor markets’ by ERS. As part of the working definition, and for ease, we have termed these counties as ‘rural.’ Based upon WA county population data, we’ve pursued a hypothesis that counties with 30,000 or more as rural, but likely more

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

### **Composition**

Members of the STAR Committee should have demonstrated experience and/or interest in a thriving legal practice in Washington's rural communities. The STAR Committee will consist of 13 members and are outlined as:

- Chair (voting member)
- 2 Current or Former WSBA Board of Governors Members (voting members)
- 1 Active WSBA Member At Large (voting member)
- 4 Active WSBA Members from rural communities - see above for definition of "rural" (voting members)
- 1 Active WSBA Young Lawyer Member, as defined in WSBA Bylaws (voting member)
- 3 Law School Representatives (voting members, must be currently employed with a WA Law School which is not currently represented on the Committee.)
- 1 Active WSBA Lawyer Member currently employed with a Qualified Legal Service Provider (QLSP)(voting member).

WSBA Staff Liaison: Member Services and Engagement Manager or staff member in the Advancement Department, non-voting

Board of Governor Liaison: as assigned annually, non-voting.

### **Terms**

- Chair: two-year term
- Members: three-year term

### **Initial Committee Terms**

The first appointments to the STAR Committee should effectuate a staggered rotation of STAR Committee members. Therefore, the following terms are in place for the first appointment cycle only. All subsequent terms should adhere to the term limits stated above. STAR Committee member serving an initial term less than three years, should be considered an incomplete term. Therefore, the member is eligible to serve two subsequent complete three-year terms in WSBA Bylaws.

- 2 Active WSBA Members  
*1 member with two-year term, 1 member with three-year term.*
- 4 Active WSBA Members from rural communities (see above for definition)  
*1 member with one-year term, 1 member with two years term, 2 members with three-years term.*
- 3 Law School Representatives (voting, must be currently employed with a WA Law School)
- *1 member with one-year term, 1 member with two-years term, 1 member with three-years term.*

The following positions will begin as a standard term as set forth in this charter.

- Chair
- 1 Active WSBA Young Lawyer Member

- 1 Active WSBA Lawyer Member currently employed with a Qualified Legal Service Provider (QLSP).

### ***Scope of Work***

The scope of the STAR Committee's work will focus on what the WSBA is uniquely positioned to do in supporting a sustaining and thriving environment for the practice of law in Washington's rural communities. The STAR Committee will work with all relevant and interested stakeholders to collaborate where needed. The provision of direct legal services and civil legal aid to the public is outside the scope of the STAR Committee.

### ***Measures of Success***

- Increased awareness of the issues and possible solutions to address any gap in practicing members in rural communities.
- A sustainable pipeline of legal practitioners in rural communities.
- Increased numbers of legal practitioners in rural communities.
- The establishment of funding for programs and initiatives for the practice of law in rural communities.

### ***STAR Committee Roles***

#### **1. Community Education and Outreach**

Coordinated efforts to educate members and potential members about the unique needs, opportunities and benefits of a rural practice. This can include, but should not be limited to, comprehensive information on WSBA's website, features in WSBA publications, presentations at high schools, law schools and community colleges. Meetings and events, such as a summit or symposium, to highlight the issue, convene interested stakeholders to share their concerns and strategize on possible solutions.

#### **2. Pipeline and Placement Program(s)**

Develop WSBA programming, or WSBA supported/partnered programming designed to build a pipeline of practitioners in rural areas as well as an incentive program to encourage members to explore a rural practice on a time-limited or multi-year timeframe. This role should explore a possible collaboration or strategic overlap with WSBA existing and future mentorship program(s). In particular, this role will require extensive strategic planning and identification of external stakeholder support and additional funding sources. Coordinate with law schools and other stakeholders regarding economic incentives to practice in rural areas.

#### **3. Job Opportunities and Clearinghouse**

Utilize existing and future WSBA resources to support and highlight job opportunities in rural communities. This role should include making it easier, and perhaps more cost-effective, to add job postings to WSBA's service. Develop a clearing house to assist retiring members with succession planning and the buying/selling of a practice.

### ***Committee Evaluation***

The STAR Committee should conduct an assessment within five years from the date of Board of Governors' approval by 1) conducting a survey of rural practitioners to provide stakeholder feedback regarding the impact of this Committee to effectuate change in these areas, 2) assessing the scope of work to reflect impact and progress in this area and align with trends in the greater legal community, and 3) earnestly examining if the Committee is necessary to continue the scope of work.

# WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

## Small Town and Rural Committee

### Small Town and Rural Committee Meeting Minutes

Saturday, July 8, 2023 | 12:15 p.m. – 12:54 p.m.

*Virtual meeting via Zoom*

**Committee Members Present:** Governor Kari Petrasek, Allison Foreman, Rusty McGuire, Elizabeth Penoyar, Zachary Bryant, Laurie Powers, Erin Fullner,

**Committee Members Absent:** Hunter Abell, Kathryn Burke, Sarah Cuellar, Erin Lloyd

**WSBA Staff Present:** Julianne Unite – Member Services and Engagement Manager, Chelle Gegax – Member Services and Engagement Administrative Assistant

**WSBA Board of Governors Liaisons:** Governor Sunitha Anjilvel

**Public Attendees Present:** Chelsea Baldwin, Michelle Lucas, Sophia McByrd Sherry, Judge Rebecca Pennell, Tyler O'brien, Nick Straley

## Introductions, June Meeting Recap, and Approval of June Meeting Minutes (Gov. Kari Petrasek)

Governor Kari Petrasek called the meeting to order at 12:15 p.m. Kari asked first time attendees to introduce themselves. Tyler O'brien stated that he grew up in a small town in Adams County and is currently practicing in California but licensed in Washington as well. Nick Straley stated that he is attending on behalf of STAR Committee Member Merf Ehman, while they are out of office. On motion by Committee Member Rusty McGuire, seconded by Committee Member Zachary Bryant, by unanimous vote (8-0-0) the committee approved the June meeting minutes.

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

Kari advised the committee that the Board of Governors (BOG) is looking at a couple of important topics. The first being the ongoing issue of free desk books free under various circumstances. There will be an email with a survey regarding feedback on this topic. The BOG also looking at whether the WSBA office should relocate outside of downtown Seattle and is Considering satellite locations in Spokane or other locations As an alternative. Kari asked for members to provide any/all feedback to her or Governor Sunitha Anijilvel prior to the upcoming BOG meeting.

Member Services and Engagement Manager, Julianne Unite, advised those in attendance that a – Member demographic study going out to WSBA members on a rolling basis and encouraged members to complete the survey, should they receive it. Julianne also commented that the WSBA Summer CLE Sale is currently taking place and features several recorded products at half off for those seeking to fulfill CLE requirements.

Julianne advised that the first draft of budget was reviewed by Budget and Audit Committee for FY24. This draft of the budget includes \$5000 for the committee (meetings, etc.) and \$55,000 for activities such as summit, outreach, etc.

### Career Center Discount Updates (Julianne Unite)

Julianne provided an update on the Career Center Discount initiative. There have been 39 approved inquiries since launch. Julianne also commented on an inquiry that was received regarding the sale of a practice. This does not count for job posting through WSBA, but Julianne wanted to bring this topic to the attention to the committee regarding this for future inquiries in case the STAR committee wants to consider this as a something to address. As a standard, the WSBA does refer members looking to sell their practices to our WSBA Practice Management Advisor, Margeaux Green. In the next quarter we should have a more accurate insight to how many contacts versus. how many posted, and how many were hired.

### STAR Committee Recommendations Team Updates (Gov. Petrasek)

Kari provided an update on committee appointments for the upcoming fiscal year. Julianne advised that they are pending and for committee members to not discuss outside of this meeting. The recommendations are as follows: Jesse Lamp from Ferry County for the rural position, formerly held by Sarah Cuellar; and Allison Foreman was recommended to continue in her current position. The committee should anticipate being a full committee at the start of the next fiscal year.

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

Committee Member Laurie Powers provided an update on the Pipeline Committee and the discussions of the Rural Practice Summit. WSBA Director of Advancement Kevin Plachy, Merf, Committee Member Chelsea Baldwin and Laurie met and discussed having a summit/CLE/gathering with the partnership of Gonzaga and rural practitioners discussing rural issues. They began determining ideas and concluded that there are various needs of opportunities. This is planned to be a one day event, on a Friday from 8-4, with a networking welcoming reception the night before for anyone who would like to attend. The day of would begin with check in, breakfast, keynote with QA and various speakers. Topics could vary from funding of court system, revenue streams, and challenges that we face in justice in rural communities. The first part would be identifying issues in rural practice, and the second part would be a facilitated speaker panel involving issues and opportunities faced in the field. Potential speakers could include the AGO, chair of WAPA, ATJ board Chair, and/or Judge Pennell, to talk about how to address things on a bigger scale. The event would include lunch, followed by multiple sets of break outs with different topics, which may include how to attract and keep rural attorneys, how to address lgbtqia+ concerns, effectively onboarding attorneys, addressing disability concerns, and overcoming them, and more.

Kari asked why they planned to have this on a Friday instead of a Saturday, when there were concerns of school being in session? Is the plan to have this in summer? Laurie responded that they are considering late May to early June.

## Rural Practice Mobile Unit Updates

### Financial Project Team Updates (cont. from June meeting)

Merf is not in attendance and cannot provide an update. Kari advised that the team is looking for ways to help with student loans, legislative approach, and federal laws and asked if Michelle Lucas could assist. Michelle agreed to address at their next meeting. Sophia Byrd McSherry advised that State OPD has a presence at the Legislature, and she would be happy to coordinate with Michelle, and provided her email in the chat.

Julianne advised that the Member Services and Engagement Team is planning their next MentorLink Mixer with a focus on student loans and debt and provided information on the event details. Julianne asked if there was anyone in attendance who would like to mentor or if they knew of anyone who would be a good fit, to please contact her.

### Announcements

None currently.

### Other Business

Rusty asked if there was data available that showed how student loans would be discounted based on rural practice, Julianne responded that we may have historical data from 2020 when the rural practice project available but would need to investigate that.

Judge Pennell commented that at the meeting in May, there was discussion on attracting attorneys to rural locations such as Yakima. Judge Pennell provided an update that they hosted several activities such as hikes, barbeques, and other events for summer interns and felt that it was very successful. It was easy to put together and she extended the offer to help plan with others in different counties should they wish to plan something similar.

### Next Steps/ Conclusion

Julianne will send a cancellation notice for the August meeting.

WSBA Member Services and Engagement Administrative Assistant, Chelle Gegax, to include an agenda item for Summit Project Team Updates.

### Next Meeting: August 23

Kari advised the committee that there will not be a meeting in August, and the next meeting will be held in September.

### Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:54 pm.