

WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

Small Town and Rural Council

Small Town and Rural Council Meeting I Virtual Only
Wednesday, April 22, 2026 | 12:10 p.m. – 1:10 p.m.

AGENDA

1. Introductions and Approval of March Meeting Minutes (Pres.-Elect Kari Petrasek)
2. WSBA Updates (Pres.-Elect Petrasek and Julianne Unite)
 - a. FY27 Budget
3. STAR Council Presentation to the Board of Governors (Pres.-Elect Kari Petrasek)
 - a. Survey
4. Project Updates
 - a. Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)
 - b. Rural Internships (Kevin Plachy)
 - c. April 2026 Legal Lunchbox (Ashley Cummins)
 - d. Rural Day of Service (Kevin Plachy, Julianne Unite)
 - e. Small Town and Rural Practice Day Proclamation (Pres.-Elect Petrasek, Ashley Cummins)
 - f. Summit Project Team (Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy, Michele Moore, Gloria Guizar)
5. Vacant Position(s) and Recruitment Update
 - a. STAR Chair position, current vacancies, and upcoming positions
6. Announcements
7. Next Steps/Conclusion
8. Next Meeting: May 27, 2026
9. 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, March 25, 2026 *Virtual meeting via Zoom*

Council Members Present: President-Elect Kari Petrasek, Jesse Lamp (departed 12:57 p.m.), Travis Pietila, Ashley Cummins (arrive 12:21 p.m.), Past President Dan Clark, Michele Moore, Allison Foreman (arrived 12:18 p.m., departed 1:01 p.m.), Rusty McGuire, Sean King (departed 12:57 p.m.) Governor Mary Rathbone (arrived 12:14 p.m., departed 12:50 p.m.), Philip Hunsucker

Council Members Absent: Gloria Guizar (non-voting)

WSBA Board of Governors Present: N/A

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

Public Attendees Present: Nat Jacob, Sophia Byrd McSherry, Michael Chin

Introductions and Approval of February 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 Rusty McGuire, seconded by Past President Dan Clark, the Council approved by unanimous vote the February STAR Council Meeting minutes (8-0-0).

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

Pres.-elect Petrasek reported that the last Board of Governors (BOG) meeting was held on March 6 in Olympia, where the BOG also met with the Washington Supreme Court for updates prior to the meeting. Highlights included entity regulation with five applications received. The justices said proposed projects need to expand access to justice. Pres.-elect Petrasek mentioned Justice Sal Mungia will now chair the Rules Committee. The BOG approved a proposal to sign the National Conference of Bar Presidents pledge supporting legal and judicial independence. Proposed comments to court rules from the Rules and Procedures Committee, particularly regarding criminal rules of limited jurisdiction and criminal rules, were also approved. The next BOG meeting is scheduled for May 1-2 in Wenatchee.

WSBA Member Services and Engagement Manager Julianne Unite reported on current and upcoming BOG open positions, noting that applications are due by April 7 for terms beginning on October 1. Available roles include President-elect, District 2, District 7 North, and District 8. An at-large seat will also be available with a term starting on October 1, for which the application deadline is April 15. WSBA Advancement Department Director Kevin Plachy clarified that the open positions this year will not be elected. Instead, interested candidates must submit applications and the BOG will appoint individuals to these positions. Julianne clarified that the appointed positions are the District seats. The President-elect position and At-large position will undergo a different process.

Julianne also mentioned that the WSBA Spring sale for on-demand CLEs runs through April 7, offering a 50% discount.

FY27 Budget

Pres.-elect Petrasek advised that the STAR Council is to begin drafting budget requests for FY27, and asked the Council to share ideas for new programs with Julianne and Pres.-elect Petrasek so they can be reviewed at next month's meeting.

Vacant Positions Recruitment Updates

STAR Chair Position, current vacancies, and upcoming positions

Julianne reported that one application has been received for the STAR Council's open Qualified Legal Service Provider (QLSP) position. Once Julianne receives confirmation from WSBA Volunteer Engagement Manager Paris Eriksen, it will go to the recommendations team which includes Pres.-elect Petrasek, STAR Council BOG Liaison Allison Widney, and staff liaison Julianne for review. The New Member position remains open. Beginning in May, general applications for all committees, boards, and task forces open. There are some STAR Council positions that will expire September 30 of this year and if people are interested in filling those positions, they would need to apply in May. Other than the QLSP and New Member positions, there is an at-large position, rural position, and the Seattle University Law School representative position opening up, all for a three year term beginning October 1. Julianne announced that the STAR Council Chair position will be available as Pres.-elect Petrasek becomes WSBA president. The chair is appointed for two years by the WSBA President-elect, not through the standard committee application. If interested, contact Julianne or Pres.-elect Petrasek for more information. Unlike other roles, the chair application opens in June and uses a separate process outside myWSBA.

Project Updates

Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)

STAR Council Member Sean King shared an update on the April 10 job fair. Sean expressed disappointment with the limited job postings for 1Ls and 2Ls, noting that only two were available for current students rather than licensed practitioners or possibly 3Ls. Participation was especially low outside the three law schools. Sean noted not holding the event twice in the academic year and found spring to be the best time for future events.

Rural Internships (Kevin Plachy)

Kevin noted that the internship grant opportunity is being marketed via the law schools, and it was confirmed that a total of four applications have been received, with one not meeting requirements. The group discussed whether individuals in Washington's APR 6 (Rule 6) Law Clerk Program should be eligible for the current grant program. Past President Clark mentioned receiving inquiries regarding the Rule 6 program and eligibility for internship grants. Past President Clark noted that it may not be appropriate to include participants of the Rule 6 program, as they are employed elsewhere. Participation would require individuals to take leave from their current positions to pursue other opportunities, which may not align with the program's objectives. Pres.-elect Petrasek clarified that the current application specifically requires applicants to be from a law school, which automatically excludes Rule 6 clerks. Although

inquiries have come in from Rule 6 candidates, the current wording cannot be changed this year, though it is something to consider for the next application cycle. Kevin added that from a policy perspective, it does not explicitly exclude Rule 6 clerks, but internal discussions raised concerns about how to handle stipends when clerks are already required to work under supervising attorneys to satisfy their program requirements. Kevin questioned whether they receive academic credit similar to law students, suggesting more research is needed to determine equivalency.

Nat Jacob shared that there has been significant interest from potential Rule 6 applicants and expressed support for removing exclusive language so that clerks can apply and be evaluated individually. Nat explained that clerks could benefit from rural placements and that the program could help introduce them to rural practice, potentially leading them to pursue long-term work in underserved communities. Nat described a scenario in which a clerk working in a city could do a short-term placement in a rural public defense office, discover they enjoy the community, and later seek permanent employment there. Sophia added that the Office of Public Defense has funding dedicated to specific internship programs, and those funds may not be flexible enough to support Rule 6 clerks, though she was not entirely certain. Nat responded that the statute governing the rural fellowship does not appear to exclude clerks, but similar structural questions about supervision and program alignment would still need to be considered. Pres.-elect Petrusek acknowledged that changes cannot be made for this year but emphasized that the conversation will help inform revisions to next year's application structure and eligibility requirements.

Julianne mentioned that the internship grant application deadline is April 13, and the next step requires an internal group from the STAR Council to review and make recommendations before the Council's April meeting. Law school representatives and anyone from firms currently hiring are recused from both the group and the vote to prevent conflicts of interest. Pres.-elect Petrusek noted that one member of this group would be a governor and plans to contact individuals to recruit a third person.

April Legal Lunchbox (Ashley Cummins)

STAR Council Member Ashley Cummins confirmed that the program is ready to be presented on Tuesday, April 28 at noon. An eblast will be sent as soon as the March event is complete.

Rural Day of Service (Kevin Plachy, Julianne Unite)

Julianne noted partnerships with Inland Empire Legal Aid for the upcoming Day of Service, scheduled to be held at the American Legion in Chewelah on May 4, and with Northwest Justice Project for a Day of Service in Grant County, potentially Moses Lake, on September 18. Julianne encouraged the Council to volunteer if possible, and to help spread the word. Governor Mary Rathbone offered to help find venues in Ephrata.

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

Ashley reported the request is with the Washington Governor's office; and is awaiting a response prior to the May STAR Council meeting.

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

Ashley reported that the planning team has met and is requesting feedback from the Council regarding the proposed agenda. Ashley presented the draft agenda and noted that the keynote speaker, Justice

Helen Whitener, has been confirmed. Ashley reviewed the agenda and indicated that the planning team welcomes assistance with securing additional speakers. Access to Justice (ATJ) board Chair Mike Chin commented about the possibility of including a land acknowledgment, perhaps during opening comments at the Summit. The Summit planning team will discuss this topic at their next meeting. Past President Clark noted that recent feedback calls for more recruitment focused on rural issues. Ashley agreed, suggesting that community building and networking at the Summit could support recruitment efforts. Julianne mentioned there is a guest room block at the Hotel Windrow in Ellensburg, and to please let us know if you are planning to attend. Mike noted that the reception, scheduled for the evening prior to the Summit, will feature ATJ presenting the Promoter of Justice Award, and remarks from the Bar Association Foundation. Mike is requesting input from the Council regarding possible additional topics to include in the program during the reception.

Rural Internships (cont.)

Nat inquired about a 3L student who has concerns about eligibility for a grant because the application language appears to exclude individuals who are about to graduate. The student is currently in Maricopa County, Arizona, but is originally from Washington and has a job opportunity waiting there; however, the determining factor in whether they can return is the \$5,000 grant, which would make the move financially possible. Without it, the student would likely need to remain in Arizona. Nat raised the question of whether this student could still apply for the grant and whether their application would be considered, noting that this situation might represent a valuable opportunity to bring someone into rural practice in Washington right after graduation. Kevin explained that the application explicitly states it is open to 1Ls, 2Ls, and non-graduating 3Ls, and if the student is graduating, they fall outside the scope of what was approved. Expanding eligibility would require further discussion and revisions, similar to the conversations about APR 6, because as written, graduating students are excluded. Nat acknowledged this as a clear “no” to bring back to the student but encouraged the group to consider removing such limitations in the future to avoid restricting the ability to support special opportunities that align with the mission of increasing rural practice. Kevin agreed that it is worth examining, suggesting that perhaps it could be opened to graduates within a certain time frame, though the appropriate criteria would need further thought. Pres.-elect Petrasek added that the original reasoning for excluding graduating 3Ls may have been based on the assumption that they would typically be studying for the bar exam and might not want to balance bar prep with an internship, whereas non-graduating 3Ls would not be facing that conflict. Pres.-elect Petrasek noted this is another factor to revisit as the group reworks next year’s application language. Nat added that many highly motivated students and graduates are capable of managing both responsibilities simultaneously, particularly those who are on the lower end of required internship hours, and felt it was important to acknowledge that possibility. Pres.-elect Petrasek remarked that beginning next year there will be an alternative pathway to licensure, meaning not all graduating students will be preparing for the traditional bar exam. Some will instead pursue an experiential track, which could align well with the grant program, giving the group even more reason to reconsider how the eligibility language is structured moving forward.

Announcements

None.

Next Steps/Conclusion

None.

Next Meeting: April 22, 2026

Adjournment

President-Elect Petrasek adjourned the meeting at 1:03 p.m.

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

DRAFT

MEMORANDUM

To: STAR Council Members

From: Kari Petrasek, Chair, STAR Council

Date: April 16, 2026

Subject: Committee Evaluation Requirements and Upcoming Discussion

Overview

As outlined in the STAR Council Charter, the Council is required to conduct an evaluation based on the provisions articulated at the end of the charter. In preparation for our discussion during next week's meeting, this memo summarizes the evaluation requirements and identifies the agenda topics that will guide our conversation.

Council Evaluation Requirements

The Charter identifies three primary components of the required evaluation:

- **Assessment of the Council's Work and Impact**
Review of the STAR Council's achievements, contributions, and effectiveness over the past five years.
This includes a process for surveying rural practitioners to provide stakeholder feedback regarding the impact of this Council to effectuate change in these areas.
 - **Determination of Ongoing Need and Survey**
Evaluation of whether the Council's purpose continues to warrant its operation, or whether WSBA's work supporting rural communities has become sufficiently institutionalized to continue without a formal council structure.
 - **Recommendation for Continuation or Sunset**
A recommendation regarding whether the Council should continue, including rationale, and, if continuation is recommended, suggested timing for the next review.
-

Agenda Topics for Discussion

During next week's meeting, please be prepared to discuss the following:

1. Timing of the Evaluation

We aim to bring the completed evaluation and recommendation to the Board of Governors no later than the September meeting.

2. Evaluation Process and Workplan

Discussion items include:

- Formation of a small team to work with the Chair and WSBA staff.
- Development of the evaluation memo and the accompanying presentation to the Board of Governors.
- Review and integration of relevant data and member input.

3. Survey of Rural Members

We will discuss the scope, method, and timing for surveying WSBA's rural members, including:

- Key information needed to inform the evaluation.
- Deployment approach and timeline.
- Ensuring results are available in time for BOG review (no later than September BOG meeting).

4. Future of the STAR Council

Members are encouraged to share perspectives on:

- Whether the STAR Council should continue beyond its current timeline.
- How to determine when the Council's work has become sufficiently embedded within WSBA operations.
- Criteria for recommending continuation or sunset of the Council.

Goal of the Evaluation

The ultimate objective is to present the Board of Governors with:

- A clear explanation of the STAR Council's achievements over the past five years.
- An outline of ongoing and planned work.
- A reasoned recommendation regarding whether the Council should continue, including justification and suggested timing for the next evaluation.

Please come prepared to engage in this discussion and share your insights.

Kari Petrasek

Chair, STAR Council

AI Disclosure: This memo was drafted with the assistance of Co-Pilot and checked for accuracy by ADV Director.