

WASHINGTON STATE B A R A S S O C I A T I O N

Small Town and Rural Council

Small Town and Rural Council Meeting I Virtual Only
Wednesday, March 25, 2026 | 12:10 p.m. – 1:10 p.m.

AGENDA

1. Introductions and Approval of February Meeting Minutes (Pres.-Elect Kari Petrasek)
2. WSBA Updates (Pres.-Elect Petrasek and Julianne Unite)
 - a. FY27 Budget
3. Vacant Position(s) Recruitment Update
 - a. STAR Chair position, current vacancies, and upcoming positions
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. Announcements
6. Next Steps/Conclusion
7. Next Meeting: April 22, 2026
8. 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, February 18, 2026 *Virtual meeting via Zoom*

Council Members Present: President-Elect Kari Petrasek (arrived 12:18 p.m.), Jesse Lamp (departed 1:01 p.m.), Travis Pietila, Ashley Cummins, Past President Dan Clark, Michele Moore, Gloria Guizar (non-voting), Allison Foreman (arrived 12:18 p.m., departed 1:01 p.m.), Rusty McGuire, Sean King

Council Members Absent: Philip Hunsucker (excused), Governor Mary Rathbone (unexcused)

WSBA Board of Governors Present: Allison Widney, Tom Ahearne

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

Public Attendees Present: Jason Walker, Justice Montoya-Lewis, Zaida Rivera, Vivian Hernandez, Gillian Dutton, Michael Chin

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

WSBA Advancement Department Director Kevin Plachy called the meeting to order at 12:15 p.m. On motion by STAR Council Member Allison Foreman, seconded by STAR Council Member Travis Pietila, the Council approved by unanimous vote the January STAR Council Meeting minutes (8-0-0).

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

WSBA Update

WSBA Member Services and Engagement Manager Julianne Unite provided updates, including plans for next fiscal year's budget. The first draft is due in March. The STAR Council should consider whether to adjust the budget for ongoing projects. If there are budget suggestions, for example, increased funding for the Summit or internship grants, please send them to Julianne and Kari. Otherwise, similar budgeting will be assumed as this year, where approximately \$70,000 was allocated for STAR Council activities including the Summit, internship grants, and two Rural Days of Service events. STAR Council Member Travis Pietila inquired about the budget impact of holding the STAR Summit biennially. Kevin confirmed there will be no Summit next year, so that budget will not be allocated and will instead be planned for the following year.

Legal Deserts Problem-Solving Project (Stacy Jane, Innovation 4 Justice)

President-Elect Kari Petrasek introduced Stacy Jane, the Director of Innovation 4 Justice at the University of Arizona and University of Utah. Stacy introduced a project addressing civil justice challenges through legal empowerment and participatory research. The initiative, in partnership with the State Justice

Institute and National Center for State Courts, aims to create a cohort of courts to collaboratively tackle legal desert issues and share learnings from diverse regions. Wahkiakum and Pacific counties in Washington are participating, alongside counties in Nevada and Michigan. The team is currently conducting community interviews to understand challenges and identify solutions. Stacy invited questions and feedback to ensure alignment with existing efforts.

Kevin mentioned meeting with Stacy and WSBA Executive Director Terra Nevitt previously, and shared information from the Star Council, and invited Stacy to future STAR Council meetings. Jason Walker inquired if Stacy's program is looking for more participating counties. Stacey responded that although counties for the current project phase were already selected, there may be additional opportunities as the project progresses, especially since some solutions might have statewide impacts. Governor Tom Ahearne asked about the shortage of government lawyers, and Stacy clarified their usual reference to prosecution and defense work. Tom highlighted unique aspects of Washington's government entities. Stacey offered to schedule further discussions via email (stacy@innovation4justice.org) to gather more perspectives.

Experiential Pathways to Licensure Presentation and Discussion (Cate Schur)

WSBA Assistant General Counsel Cate Schur introduced a proposed experiential pathway to licensure in Washington, offering an alternative to the traditional bar exam. This approach would assess candidates' minimum competence through supervised practice rather than an exam. Participants, once approved, would complete approximately 18 months of supervised practice, engage in specific activities such as client interviews, negotiations, and research tasks, and compile a portfolio of graded work. Additional requirements include professional responsibility training, CLE courses, and client-facing activities. Candidates must submit written communications, legal documents, and ethical reflections, ensuring confidentiality and attestation of originality. The program allows multiple attempts and aims to provide a practical, performance-based route to licensure. After the group participated in breakout rooms to provide feedback about the proposal to discussion facilitators, Cate thanked the council and offered the opportunity to follow up with any questions or thoughts via email (catherines@wsba.org). Cate added that the plan is to incorporate input into proposals by the main body of volunteers, and then presented to the court. The goal is for participation in the program to begin early next year. Updates will be provided.

Project Updates

Rural Internships (Kevin Plachy)

Kevin provided an update on the recent clarification around the use of funds for the internship grants. Kevin noted that General Counsel sought outside legal advice on WSBA's use of general fund money, ensuring it aligns with restrictions to serve individuals in rural communities who are considered infirm and poor. General funds can now be used for internships in various offices, such as the Attorneys General or a prosecutor's office, as long as they meet GR12 criteria. The internship program meets these criteria and can proceed. Applications will be available by the end of this week, and Julianne will email Ashley, Sean, and Travis with the details.

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

Ashley noted that the Summit Planning team is meeting regularly and the next meeting the goal is to decide on where to hold the welcome reception, with the options narrowed down to space on Central Washington University campus, or a winery in downtown Ellensburg.

Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)

STAR Council Member Sean King reported that the job fair flyer is complete and has been available to the public for the past few days. Targeted outreach to certain employers on the east side of the mountains will be conducted before the employer registration deadline. Good responses have been received in the past, and a strong turnout is expected again. More student participants are hoped to be attracted this time.

Rural Day of Service (Kevin Plachy, Julianne Unite)

Julianne sought the Council's input on the May 4 Rural Day of Service with Inland Empire Legal Aid, particularly the proposed location for the clinic in Inchelium, WA. Specifically, Julianne posed the question of whether the location could impact volunteer attorney recruitment due to the nearest lodging being 40 miles away in Colville. An alternative location in Ferry County might be necessary. It was agreed that Julianne should send the question to the STAR Council's list serve to gather feedback via email.

April Legal Lunchbox (Ashley Cummins)

Ashley has agreed to serve as a moderator and confirmed that the Legal Lunchbox is prepared to move forward.

Announcements

None.

Next Steps/Conclusion

None.

Next Meeting: March 25, 2026

Adjournment

President-Elect Petrasek adjourned the meeting at 1:13 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.

Rural Practice Resources - March 2026 Update

Legal deserts—regions with few or no practicing attorneys—pose significant challenges to accessing justice in rural communities across the United States. To mitigate this issue, various bars, courts and other legal organizations have initiated programs aimed at developing, attracting and retaining legal professionals in these underserved areas. Below is an overview of notable initiatives:

1. South Dakota's [Rural Attorney Recruitment Program](#) & [Project Rural Practice](#)

South Dakota pioneered a legislative approach to this issue by enacting a program in 2013 that provides annual stipends to attorneys who commit to practicing in eligible rural counties for five years. Funding is a collaborative effort among the state's judicial branch (50%), the state bar association (15%), and the hosting county (35%). Participants receive an annual payment of \$12,513, totaling \$62,568 over five years.

2. Nebraska State Bar Association's (NSBA) [Loan Repayment Assistance](#) & [Nebraska Rural Law Opportunities Program](#)

The NSBA administers a state-funded loan assistance program targeting attorneys in rural communities. Eligible attorneys can receive up to \$6,000 annually toward loan repayments, with a maximum benefit of \$42,000 over the program's duration.

Through the Rural Law Opportunities Program (RLOP), students from certain Nebraska areas will study at one of three Nebraska state colleges or universities, obtain their legal education at Nebraska Law and then practice in rural areas throughout the state. Students in the program receive a scholarship for their undergraduate education and, provided they maintain a 3.5 GPA and meet a minimum LSAT score, are automatically admitted to the University of Nebraska College of Law.

3. Tennessee's [Access to Justice Commission](#) – [Justice Bus](#)

In 2022, Tennessee launched a mobile law office known as the "Justice Bus." Equipped with computers, internet access, and printers, this mobile unit enables lawyers and

volunteers to provide on-the-spot legal assistance in rural areas, effectively bringing legal services directly to underserved populations.

4. Arizona Lawyer Apprentice Program

The Arizona Supreme Court established the Arizona Lawyer Apprentice Program, targeting law graduates who scored between 260 and 269 on the Uniform Bar Exam (below the passing score of 270). Participants must secure qualifying employment in rural Arizona or public law practice and commit to at least two years in these positions.

5. Illinois State Bar Association (ISBA) Rural Practice Fellowship Program

The ISBA's Rural Practice Fellowship Program seeks to connect law students and new attorneys with rural law firms. The program offers two main tracks: 1) Summer Clerkship: Law students are placed as clerks in rural firms, providing them with hands-on experience and fostering interest in rural legal practice, and 2) Assoc. Fellowships: New attorneys commit to at least one year with a rural firm, receiving a \$5,000 stipend at the start and an additional \$5,000 after one year.

6. Indiana State Bar Association Attorney Shortage Plan

The Attorney Shortage Plan outlines the Indiana State Bar Association's strategy to address the growing shortage of legal service providers across the state, especially in rural and underserved areas. The plan is structured around three core pillars — improving rural practice and business models, enhancing licensure and practice readiness, and considering the role of Allied Legal Professionals — with specific goals and tactics for each area. Its overarching aim is to strengthen the legal workforce, support attorneys, and better serve the public's legal needs.

Many states are also implementing allied paraprofessional or community justice worker programs to assist with legal needs in rural areas.

Allied Paraprofessional Programs

Active programs: [Arizona](#), [Minnesota](#), [Oregon](#), [Utah](#), [Colorado](#)

Community Justice Worker Programs

Active programs: [Alaska](#), [Texas](#), [South Carolina](#), [Delaware](#), [Arizona](#), [Oklahoma](#), [Montana](#), [Utah](#)