

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, November 26, 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 October Meeting Minutes (Pres.-Elect Kari Petrasek)
2. WSBA Updates (Pres.-Elect Petrasek and Julianne Unite)
3. Vacant Position(s) Recruitment Update
4. Community Justice Workers (Jordan Couch)
5. Project Updates
 - a. Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)
 - b. Rural Day of Service (Kevin Plachy, Julianne Unite)
 - c. April 2026 Legal Lunchbox (Ashley Cummins)
 - d. Small Town and Rural Practice Day Proclamation (Pres. Elect Petrasek, Ashley Cummins)
 - e. Summit Project Team (Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy)
6. Announcements
7. Next Steps/Conclusion
8. Next Meeting: December 17, 2025
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.

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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.

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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, October 22, 2025 *Virtual meeting via Zoom*

Council Members Present: President Elect Kari Petrasek, Jesse Lamp (arrived 12:16 p.m.), Rusty McGuire (departed 1:02 p.m.), Travis Pietila, Sean King, Ashley Cummins, Past President Dan Clark, Philip Hunsucker, Michele Moore, Governor Mary Rathbone (departed 12:52 p.m.)

Council Members Absent: Gloria Guizar (excused)

WSBA Board of Governors Present: N/A

WSBA Staff Present: Julianne Unite, Vanessa Sweeney

Public Attendees Present: Merf Ehman, Rachel Cortez, Stephen Foster, Sophia Byrd McSherry

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

STAR Council Chair and WSBA President-Elect Kari Petrasek called the meeting to order at 12:13 p.m. On motion by STAR Council Member and WSBA Past President Dan Clark, seconded by STAR Council Member Rusty McGuire, and abstention by STAR Council Member Michele Moore, the Council approved by majority vote the September STAR Council Meeting minutes (10-0-1). Pres.-Elect Petrasek welcomed new STAR Council Member Michele Moore, and introductions were made.

WSBA Updates (Pres. Elect Petrasek and Julianne Unite)

BOG Update

Pres.-Elect Petrasek noted that the next Board of Governors (BOG) meeting is November 14-15, in Seattle, and that the agenda is available on the WSBA website. Pres.-Elect Petrasek encouraged the Council to reach out to Pres.-Elect Petrasek or STAR Council Member Governor Mary Rathbone with any questions.

WSBA Member Services and Engagement Manager Julianne Unite reminded the Council to submit any outstanding volunteer expenses from FY25. At the September meeting, the STAR Council voted to amend the charter for the "Young Lawyer" to "New Member" seat. It will be on the November BOG meeting for approval on consent. Once approved, the charter will be amended and posted to website.

Vacant Position(s) Recruitment

Pres.-Elect Petrasek noted there are two vacant positions with the STAR Council: New Member and Qualified Legal Service Provider (QLSP) positions. Julianne noted that recruitment announcements were sent on various WSBA list serves, and that Council members have forwarded names to Julianne, but

there have not been any applications received via the barleaders@wsba.org email. Rusty mentioned a connection was made with an individual who would be eligible for the new member position, and expects this person to be in contact about the position. Julianne noted that the October 31 deadline, as communicated in the list serve messages, can be extended. We will reevaluate after October 31 to determine if we should keep it open. All inquiries should be directed to the bar leaders' email, and WSBA Manager of Volunteer Engagement Paris Eriksen will notify us if there are any interested applicants.

Pres.-Elect Petrasek asked if a vote was needed on this matter. Julianne questioned whether receiving one application would be sufficient and suggested closing it by the deadline but keeping it open if one of the positions had no applicants. STAR Council member Travis Pietila requested a reminder of the process. Julianne explained that the process involves the STAR Council's recommendations team, which includes Pres.-Elect Petrasek, BOG Liaison Allison Widney, and Julianne as staff liaison. Whenever they meet and make a recommendation, it is then forwarded to the BOG nominations committee for review at the next monthly meeting. If the meeting is in November, the review would happen in January.

Travis expressed concern about delaying the process to find another applicant, and asked if it would be possible to still consider applications submitted after the deadline. Pres.-Elect Petrasek responded that if someone applies and the recommendations team isn't satisfied, it can remain open for additional applications. Michele emphasized the importance of honoring those who have shown willingness to commit by applying and supported moving forward as suggested. Pres.-Elect Petrasek indicated a preference for those who apply by the deadline unless they don't qualify. Pres.-Elect Petrasek encouraged the Council to share the opportunity with those who have contacts with QLSPs and new members.

Project Updates

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

Pres.-Elect Petrasek and STAR Council Member Ashley Cummins reported that the proclamation had been drafted, following the format used in previous years and incorporating a "rule of law" theme. Ashley plans to submit the proclamation soon, noting that the response window is approximately 45 days.

Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)

STAR Council Member Sean King provided an update on the Job Fair at Gonzaga, reporting strong registration numbers: 105 registrants, 51 jobs posted by 39 employers, and 58 applications submitted to date. Interviews will be held in person and virtually on November 14, with Rusty's firm and the Benton County Prosecutor's Office holding in-person interviews onsite. Sean indicated after the post-event review, it can be determined if an April job fair will be held.

Summit Project Team (Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy)

Ashley discussed potential locations for the next Summit. Considering previous Summits were held at Gonzaga University and Heritage University (a Seattle University Hybrid Hub location), Ashley suggested considering the South Sound/Pierce County with a tie into the University of Washington as a potential location. Past President Clark prefers to see it remain in the central Washington area as this is a primary location of legal deserts. Suggestions included South Sound (Pierce County), Walla Walla, and Central

Washington, with consensus to keep the event on the eastern side of Washington and consider locations such as Yakima, Ellensburg, and Moses Lake. Two potential dates were identified: June 5 or June 26, depending on venue availability and school schedules. Julianne and WSBA Member Services and Engagement Program Coordinator Vanessa Sweeney will research venues and report back at the November meeting.

Rural Day of Service (Pres. Elect Petrasek, Kevin Plachy)

Pres.-Elect Petrasek mentioned organizing another event and setting up dates, possibly involving one or multiple Qualified Legal Service Providers (QLSPs). Pres. Elect-Petrasek highlighted a suggestion from Governor Emily Arneson of Spokane, who noted that much of her district is comprised of rural areas, and may be a consideration for holding a Rural Day of Service. Gov. Arneson has suggested a QLSP, Inland Empire Legal Aid, formerly known as the Spokane County Volunteer Lawyers Program, serves five counties in northeastern Washington: Ferry, Pend Oreille, Lincoln, Stevens, and Spokane, and suggested that this QLSP could be a potential partner for the event.

It was discussed to possibly expand the initiative to two events this year. The idea was to spread them out over a few months in different areas, such as one on the peninsula and another in eastern Washington, or perhaps two in completely different areas of eastern Washington.

Julianne stated that unlike the Summit, the dates for the Rural Day of Service would heavily depend on the availability of QLSP partnerships. Julianne noted that they would need to space out the events and work closely with the QLSPs to determine suitable dates. Julianne shared that they had a productive debrief meeting with Coco Holbrook, the staff contact at the Northwest Justice Project (NJP), who had agreed, with the consent of her superiors, to participate again next year in Okanogan County. Julianne posed the question of whether they should continue with NJP in Okanogan County and whether they should consider working with another QLSP to organize two events next year.

Michele expressed her support for hosting more than one event, and suggested that having an event in a different location would be beneficial. Past President Clark agreed, pointing out that there are many small places within Spokane's district that could benefit from such services. Ashley also supported the idea of two events, and proposed the idea of aligning the Day of Service with the Summit to build community engagement.

Julianne suggested that combining the Rural Day of Service with other initiatives, such as the proclamation month, could be beneficial and added that hosting an event during the Small Town and Rural Month could be a way to celebrate and promote these initiatives. STAR Council Member Jesse Lamp raised questions about the long-term strategy for the Rural Day of Service, suggesting that empowering local bar associations and communities could create a more sustainable impact. If another Day of Service is held in Okanogan County in partnership with NJP, Jesse proposed involving the Okanogan County Bar Association as an effort to establish an ongoing relationship and support to ensure the event's longevity and effectiveness.

Pres.-Elect Petrasek clarified the logistics of the Day of Service, explaining that the Council partners with a QLSP and provide \$5,000 to help offset the costs of running the clinic. WSBA staff recruit attorneys for

the event, and NJP in Okanogan County provided the space and resources for the previous event, which was held at a casino. Michele supported the idea of moving the event around the state to provide long-lasting benefits and suggested involving students from the Law and Justice Department at Central to attract them to rural areas.

Merf Ehman suggested, as part of the long-term vision of connecting people with the Rural Day of Service, to involve the summer intern grant recipients. Pres.-Elect Petrasek agreed, noting it can be difficult to recruit volunteers, especially during the summer months.

Pres.-Elect Petrasek recommended for Julianne to connect with NJP to discuss future possibilities, and noted that Gov. Arneson is planning to reach out to Inland Empire Legal Aid, and suggested Julianne be part of that to discuss potential next steps.

Legal Lunchbox (Ashley Cummins)

Ashley proposed inviting Bree Black Horse and Brenda George to present on Indian law issues and legal practice for the April Legal Lunchbox CLE, following a missed opportunity at the Summit. Ashley noted that WSBA Education Lead Rachel Matz said the timing is ideal, as a 2023 Legal Lunchbox on Indian law fundamentals will be removed from the WSBA store, creating a gap. Rachel also contacted the Indian Law Section regarding potential other CLEs. The Council supported this proposal, recognizing the value of the topic and the presenters.

Announcements

Announcements included a review of upcoming meeting dates, with adjustments to avoid conflicts with holidays. The November meeting will be held on November 26, the December meeting moved up to December 17, and the February meeting moved up to February 18.

Next Steps/Conclusion

None.

Next Meeting: December 17, 2025

Adjournment

Pres. Elect Petrasek adjourned the meeting at 1:10 p.m.

From: Jordan Couch <jordan@palacelaw.com>

Subject: Background on Community Justice Workers

For those interested, a good podcast and an interesting article on the community justice worker programs developing around the country.

lawnext.com

<https://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/nikole-nelson-champions-a-national-model-to-bring-legal-services-to-those-without-access>

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