

Washington State Rural Practice Ideation Brainstorming Sessions Summary

In November 2020, the Washington State Bar Association (WSBA) hosted three brainstorming sessions¹ with various stakeholders to explore potential ways in which WSBA could support rural practice in Washington state. The following is a brief summary of the brainstorming discussions, which identify the common problems discussed and solutions proposed. The information is presented below in no particular order.

- **Problem Statement #1:** How can the WSBA address mitigate the *financial* barriers and challenges to starting and remaining in rural practice?
 - **Potential Solutions to Problem Statement #1:**
 - Loan repayment assistance program and/or other student loan debt relief options
 - B&O Tax
 - Retirement benefits, group health insurance, other ways to offset costs for personnel/running a firm
 - Educate rural law firms about reasonable starting salaries for associates
 - Support legislation to expand access to broadband internet
- **Problem Statement #2:** How can the WSBA help *recruit* practitioners to serve in rural communities?
 - **Potential Solutions to Problem Statement #2:**
 - Pipeline program (high school & college)
 - Incubator/placement program
 - Diploma privilege in lieu of bar exam if a bar applicant agrees to practice in a rural community
- **Problem Statement #3:** How can the WSBA *connect* rural practitioners to the *community*?

¹ The brainstorming sessions occurred at noon on November 16, November 18, and November 20, 2020. The total amount of unique participants that attended the brainstorming sessions was 41, inclusive of the WSBA's rural practice project team comprised of members from the WSBA Board of Governors, staff leadership from Washington law schools, Washington Young Lawyers Committee members, and staff. Other participants included rural practitioners and leadership from local county bar associations, volunteer legal service providers, tribes, and government agencies.

- **Potential Solutions to Problem Statement #3:**
 - Create a WSBA Rural Practice Section
 - Create WSBA Rural Practice Committee
 - Mentorship
 - Strengthen support and connections with local county bar associations
 - Strengthen support and connections with volunteer legal service providers
 - Leadership development/opportunities for growth programs
 - Develop a “welcoming committee” to meet and greet with those interested in/entering into rural practice
- **Problem Statement #4:** How can the WSBA generate *visibility* about rural practice opportunities and rural communities?
 - **Potential Solutions to Problem Statement #4:**
 - Bar News article(s)
 - Facilitate the process for practitioners selling their practice
 - Emphasize public service
 - Video clips (or other forms of media) of people sharing their stories of what it’s like to live in a rural area
- **Problem Statement #5:** How can the WSBA provide *education and resources* to enter and thrive in rural practice?
 - **Potential Solutions to Problem Statement #5:**
 - Work with/recommend that law schools:
 - Provide students with opportunities to practice in a rural community during law school, e.g., internships, summer associate work, etc.
 - Provide resources for housing, food, and other financial costs associated with moving to a rural area

- Host a Career/Law Day with rural practitioners and law students
- Provide courses in law school for hanging a shingle/benefits of solo practice/entrepreneurship
- Develop an apprenticeship type model
- Practice management resources, e.g. consultations, virtual practice/technology tools
- CLEs