

The Rural Practice Development Program

Attorney Information

The State Bar of Wisconsin's Rural Attorney Recruitment Program is intended to help mitigate the shortage of legal representation in rural areas of the state. Each year, three eligible attorney applicants are selected for the program and will receive a financial stipend (described more fully below in Program Basics). Selected attorneys will move to and practice law in a designated rural community for at least two years. By incentivizing attorneys to establish their practices in underserved regions, the program helps to improve access to legal services in rural Wisconsin while offering a unique opportunity for professional and community engagement.

Program Goal:

The goal of this program is to promote long-term attorney retention in rural communities by encouraging attorneys to become deeply invested in the local area. Attorneys are encouraged to engage in networking and community activities to integrate into the community, fostering a sustainable and mutually beneficial relationship between themselves and the residents.

Additionally, the program will highlight the critical issue of limited legal representation in rural areas and aim to showcase viable solutions for addressing this gap, ensuring that rural communities have access to the legal support they need for years to come.

Program Basics:

Attorneys must be willing to relocate to and practice for two years in a defined in the program. (see county eligibility map) If accepted into the program the attorney will receive \$5,000 at the start of the two-year period and additional \$5,000 upon completion of the two-year (24-month) commitment.

Applicant Requirements:

- Be a State Bar of Wisconsin member in good standing.
- Must commit to work in a [defined rural community](#) for two consecutive years (24 months).
- Have not maintained residence in an eligible county for the past two years.
 - Recent graduates who summered in a rural community are eligible to apply to the program.
- Have not been physically employed on a regular basis in any [eligible county](#) for the past two years.

If selected the attorney must:

- Work full-time for a qualified employer or open a private practice (full-time) in a defined county.
 - “Qualified employer” is a law firm, nonprofit organization, or government entity where the attorneys work with the public / provide representation to the residents. (Not in-house counsel.)

- Live and work in a [geographic area](#) defined by the program, remote work from location outside of a defined county is not allowed.
 - Attorney may live in a defined county and work in a different defined county. However, attorney may not reside in a county that is not part of the program and work in a defined county or vice versa.
- Sign a Letter of Agreement. (available upon request)

Selection:

Each year the applications will be reviewed by an advisory group of State Bar of Wisconsin members. Current members of the advisory group may not participate in the program, nor can advisory group members be affiliated with any firm or company that may hire a participant.

Employer Listing:

The State Bar of Wisconsin will provide a list of employers interested in hiring in the defined areas. However, participants can find employment outside of this list or open their own practice. The State Bar of Wisconsin list will be posted no later than March 15 of the program year.

Timeline:

Dates are tentative and could change due to unforeseen circumstances.

Application deadline: March 31, 2025 at noon

Notification of acceptance*: No later than April 25, 2025

Relocation plan due: As soon as possible to ensure all criteria is met, but no later than 4 months after acceptance.

Service obligation to begin: No later than six months after notification of acceptance.

*If a selected applicant cannot meet the obligations of the program, the advisory group will determine how to proceed depending on the circumstances.

If you are interested in applying, you can find the application [here](#). Please contact Kim Burns, kburns@wisbar.org or 608-250-6181 with any questions.