



# Bridge the Legal Gap: Make a Difference in Rural Wisconsin

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 chosen for the program and will receive a financial stipend and resources to assist with the transition to a rural area. Attorney participants will reside 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 either have recently relocated to, or be willing to relocate to, a county designated as eligible under the program (see county eligibility map). If accepted, the attorney agrees to practice in that county for a two-year (24-month) period. The program provides a \$5,000 payment at the start of the commitment and an additional \$5,000 upon successful completion of the two years.

Along with the \$10,000 stipend, attorneys chosen for the program will also receive a subscription to [PINNACLE® Books Unbound for individuals](#) (valued at \$1479 annually), [PINNACLE® Ultimate Pass™](#) Gold (valued at \$1199 annually), and, if applicable, membership in the [Lawyer Referral Service](#) panel (valued at \$125 annually) for the two-year duration of the program. These additional benefits are provided to support you during your time in the Rural Practice Development Program.

The stipend and added programs total **\$15,606** for the two years of the program!

## **Eligibility:**

- Be a State Bar of Wisconsin member in good standing.
- Commit to work in a defined rural community for two consecutive years (24 months).
- Must meet one of the following conditions:
  - Relocated to and/or began working in an eligible county after September 1, 2025, **OR**
  - Have not been regularly employed in and/or maintained residence in an eligible county\* for the past two years. *Note: Recent graduates who completed a summer position in a rural community are eligible to apply.*

\*State Bar Members who reside and work out of state are eligible to apply if they currently work in an area considered urban. (Contact [Kim Burns](#) for more information if interested.)

## **Applicant Requirements:**

- Work full-time either:
  - For a qualified employer: law firm, nonprofit organization, or government entity that provides legal services to the public or represents residents (*in-house counsel positions do not qualify*), **OR**
  - Open and operate a full-time private practice in an eligible county.
- Live and work within the program's defined geographic area.
  - Remote work from outside an eligible county is not allowed.
  - Attorneys may live in one eligible county and work in another eligible county.
  - Attorneys cannot reside outside the program area while working in an eligible county, or vice versa.
- Sign a Letter of Agreement (available upon request).

## **Applicant Review Process:**

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 organization that may hire a participant.

## **Employer Listing:**

The State Bar of Wisconsin will gather a list of employers interested in hiring in the eligible areas. However, participants can find employment outside of this list or open their own practice.

## **Timeline:**

*Dates are tentative and could change due to unforeseen circumstances.*

Application deadline: April 30, 2026

Notification of acceptance\*: No later than May 25, 2026

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 participant cannot meet the obligations of the program, the advisory group will determine how to proceed based on the specific circumstances.

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