



# The Washington State Bar Association

---

Membership Study 2012  
Executive Summary



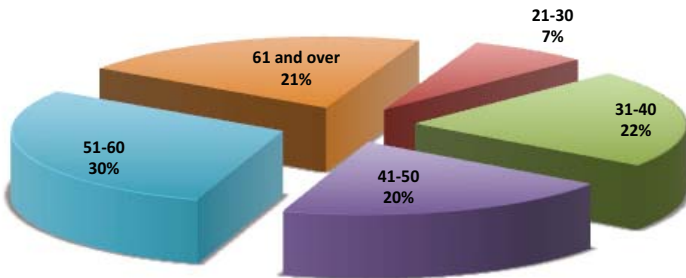
# Membership Highlights and Diversity in the WSBA

**AVERAGE YEARS OF EXPERIENCE: 19**

**MEMBERS UNDER AGE 40: 30 PERCENT**

Younger and new attorney cohorts tend to be more diverse, bringing distinctive assets, needs, and perspectives to the profession.

**MEMBERS OVER AGE 60: 21 PERCENT**

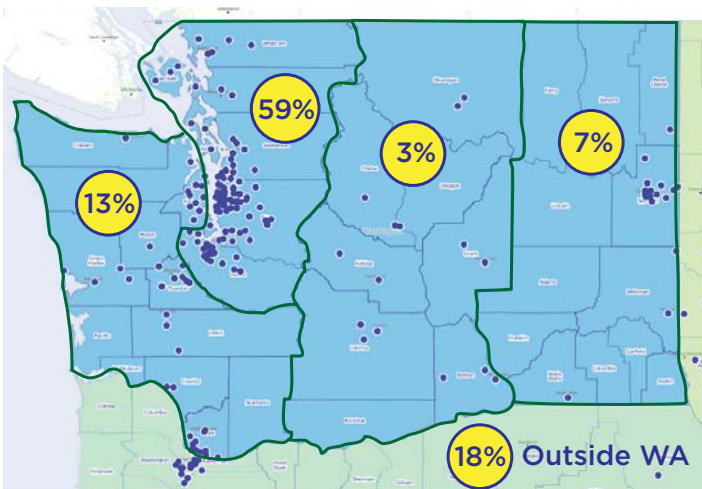


**MEMBERS PRACTICING IN LAW FIRMS: 48 PERCENT**

**MEMBERS IN SOLO PRACTICE: 19 PERCENT**

## GEOGRAPHY

The WSBA membership is geographically diverse, posing significant communication and access challenges.



## OLDER MEMBERS (40+)

- 79 percent of WSBA
- WSBA's largest diversity group



## RACIAL MINORITIES

- 12 percent of WSBA
- Highest frequency of professional barriers experienced among diversity groups



## SEXUAL ORIENTATION MINORITIES

- 9 percent of WSBA
- Income is lowest reported among the diversity groups



## WOMEN

- 45 percent of WSBA
- Relatively high frequency and intensity of professional barriers
- Younger membership is proportionately more female



## PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

- 38 percent of WSBA
- Development of family-friendly workplace policies a frequently stated concern



## PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES OR IMPAIRMENTS

- 21 percent of WSBA
- Rank second on frequency of experienced professional barriers and highest overall in intensity
- Health-and age-related impairments frequently reported, especially among older members



## MILITARY PERSONNEL AND VETERANS

- 13 percent of WSBA
- Most likely to be in solo practice among all diversity groups

## DIVERSITY AND SOLO PRACTICE

Members of each of the seven diversity groups in the study identify as solo practitioners at a higher rate than the overall membership.

## PERCEPTIONS OF WSBA

Members report widely varying perceptions of WSBA's mission, value proposition, and priorities.

## Recommendation Highlights

### TRANSITION-RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS

Prepare for significant levels of retirements, departures, and reductions in practice across the membership. Issues to address include:

- Projected new member inflows
- Personal and professional needs of exiting members

- Retirees as a resource for consultation and mentoring
- Career stability enhancements
- Leadership development and mentoring among early- to mid-career WSBA members

# At a Glance: The WSBA Membership

## YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

The average member has 19 years of experience in the profession.

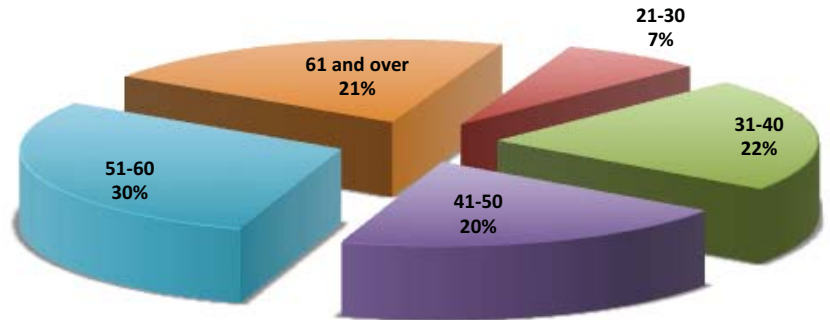
## GENDER

45 percent of the WSBA membership is female. The gender gap narrows among younger and new attorneys.

Newer member cohorts are proportionately more diverse in traditional diversity categories.

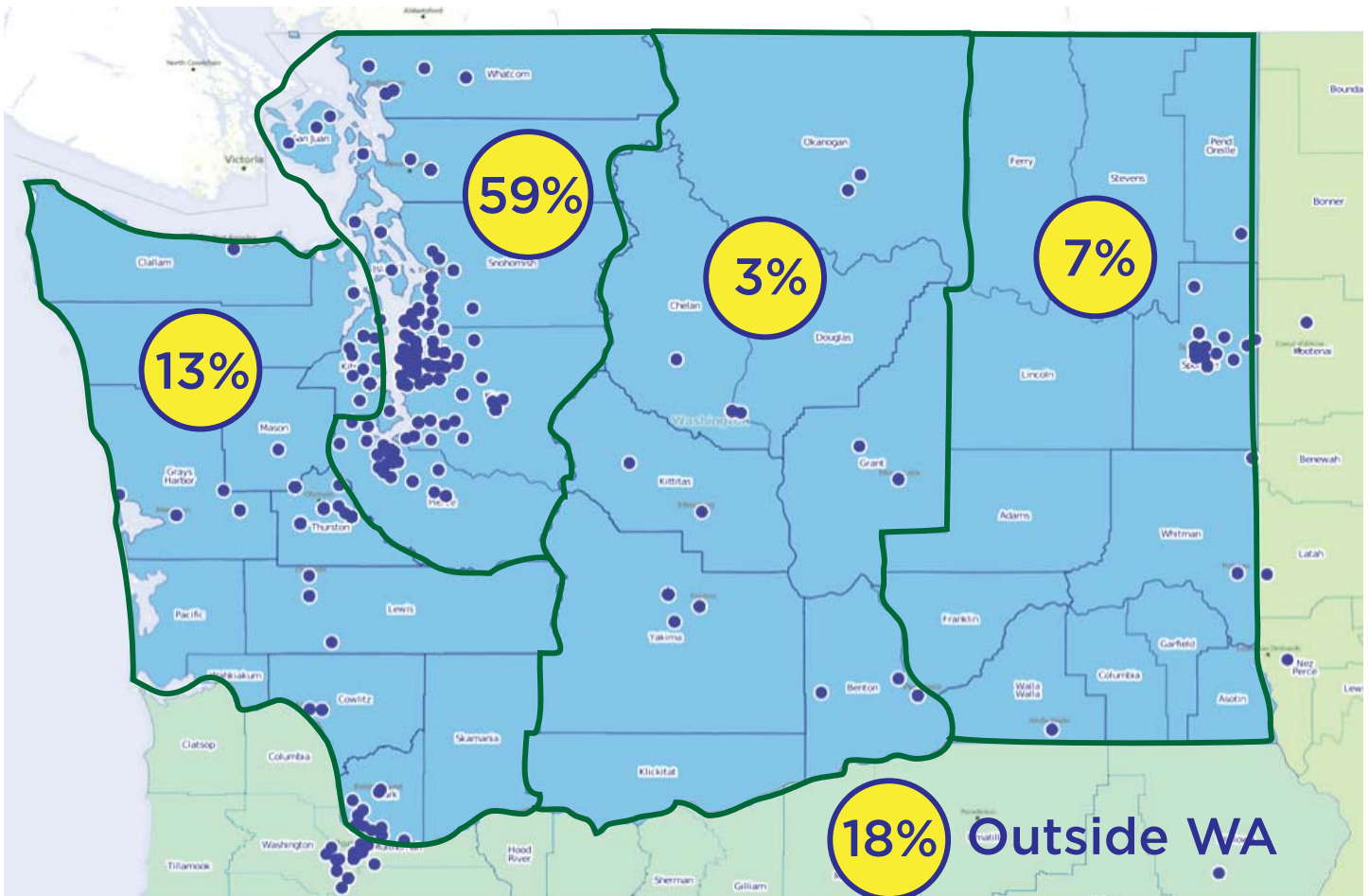
## AGE

Slightly over half of the membership is over 50 years of age.



## GEOGRAPHY

The WSBA faces distinctive challenges in providing relevant and accessible services to a membership that is geographically diverse within Washington State, as well as nationally and internationally.

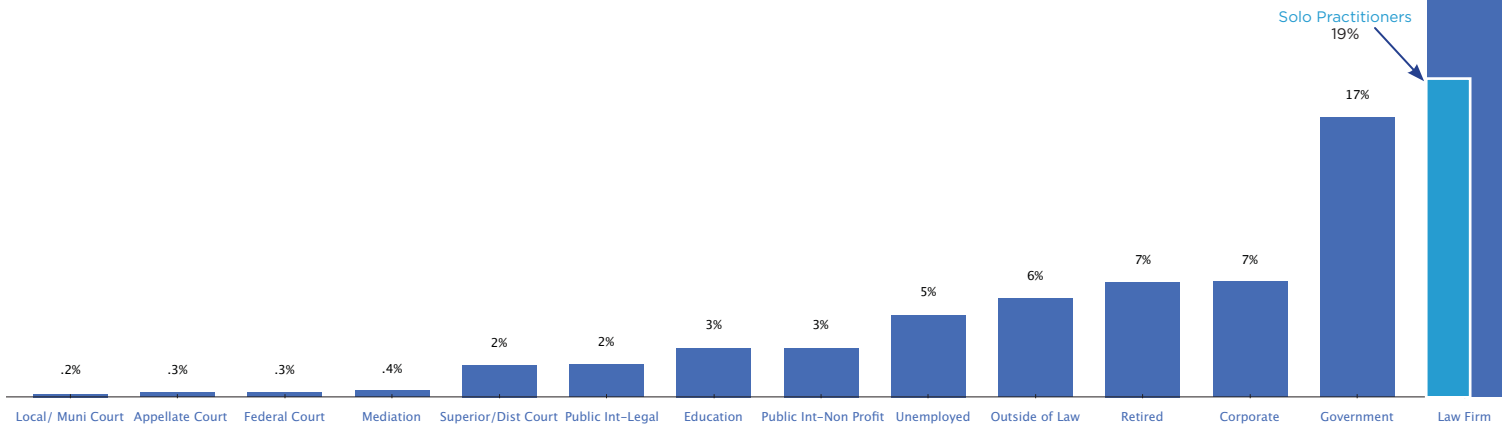


## EMPLOYMENT SETTING

Forty-eight percent of all members practice in a law firm setting.

Of those members in a law firm setting, 40 percent identify themselves as solo practitioners.

At 19 percent of the membership, solo practitioners represent by far the largest single mode of practice and one that reports a distinctive set of professional priorities and perceived needs.



Employment Settings of WSBA Membership

## TRANSITIONS

A historically large percentage of the WSBA membership is projected to leave the profession during the next five years.

- Nearly one-quarter of the membership - over 7,200 members - is actively considering retirement during the next five years.
- Approximately seven percent - over 2,200 members - is actively considering departing the profession other than through retirement during the next five years.
- An additional 25 percent - 7,500 members - plan to reduce professional practice during the next five years.

---






Altogether, 56 percent of the existing membership is projected to either retire, depart the profession or significantly reduce their practices during the next five years.

---

These figures do not account for inflows of new graduates, attorneys entering or leaving the state, and other factors. Nevertheless, these findings represent a major challenge to WSBA, the legal profession, and the public in Washington State in the coming years.

# At a Glance: Diversity in WSBA

This study provides the first reliable data on diversity groups in WSBA. These findings provide an opportunity to acknowledge the presence of these groups and to articulate issues they value.

DIVERSITY GROUP	TRENDS AND FINDINGS
<p><b>OLDER MEMBERS (40+)</b></p> <p><b>79% OF WSBA MEMBERSHIP</b></p> 	<p>Largest diversity group in the overall membership.</p> <p>This group includes a high percentage of solo practitioners.</p> <p>An unprecedentedly large portion of these members anticipate retiring during the next five years.</p>
<p><b>RACIAL MINORITIES</b></p> <p><b>12% OF WSBA MEMBERSHIP</b></p> 	<p>This group has a median of 9 years of professional experience- the lowest among all diversity groups.</p> <p>Mentoring cited as particularly important for facilitating positive career trajectories, especially for younger and newer attorneys.</p> <p>Experience greatest incidence of social, opportunity, and advancement barriers among all diversity groups.</p>
<p><b>SEXUAL ORIENTATION MINORITIES</b></p> <p><b>9% OF WSBA MEMBERSHIP</b></p> 	<p>Professional experiences vary widely based on geographic location; connecting with other GLBT members and joining support networks improves professional satisfaction.</p> <p>Job satisfaction is a particularly important factor in determining whether these members expect to stay in the legal profession.</p> <p>Reported incomes lag notably behind the overall median and are the lowest of all diversity groups, despite comparable years of experience.</p>
<p><b>WOMEN</b></p> <p><b>45% OF WSBA MEMBERSHIP</b></p> 	<p>Rank third on experienced professional barriers and second on intensity of such barriers.</p> <p>Mentoring was frequently cited as particularly important for facilitating positive career trajectories, especially for younger and newer attorneys in this diversity group.</p>
<p><b>PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS</b></p> <p><b>38% OF WSBA MEMBERSHIP</b></p> 	<p>No significant difference in hours worked as compared to the overall membership.</p> <p>Cite the need for family-friendly workplace policies, flexible schedules and hours, and health benefits for dependents.</p> <p>Rank fourth among diversity groups in reported frequency of professional barriers encountered and lowest in the intensity of those barriers.</p>

## DIVERSITY GROUP

## TRENDS AND FINDINGS

### PERSONS LIVING WITH DISABILITIES OR IMPAIRMENTS

21% OF WSBA MEMBERSHIP



A notable segment of this group reports a wide range of health- or age-related impairments, especially among older members.

Rank second on experienced professional barriers and highest on reported intensity of such barriers.

### MILITARY PERSONNEL AND VETERANS

13% OF WSBA MEMBERSHIP



Oldest and most experienced relative to other non-age-based diversity groups and to the average overall membership.

Most likely to be solo practitioners.

Rank lowest on experienced professional barriers and second lowest in the intensity of those barriers.

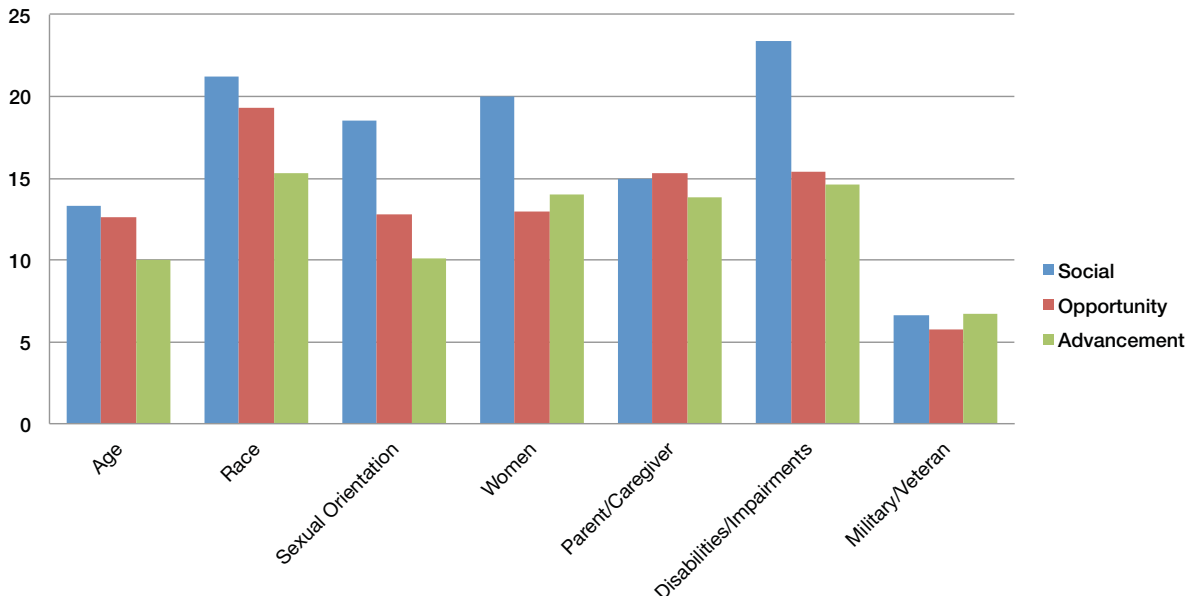
Members of every diversity group are far more likely to be in solo practice than members overall. The reasons behind this trend and its effect upon career development among diversity groups bear further investigation. **It is important to note that initiatives benefitting solos will not only benefit the membership overall but also will positively impact these groups.**

## Professional Barriers and Diversity Groups

Diversity groups reported distinctive patterns of barriers experienced in their professional practice:

- Social barriers, including being excluded, misunderstood, or treated differently by one's supervisor, colleagues, or clients due to membership in a particular diversity group.
- Barriers to opportunity, including being given fewer opportunities to work with clients, limited responsibility, or less training due to membership in a particular diversity group.
- Barriers to advancement, including not receiving a raise or promotion due to membership in a particular diversity group.

### Percent of Diversity Group Members Reporting Social, Opportunity and Advancement Barriers





# At a Glance: Professional Transitions

Historic generational and vocational trends are underway, reflecting a confluence of societal trends that includes the Boomer generation's quickly approaching retirement, rapid changes in the profession, and the current economic climate.

## THIS STUDY CONSIDERED TWO FORMS OF PROFESSIONAL TRANSITION

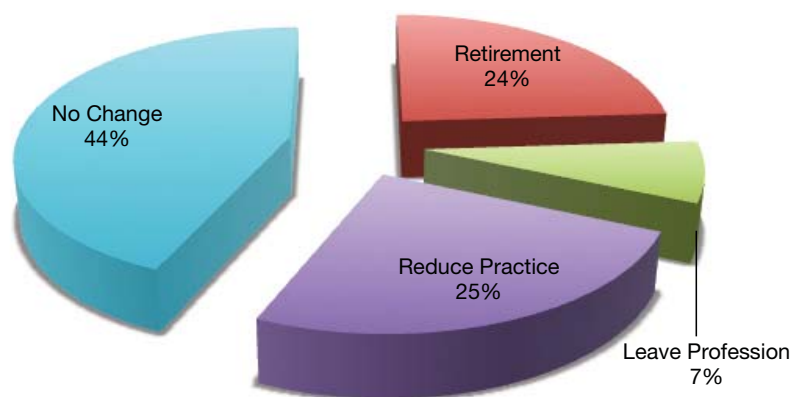
**JOB STABILITY:** Persistence in a particular employment setting or area of practice over time.

- Over the last five years, 25 percent of study participants reported having changed their area of practice at least once.
- In the same period, thirty-five percent changed their employment setting at least once (in some cases, these changes occurred concurrently).
- Of those reporting employment setting changes, seven percent became unemployed.

**CAREER STABILITY:** Persistence in the practice of law over the natural course of a member's career.

- Fourteen percent of respondents do not believe they will continue to practice law for the remainder of their professional careers, and another 22 percent were unsure or neutral on this issue.
- Annual projections:
  - Retirement: Annual projected rate of 4.8 percent is double the expected pattern.
  - Departure: Annual projected rate (other than retirement) is 1.5 percent.
  - Reduction of practice: Annual projected rate is 5 percent.
- Cumulative five-year projections:
  - Over the next five years, retirements and departures will accumulate to a gross reduction of 31 percent of the existing membership roster - a total of 9,500 members exiting the profession.
  - In addition, over 25 percent of the membership - approximately 7,500 members - plan to reduce involvement in the practice of law over the course of the next five years.

### Five-Year Projection of Career Transitions among WSBA Members



These figures do not account for inflows of new graduates, attorneys entering the state, and other factors. Nevertheless, they are consistent with national demographic trends, and represent a major challenge to WSBA and to the legal profession in Washington State in the coming years.

## PREDICTORS OF CAREER STABILITY

The study explored factors that promote career stability in order to give WSBA and other stakeholders the conceptual tools necessary to respond to threats to healthy career stability among WSBA members.

Job stability does not predict career stability *per se*. However, the circumstances surrounding a change of area of practice or employment (e.g. layoff, forced change, or the deliberate execution of a career strategy) may have important implications for professional development.

Job satisfaction has by far the strongest impact on career stability of all variables examined in this study. Job satisfaction consists of four elements:

- Positive perceptions of relationships at work
- Sense of job autonomy and task integrity
- Work meaning and stimulation
- Perception of extrinsic factors such as income and benefits

## PREDICTORS OF JOB SATISFACTION

The study found four factors to be strongly associated with job satisfaction, and therefore important in promoting career stability.



Job satisfaction's role in promoting career stability was strong in the membership overall as well as within every diversity group.

These findings reveal that in the legal profession in Washington State a significant loss of senior professional experience is underway that will continue for at least five years, and most likely for a considerable period of time beyond that. This will create significant challenges as well as remarkable opportunities for the Association in terms of managing exit-related issues, fostering emerging leaders, preserving valuable professional and institutional knowledge, and ensuring an equitable and effective transition.



# At a Glance: Recommendation Highlights

## TRANSITION-RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS

Prepare for historic levels of transition in the membership during at least the next five years.

- Develop analysis of the numbers and characteristics of attorneys projected to enter WSBA during this period
- Explore personal and professional concerns of exiting members
- Consider retirees as a consultation and mentoring resource to membership
- Explore strategies to enhance career stability
- Support leadership development and mentoring efforts among early- to mid- career members

Enhance member career stability through strategies that address:

- Mentoring and leadership development opportunities
- Spousal and familial support
- Income and other extrinsic work benefits
- Work-life balance

## DIVERSITY-RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS

Explore strategies to support positive mentoring relationships and effective leadership development opportunities;

Acquire a more complete understanding of social, opportunity, and advancement barriers experienced by diverse members of the bar in order to proactively address them in the profession; and

Investigate the predominance of attorneys in solo practice, particularly those belonging to diversity groups, in order to better understand whether this setting represents opportunity or necessity.

### Members 40 and over

Support efforts to better understand and address upcoming professional challenges related to leadership and professional transition.

Foster efforts to provide professional guidance and resources to navigate upcoming life events such as aging and retirement.

### Racial minorities

Support efforts to better understand and address the particularly high level of this group's experience of professional barriers.

Develop an understanding of the need for suitable mentoring relationships as expressed by this group and promote efforts to facilitate mentoring and provide training.

## Sexual orientation minorities

Explore and seek to address income disparities relative to other diversity groups and the overall membership.

Gather information from geographically diverse members of this group to better understand professional experiences and address geographic barriers.

## Women

Support efforts to better understand and address the relatively high level of this group's experience of professional barriers.

Since female members of WSBA tend to be younger and newer to the profession, they will likely benefit from efforts to better understand and address issues important to new attorneys, and efforts in the areas of mentoring and professional support.

Efforts to support career stability for parents and caregivers will likely be of particular benefit to women over the course of their careers.

## Parents and caregivers

Support efforts to educate employers and managers regarding practical issues faced by this group including strategies to prevent turnover.

Promote the adoption of flexible schedules, billing methods, and the use of technology to encourage job and career stability.

## Persons living with disabilities or impairments

Support efforts to better understand and address the particularly high frequency and intensity of this group's experience of professional and other experienced barriers.

Develop a broad definition of this group to incorporate age-and health-related impairments for policy and programmatic purposes.

## Military personnel and veterans

Explore and address dynamics related to solo practice as the predominant setting for this group, seeking insight into whether this setting represents an opportunity or necessity.

Since military personnel and veterans tend to be older, they will likely benefit from efforts to better understand and address issues important to members over 40.

## Young and new attorneys

Support efforts to better understand and address these members' expressed need for mentoring, practical professional consultation and resources, and other assistance related to launching a career in the law.

## Solo practitioners

Foster initiatives to clarify and address expressed needs for training, resources and professional support in the form of mentoring or consultation.

Support efforts to better understand and address solo practitioners' experienced barriers in terms of transitioning from solo practice to another employment setting.

## OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

### Clarify WSBA's mission and value proposition.

Foster an ongoing dialogue to engage the membership around WSBA's mission as well as its consequent policies and program priorities.

### Seek ways to improve member communication and access.

Explore the use of emerging online technologies, such as collaborative media and survey panels, for members to access WSBA staff and resources and engage in WSBA activities.

Consider new ways to mitigate geographic barriers faced by many members in accessing WSBA services and activities.

Conduct a timely review of member concerns and suggestions that are documented in the open-ended portions of the survey as well as the fora.

Update WSBA institutional data collection strategy and methods, and aligning the institutional database with future research goals.

“ “ I appreciate the WSBA reaching out to members to ask how we might be better served. It's a good first step. ” ”

“ “ I'd like to take advantage of many of the services the bar provides, but Seattle is just too far away. It's the 21st century- most members I know would use more online and other methods to access WSBA services. ” ”

# Professional Transitions

This study considered two forms of professional transition: job stability and career stability.

## JOB STABILITY

*Persistence in a particular area of practice or employment setting over time.*

During the past five years, the percent of members who have changed:

- Area of practice: **25 PERCENT**
- Employment setting: **35 PERCENT**

Employment changes resulting in unemployment: **7 PERCENT**

## CAREER STABILITY

*Persistence in the practice of law over the natural course of a member's career*

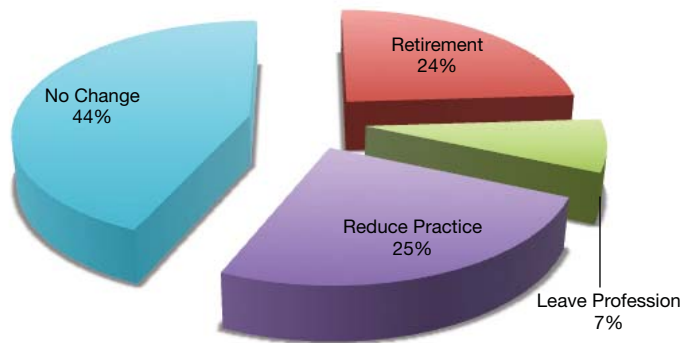
During the next five years:

Planning or contemplating retirement: **24 PERCENT | 7,200 MEMBERS**

Planning to leave the profession apart from retirement: **7 PERCENT | 2,300 MEMBERS**

Planning to reduce practice: **25 PERCENT | 7,500 MEMBERS**

Five-year Projection of Career Transitions among WSBA Members



These data are consistent with national demographic trends and indicate that historic changes in the attorney workforce are underway.

## FACTORS AFFECTING CAREER STABILITY

- Job satisfaction is the strongest predictor of career stability found in this study.
- The study found four factors to be strongly associated with job satisfaction, and therefore important in promoting career stability.



THE HISTORIC CHALLENGES FACING THE BAR CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR WSBA AND ITS MEMBERSHIP TO COLLABORATE IN PRODUCTIVE WAYS TO IMPROVE BOTH THE EXPERIENCE OF PRACTICING LAW AND THE PRODUCT OF THAT PRACTICE.

## DIVERSITY-RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Explore and consider responses to:

- The distinctive experience of professional barriers for each diversity group;
- The potential benefit of mentoring in diversity groups;
- The experience of solo practice among diversity groups;
- Ways in which diversity groups may be well-positioned to contribute to solutions that can potentially benefit all members, such as addressing the challenges of solo practice and meeting the leadership gap created by member retirements and departures.

## OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

- Clarify WSBA's mission and value proposition in ongoing dialogue with members.
- Consider strategies to improve member communication and access.
- Conduct a timely review of member concerns and suggestions documented in the open-ended portions of the survey as well as the fora.
- Update WSBA institutional data collection strategy and methods.

## Context

The WSBA initiated this Membership Study in the spring of 2011 in order to achieve four interlocking goals:

- 1) Gather reliable demographic and career-related data about the WSBA membership overall;
- 2) Initiate an exploration of the characteristics and work experiences of diverse segments of the membership;
- 3) Explore patterns of professional transitions among the WSBA membership, identifying causal factors where possible, and
- 4) Establish a statistically reliable database that can serve as:
  - a practical benchmark for understanding membership trends,
  - a guide to policy and program planning, and
  - a clear baseline for use in future program evaluation.

TrueBearing LLC, a research and evaluation firm in Seattle, collaborated on all aspects of the Study design with the WSBA Study Team, comprising representatives from the WSBA leadership, governance and staff.

## Methods

In order to build a statistically reliable database of the professional experiences and perceptions of the WSBA members, TrueBearing and the Study Team employed a multi-method strategy:

**Phase 1. Online randomized survey**, targeting random sample of ten percent of the entire WSBA membership, including former members who exited the membership within the past five years.

**Phase 2. A series of online fora**, focusing on selected themes and drawing from diverse segments of the membership identified by the WSBA Study Team. These confidential interactive discussions among WSBA members add qualitative depth to the findings.

**Phase 3. An open survey** was offered to all WSBA members. The results of the open survey provide valuable qualitative information, feedback, and recommendations from participating members.

## Status and Next Steps

This Membership Study has achieved the four primary goals set by the WSBA, and the resulting database offers a versatile and statistically reliable blueprint for the leadership of WSBA in setting future policy and program priorities.

This Membership Study identifies several challenges and opportunities that may require responses not only from WSBA but also from other institutional stakeholders in the legal profession. These findings provide a common framework for collaboration in the shared responsibility to protect and nurture the legal profession in the State of Washington for years to come.