Rural & Mountain Attorney Mentoring Plan

ABOUT THIS PLAN: This plan is designed for attorneys practicing, or planning to practice, in rural and mountain communities across Colorado. Rural and mountain practice presents a distinctive combination of challenges and rewards: geographic isolation, generalist demands, deep community roots, and the privilege of serving clients who often have no other legal option. This plan honors those realities. Discussion topics, activities, and resources are informational in value. Mentoring pairs can and should modify this plan to reflect the unique goals and circumstances of the mentoring relationship.

1. INITIAL PLANNING MEETING, PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (COMPLETE ALL)

Action	Mark Completed
Schedule an initial meeting — in person where practical, or virtually — to prepare a customized mentoring plan. Use the CAMP Initial Goal Plan & Meeting Guide to assist your pair in developing goals for the mentoring relationship.	☐
Discuss best communication methods for each participant - especially given geographic distance - and consider scheduling all remaining meetings and activities for the mentoring term. Discuss whether meetings will be in person, by video call, by phone, or a combination. • Set clear expectations about response time and availability, particularly if one or both parties have limited cell or internet service. • Discuss how to handle rescheduling during busy court seasons, weather events, or client emergencies.	☐
In tailoring the mentoring plan to Mentee's interests, discuss long-term professional and career goals and identify ways to achieve them. Be specific about what "success" looks like in a rural or mountain context: • Is the goal to build a solo or small-firm practice? To join an established firm? To serve as a public defender, DA, or county attorney? • What does Mentee want their relationship with the local community to look like five years from now?	☐
Mentor: introduce Mentee to your office's attorneys and staff (if not already done), where practical. Discuss the relational fabric of the local legal community and how introductions work in a small bar.	☐

Action	Mark Completed
Include in the meeting a day-in-the-life discussion: • What does a typical week look like for Mentor? How is it different from what Mentee expected about rural practice? • Discuss work-life integration, mental health, and substance use issues facing lawyers - particularly in isolated practice settings. Discuss COLAP and other support services available to Colorado attorneys. • What are the rhythms of rural practice - court terms, agricultural cycles, tourist seasons - that shape the legal calendar?	☐
Mentor: Give a brief career history: • Describe your mentors and the effect they had on your career. If you lacked mentors, describe how that impacted your path. • Why did you choose to practice in this area? What path led you here? • What would you have done differently? What is the best career decision you've made so far? • What do you love about rural and mountain practice that you couldn't find elsewhere?	☐
Mentor and Mentee: develop a game plan for the mentoring relationship: • Mentee: How do you learn best? Do you want a structured plan with accountability checkpoints, or a more informal, responsive approach? • Both: Determine whether to follow this formal plan or adapt it to your specific goals. • Review the CAMP mentoring plans and adapt activities to reflect Mentee's specific goals and the realities of rural practice.	☐
Share something about yourself not related to law. Rural communities are relational - what you do outside the office matters here as much as what you do inside it.	☐
Add Other: _____	☐

2. THE COLORADO BAR AND LOCAL LEGAL COMMUNITY

Action	Mark Completed
Discuss the culture of practicing law in a smaller legal community: • In rural and mountain practice, you will likely see the same judges, court staff, opposing counsel, and clients across many matters and many years. Reputation is built and lost slowly. • Discuss how professional relationships in small communities differ from large-firm or urban practice and why those differences are actually an asset.	☐

Action	Mark Completed
• What does "professionalism" mean in a setting where everyone knows everyone?	
Discuss building and maintaining professional relationships with local attorneys, judges, court staff, and other legal professionals: • Who are the key players in the local legal ecosystem? Who should Mentee know? • Discuss courthouse culture: how to interact with clerks, bailiffs, and administrative staff in ways that serve clients well. • Discuss the difference between friendly collegiality and inappropriate familiarity, especially in small jurisdictions.	☐
Discuss professionalism and collegiality when attorneys regularly encounter the same opposing counsel and practitioners: • How to be zealous without being adversarial in a community where the opposing counsel today may be your co-counsel tomorrow. • Discuss how to handle personal conflict with a colleague in a small bar where you cannot simply avoid them. • Discuss how to navigate situations where a client's interests conflict with maintaining a collegial relationship with opposing counsel.	☐
Identify opportunities for involvement with local bar associations, professional organizations, courts, and community organizations: • What local and regional bar associations serve this community? Consider county bar associations, the Colorado Bar Association, and specialty sections relevant to Mentee's practice. • What community organizations (i.e. chambers of commerce, service clubs, nonprofit boards) offer opportunities for civic engagement and professional visibility? • How does involvement in local organizations connect to practice development in a rural or mountain setting?	☐
Introduce the Mentee to attorneys and other members of the local legal community when appropriate. Discuss how warm introductions work in a small bar and why they matter.	☐
Discuss strategies for developing a professional network when geographic distance or a small local bar limits opportunities for connection: • State-level and specialty bar listservs, Slack groups, and online communities for rural attorneys. • Colorado Attorney Mentoring Program (CAMP) events and statewide CLE as networking opportunities. • Building informal peer networks with other rural attorneys across the state for referrals, second opinions, and collegial support. • How to use technology (i.e. LinkedIn, legal directories, state bar platforms) to maintain visibility and connections beyond your county.	☐

Action	Mark Completed
Discuss how the rural legal community relates to the broader Colorado bar: • How to advocate for the needs of rural and mountain communities within the statewide bar. • Colorado Supreme Court programs, the Office of Attorney Regulation Counsel, and statewide resources relevant to rural attorneys. • Judicial districts in rural and mountain Colorado: how they differ from the Front Range in terms of docket, culture, and judicial temperament.	☐
Add Other: _____	☐

3. DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY & LAWYER WELL-BEING

Action	Mark Completed
Discuss the Mentee's professional identity and what a sustainable legal career looks like for them in a rural or mountain context: • What drew Mentee to rural or mountain practice? What values or life circumstances shape that choice? • How does Mentee want to be known in this community in five and ten years? • Discuss the difference between professional identity (who you are as a lawyer) and professional role (what tasks you perform).	☐
Discuss the genuine benefits and real challenges of rural and mountain practice with honesty: • **Benefits:** Deep community roots; meaningful client relationships; generalist skills; work-life integration potential; lower cost of living; natural beauty; sense of purpose. • **Challenges:** Professional isolation; limited peer support; generalist demands requiring competency across many areas; physical distance from courts, law libraries, and CLEs; limited support staff; geographic constraints on client base. • Discuss which of these are true for Mentee's specific situation, and which may be different from the stereotype.	☐
Discuss professional isolation and strategies for maintaining meaningful professional relationships: • How often does Mentee interact with other attorneys in a typical week? What is the emotional and professional impact of that level of contact? • Peer support networks: other rural attorneys, state bar sections, CAMP alumni. • How to build a "virtual collegium" using technology like listservs, video calls, online practice communities that provides the intellectual exchange urban lawyers get informally.	☐

Action	Mark Completed
• The difference between physical isolation and professional isolation and strategies to address both.	
Engage Mentee in a self-reflective exercise on the six dimensions of lawyer well-being: • **Emotional:** Recognize and manage emotions; seek mental health support when needed. In rural settings, discussing mental health openly may be especially important given cultural stigma. • **Occupational:** Cultivate satisfaction, growth, and financial stability in work. Discuss what "growth" looks like when the practice itself may not scale in traditional ways. • **Intellectual:** Pursue continuous learning, especially important when local CLE access may be limited. Discuss online CLE, state bar programs, and peer learning. • **Spiritual:** Develop a sense of meaning and purpose. Discuss how serving a rural community connects to Mentee's deeper "why." • **Social:** Build connection and belonging. In rural settings, professional and social community often overlap — discuss how to navigate that thoughtfully. • **Physical:** Colorado's outdoors as an asset for physical well-being; discuss how Mentee builds physical activity into their life and practice.	☐
Identify resources and relationships that can provide support when professional or personal challenges arise: • Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program (COLAP): confidential assistance for any career challenge, including practice management, stress, substance use, anxiety, depression. (1-800-432-0977) • Peer support within the local bar; how Mentor has navigated challenges in their own practice. • Colorado Bar Association ethics hotline for real-time professional guidance. • Colorado Supreme Court Lawyer Regulation resources.	☐
Discuss workload, boundaries, and maintaining a sustainable practice in a setting where "being the only lawyer in town" can create pressure to take every call: • How to establish and maintain boundaries around availability without sacrificing client service. • The ethics of turning down matters you are not competent to handle when there is no other local option and the resources available to bridge the gap. • Discuss how to create off-ramps: referral relationships, licensed legal paraprofessionals, legal aid partnerships, and limited-scope representation options. • Vacation, disconnection, and rest: how to practically take time away when you are a solo or small-firm practitioner in a rural community.	☐

Action	Mark Completed
Identify opportunities for continued learning, professional growth, and connection: • Online CLE: Colorado CLE, CBA On-Demand, and national programs accessible from anywhere. • State bar specialty sections and committees as remote participation opportunities. • Peer mentoring: informal networks of rural and mountain attorneys across the state. • CAMP statewide events and alumni networks.	☐
Discuss technology and well-being: • How technology can reduce isolation: virtual court appearances, remote collaboration, online client intake. • The "always-on" risk: how to set limits around digital availability and protect off-hours. • Connectivity infrastructure as a justice issue: when clients lack reliable internet, what are the obligations and workarounds?	☐
Add Other: _____	☐

4. COLORADO RULES OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT, PROFESSIONALISM, AND CIVILITY

Action	Mark Completed
REQUIRED (complete with at least one activity from the list below)	
Core Ethics Discussion (Required): The pair should discuss: • The distinction between the Colorado RPC and general professionalism. • Attorney obligations to the court, the client, and opposing counsel with special attention to how these play out in a small-bar, rural setting. • Common ethical issues and resources for resolving difficult ethical questions. The Colorado Bar Association Ethics Hotline is a first resource. • Common grievance and malpractice "traps" and how to avoid them especially those unique to generalist practice across multiple areas of law. • The benefits of carrying malpractice insurance including products designed for solo and small-firm practitioners and the consequences of going without it. • Technology competency obligations under RPC 1.1, Comment [8], including how rural attorneys can meet those obligations with limited local tech support.	☐
Discuss the "bullying" and "toxicity" reflection exercise: Engage Mentee in a reflection on these behaviors in the legal profession. Define what these terms mean to Mentee and reflect on whether Mentee has	☐

Action	Mark Completed
experienced or contributed to these issues at various points in their career. Develop a personal plan for avoiding and responding to bullying or toxic behavior. In a small bar, these dynamics play out in high-stakes, high-visibility ways. See: • Dealing with Lawyer Bullies	
COMPLETE AT LEAST TWO OF THE FOLLOWING	
Discuss how to screen for, recognize, and avoid conflicts of interest including the unique conflict challenges in rural practice: • When you serve many roles in a small community (i.e. neighbor, civic leader, attorney, community member) conflicts can arise in unexpected ways. • Discuss how to maintain a conflict-check system when client intake is informal. • Discuss what to do when a conflict means declining a matter and there is no other local attorney such as referral resources, limited scope, and legal aid options.	☐
Work with Mentee to develop communication and leadership skills for professional relationships with support staff, associates, and partners. Consider the following resources: • Fire & Ice: An Associate's View of Partners • I Don't Feel Your Pain: A Partner's View of Associates • Six Ways to Work Successfully With Support Staff • In solo and small-firm settings, discuss how to get the most out of limited staff resources and how to delegate effectively even when the team is small.	☐
Discuss competency and professionalism during discovery: • E-discovery obligations: how to handle electronic discovery in a small-firm setting with limited tech resources. • How to negotiate proportionality with opposing counsel when both sides have limited resources. • Discuss how to use AI-assisted discovery tools appropriately and the verification obligations that accompany them.	☐
Discuss how to prepare for negotiation of a legal matter: when and how negotiation is initiated; how to involve the client; ethical and professionalism obligations of negotiators; skills needed to be an effective negotiator and how to acquire them. • In rural settings, discuss how repeated negotiations with the same parties affect strategy and relationship dynamics.	☐
Discuss appropriate ways to handle situations where a lawyer believes another lawyer has committed an ethical violation or acted unprofessionally; the obligation to report misconduct; and how to handle pressure from a senior	☐

Action	Mark Completed
colleague to act unethically. In a small bar, these situations carry particular weight because the parties know each other well.	
Discuss the grievance process and a lawyer's duty to cooperate with a disciplinary investigation by the Office of Attorney Regulation Counsel.	☐
Discuss the benefits of the Colorado Bar Ethics Hotline as a real-time resource for professional guidance when difficult situations arise.	☐
Add Other: _____	☐

5. LITIGATION AND TRANSACTION EXPERIENCES

Action	Mark Completed
Identify the primary practice areas in which the Mentee needs guidance or additional experience. Rural and mountain attorneys frequently practice across multiple areas of law. What is Mentee's current mix, and where do they most need to build competency? • Common rural and mountain practice areas: real property and water law, agricultural law, estate planning and probate, family law, criminal defense, personal injury, and small business/transactional work. • Unique Colorado specialty areas with rural dimensions: water rights adjudication, oil and gas, ski and resort law, mining law, and cannabis. • Identify which areas are likely to arise regardless of Mentee's preferences, and develop a competency plan for each.	☐
Discuss practical skills relevant to Mentee's practice, including legal research, drafting, negotiation, hearings, trial preparation, or transactional practice: • In rural practice, the expectation is often that you handle all phases of a matter. Discuss how to build skills in phases of practice that are less familiar. • Discuss how AI-assisted legal research and drafting tools can extend a small practice's capacity, and the ethical obligations of verification and competent review. • Review JDF forms applicable to Mentor's practice area and discuss drafting strategies for motions, briefs, and client letters in rural courts.	☐
Mentee attends or participates in a meeting, hearing, or other proceeding specific to Mentee's or Mentor's practice area. The pair discusses and evaluates what was observed. • Identify upcoming hearings, depositions, closings, or other proceedings Mentee can observe or participate in.	☐

Action	Mark Completed
• Discuss how rural court proceedings may differ from urban practice: judicial culture, informal procedures, local rules, and the role of personal relationships.	
Discuss strategies for maintaining competency when practicing across multiple areas of law: • Develop a "Generalist Competency Map": the areas Mentee currently handles, the areas they aspire to add, and the areas they will decline and refer. • CLE strategy for a generalist: how to cover multiple practice areas with limited CLE budget and time. • Co-counseling, referral relationships, and consultation as tools for extending competency without overreaching. • When to say no: how to assess whether taking a matter in an unfamiliar area serves the client vs. creates undue risk.	☐
Discuss virtual practice tools that expand the reach of a rural practice: • Video hearings and remote court appearances: procedures, technology requirements, and professionalism standards. • Online client intake, remote notarization, and electronic signing tools. • Cloud-based practice management tools accessible from anywhere with internet. • AI drafting and research tools as a "force multiplier" for a solo or small-firm practitioner.	☐
Add Other: _____	☐

6. LAW OFFICE MANAGEMENT, FEES, AND IN-OFFICE PROCEDURES

Action	Mark Completed
REQUIRED (complete with at least one activity from the list below)	
Discuss law office management best practices (preferably including a tour of Mentor's office), including: • Time records and timekeeping. • Records of client-related expenses. • Billing system and cycles; invoicing best practices. • Client retainer and payment schedules; types of fee agreements; what goes into a fee agreement under RPC 1.16A. • Escrow and trust accounts: establishing a COLTAF; accounting, auditing, use of interest proceeds; proper procedures for handling client funds and other property.	☐

Action	Mark Completed
• Filing system and procedures (physical and digital). • Document retention plan. • Calendar reminder and docketing systems; avoiding missed deadlines. • Information technology systems and cybersecurity basics. • Library and legal research systems, including online and AI-assisted resources accessible from rural locations. • Other resources: publications, seminars, equipment.	
Discuss law office financial planning with a rural and mountain lens: • Start-up costs for a rural or mountain practice: office space, technology, insurance, bar dues. • Revenue planning: seasonal fluctuations common in resort communities; agricultural cycles that affect rural client cash flow. • Alternative fee structures particularly relevant to rural clients: flat fees, unbundled services, payment plans, and subscription models. • How to handle clients who cannot afford fees: sliding-scale options, pro bono obligations, and legal aid referrals. • Trust accounting in a solo or small-firm setting: COLTAF setup; when to transfer funds from trust; billing and collections procedures. • Discuss attending Trust Account School offered by the Office of Attorney Regulation Counsel.	☐
COMPLETE AT LEAST TWO OF THE FOLLOWING	
Discuss role and responsibilities of paralegals, assistants, and other office personnel, and how to establish good working relationships. Discuss the “care and feeding” of support staff in a small office where each person plays an outsize role.	☐
Discuss practices to maintain client confidentiality, including in remote and rural settings: • Managing confidential conversations when the office is in a small building where others may overhear. • Digital confidentiality: secure email, cloud storage, and AI tool data retention policies. • What to do when a client’s neighbor or family member is also a client.	☐
Discuss good time management skills and techniques for a generalist practice: • How to manage competing deadlines across multiple practice areas. • Discuss ways to organize the day: time blocking, client communication windows, and protecting time for substantive work. • How to handle the “walk-in” culture common in small-town practice.	☐
Discuss how to screen for, recognize, and avoid conflicts of interest, including the use of a conflict-check system in a small office.	☐

Action	Mark Completed
Discuss how to prevent unauthorized practice of law issues with staff, including supervision obligations and the limits of paralegal authority.	☐
Discuss office politics in a small-firm setting, including appropriate networking, socializing, and the personal behaviors that reinforce professional reputation in a community where everyone knows everyone.	☐
Discuss planning ahead for handling the practice in the event of retirement, disability, or death: • Designating a successor attorney. • Client notification obligations. • File transfer and trust account procedures.	☐
Discuss the issues surrounding leaving a firm or solo practice: how to protect yourself, properly advise clients of their rights, withdraw from cases, and avoid ethical pitfalls during transitions. See RPC 1.16.	☐
Discuss evaluation and compensation procedures and professional advancement within a firm.	☐
Discuss information security and cybersecurity basics for rural practices: • Password hygiene, multi-factor authentication, and secure remote access are especially important when working from locations with shared or public Wi-Fi. • Risks of phishing, ransomware, and wire fraud targeting small law firms. • Attorney obligations under Colorado RPC 1.6 and associated comments. • Data breach response: what to do if client data is compromised.	☐
Add Other: _____	☐

7. PROFESSIONALISM IN WORKING WITH CLIENTS

Action	Mark Completed
COMPLETE AT LEAST THREE OF THE FOLLOWING	
Review the Colorado Principles of Professionalism as a pair and select at least three principles for further discussion as to their application to Mentee's practice. Consider how each principle plays out specifically in a small-community, rural setting where professional relationships are long-term and personal.	☐
Discuss the initial meeting and interaction with a potential client in a rural setting: • Tips for gathering information about a legal matter; appraising credibility and trust of the potential client.	☐

Action	Mark Completed
• How to evaluate whether to accept the representation, including conflict checks and competency assessment. • How to decline representation professionally when the small-bar context means you may encounter this person again at the grocery store. • Making and accepting referrals: building a referral network across practice areas and geographic areas.	
Discuss the importance of client communication and strategies to maintain appropriate ongoing communication: • Returning telephone calls, emails, and texts promptly. Discuss what "timely" means in Mentee's practice. • Managing client expectations in a rural setting: clients may not understand that their attorney's attention is divided across many matters and many areas of law. • Use of fee agreements, timeliness, written communication, and formal communication policies. Consider: Do You Have a Client-Centered Law Practice? (Sullivan, 2016)	☐
Discuss proper legal counseling: the duties and responsibilities of advising clients; the respective roles of client and lawyer in decision-making: • In rural communities, clients often expect a trusted advisor relationship, not just legal services. Discuss how to fulfill that expectation while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries. • See also: Who Is My Client? Client-Centered Lawyering With Multiple Clients (Lawton, 2015)	☐
Assess best practices for communicating with clients about the business aspects of the relationship: billing, collections, and related procedures. • Discuss fee agreement best practices for a rural client base: payment plans, flat fees, and sliding-scale options. • Evaluate Mentee's current collections approach and discuss how to handle non-payment professionally in a community where the non-paying client may be a neighbor or local figure.	☐
Discuss how to deal with a "difficult" client: • Tools for evaluating when it is time to withdraw from representation. • Avoiding ethical pitfalls and professionally terminating a client relationship. • In rural settings: the client's potential to damage professional reputation by word of mouth makes proactive communication especially important. See: Taming the Beast: How to Manage Difficult Clients (Lowentheil, 2017)	☐
Discuss the termination of the attorney-client relationship: • Issues with terminating mid-representation; necessary steps and documentation.	☐

Action	Mark Completed
• See RPC 1.16: mandatory vs. permissive withdrawal; how to protect the client's interests; file surrender rules. • In rural settings: discuss how to handle withdrawal in a community where referral options may be limited.	
Discuss maintaining communication with the client about legal updates, articles of interest, and check-ins on live matters. Discuss how client communication is a form of client development in a rural practice.	☐
Discuss the idea that clients are a rural attorney's best marketing. In a small community, referrals from satisfied clients are the primary source of new business. Discuss how to consistently earn them.	☐
Discuss how to handle mistakes in representation: notification obligations, malpractice insurance, and how to maintain client trust while addressing an error professionally.	☐
Add Other: _____	☐

8. PUBLIC SERVICE AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Action	Mark Completed
COMPLETE AT LEAST ONE OF THE FOLLOWING	
Discuss the unique access-to-justice landscape in rural and mountain Colorado: • The "legal desert" problem: many rural Colorado counties have few or no resident attorneys. Discuss what that means for the clients Mentee serves and the communities they serve in. • The rural attorney as a community access-to-justice infrastructure: what is Mentee's responsibility, and how do they balance it against sustainability? • Colorado Legal Services rural programs and how to work with them effectively. • COLAP's Access to Justice resources and statewide pro bono coordination through the CBA.	☐
Acquaint Mentee with legal aid programs, local pro bono programs, volunteer boards, and other opportunities for civic and charitable work. • Discuss the reasons for making time to engage in volunteer legal service to the public and any impediments to undertaking such work. • Discuss the professional development value of pro bono work for a generalist practitioner: exposure to new practice areas, new courts, and new client populations.	☐

Action	Mark Completed
Mentee attends a civic club or community service activity in which Mentor participates. Discuss the professional and personal value of community engagement in a rural setting.	☐
The pair participates in a bar-sponsored or other volunteer program delivering legal services to the public. Discuss the reasons for making time for this work.	☐
Discuss technology and access to justice: • How AI tools, online legal document services, and self-help platforms are changing what clients can do without an attorney — and what role rural attorneys play in that ecosystem. • Court self-help programs, remote hearings, and online dispute resolution as tools that extend access in rural communities. • Discuss the ethical dimensions of technological access-to-justice solutions: competency, confidentiality, and the limits of automated assistance.	☐
Add Other: _____	☐