

ANNUAL REPORT

*Legislative Advocacy.
Education & Capacity Building.
Outreach & Engagement.*

20
23



Executive Summary

Three years into the “Covid-era”, WACO has found solid footing in adapting to a changing work landscape by focusing on its three key areas: Legislative Advocacy, Outreach & Engagement, and Education & Capacity Building. The year marks the first year in its new five-year Strategic Plan, and we are happy to report on solid progress on the plan for year one.

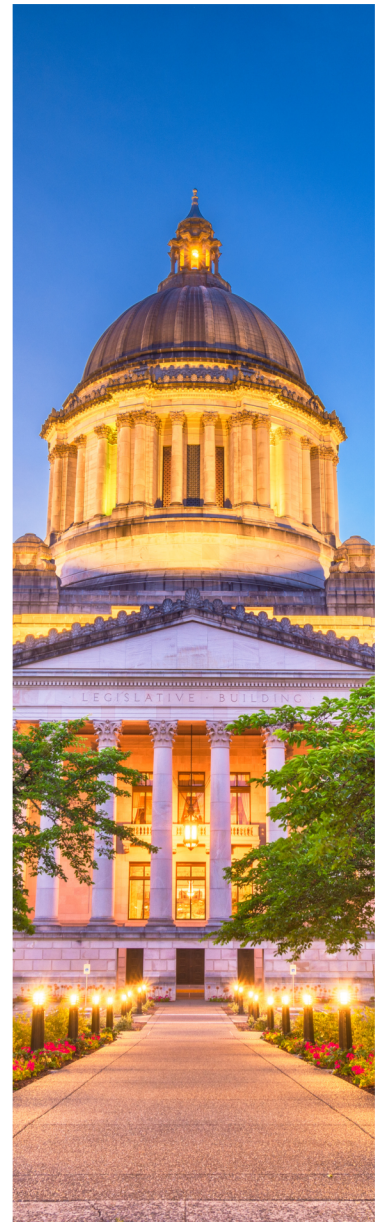
2023 saw over 2000 bills introduced with less than 500 going to the Governor’s desk. Despite this WACO was able to move our priorities forward. We started the session off with six priorities, of which three were passed by the legislature, the remaining three were poised to do well in the 2024 session based on stakeholder work and legislative feedback.

WACO’s outreach and engagement continues to flourish with increased public engagement and effective membership outreach. Our “Know Your County Officials” program continues to produce new videos expanding the understanding of our members roles and responsibilities, while we find new and effective ways to share information with our members.

2023 was a record setting year for our education endeavors with over 181 participants joining us at the Annual Conference, and increased participation in our many online a trainings and packed lunch events. Throughout the year, WACO was able to offer online training bi-monthly accompanied by a monthly packed lunch, creating a broad-ranged online training hub to access at any time.

All this, of course, could not be done without the foundation of solid budget management and planning. In 2023 WACO again passed outside audits without finding, keeping up a strong track record of transparent and accountable fiscal management.

We look forward to 2024 with ever increased alignment of our operations to the Strategic Plan and continued improvements to our daily operation.





Building Trust Together

**President Adam Kick
Skamania County
Prosecuting Attorney**

I am pleased and proud to present you with WACO's annual report for 2023. The purpose of our annual report is to overview our past year activities and accomplishments and provide transparent reporting of our operations and finances. We organize our reporting by the areas of activity our membership has consistently voiced as their priorities: Legislation, Education, and Communication.

Some have described 2023 as "post-pandemic" and for many this characterization brought a small sense of relief. But we can't overlook its impact nor the lingering and new challenges we continue to face. For WACO, the pandemic fundamentally altered our system of member outreach and delivery of education, training and events. While prompted by necessity, the success of online and virtual delivery responds to demands well beyond those imposed by the pandemic.

Conflicts home and abroad loomed large in 2023 and continue into 2024 as we approach the general election of our nation's leader. My own participation in WACO and experience as a county elected official has convinced me that we succeed when we collaborate, and in order to collaborate effectively, we need to trust each other. Perhaps never before in WACO history has it been more important for county elected officials, seemingly disparate in our roles and political stances, to build trust between us and also with other government leaders. This is why I have selected "Building Trust Together" as my 2023-2024 theme, in part as a continuation and expansion of last year's theme of building bridges. Much of the work needed in order to build trust on a foundation of common ground remains to be done. As an association, WACO must continue to embrace and strongly respond to the reasons why we associate and why we are stronger and more effective together.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to lead and offer my thanks to our members and WACO staff.

Washington Association of County Officials President
Adam Kick
Skamania County Prosecuting Attorney

Our Vision

The Vision of the Washington Association of County Officials is to be a forum open to all county Assessors, Auditors, Clerks, Coroners, Prosecutors, Sheriffs, and Treasurers, where initiatives for better county government are nurtured and differences are reconciled; to act as a collective voice for all WACO members; and to serve as a conduit between WACO and local, state, and federal governments.

Our Mission

The Mission of the Washington Association of County Officials is to support each county official as he/she executes the constitutional and statutory duties and responsibilities of the office.

Our Values

Our organizational values are our standards. These values define how WACO will conduct its work:

Collaborative	Efficient	Non-Partisan	Respected
Competent	Inclusive	Productive	Responsive
Consistent	Innovative	Professional	Transparent
Constructive	Member-Driven	Progressive	Trusted





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WACO Staff



Jennifer Wallace
Executive Director



Timothy Grisham
Deputy Director



Tiffin Moreno
Finance & Administration
Manager



Cella Hyde
Member Services
Manager

WACO Board of Trustees

Adam Kick, President
Skamania County, Prosecutor

Amy Cziske, Vice-President
Kittitas County, Treasurer

Linda Hjelle, 2nd Vice-President
Snohomish County, Assessor

Paul Budrow, Secretary/Treasurer
Okanogan County, Sheriff

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Thurston County, Treasurer

Stacie Prada, Past-President
Jefferson County, Treasurer

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Pierce County, Assessor

Thad Duvall, Auditors Trustee
Douglas County, Auditor

Scott Tinney, Clerks Trustee
Lewis County, Clerk

Craig Morrison, Coroners Trustee
Grant County, Coroner

Jon Tunheim, Prosecutors Trustee
Thurston County, Prosecuting Attorney

Rob Snaza, Sheriffs Trustee
Lewis County, Sheriff

Leslie Valz, Treasurers Trustee
Stevens County, Treasurer

John Wilson, Trustee at Large Position 1
King County, Assessor

Tom Konis, Trustee at Large Position 2
Spokane County, Assessor

Carolyn Fundingsland, Trustee at Large Position 3
Cowlitz County, Auditor

Lisa Frazier, Trustee at Large Position 4
Mason County, Treasurer

Katie Sloan, Trustee at Large Position 5
Adams County, Clerk

Falon Hoven, Trustee at Large Position 6
Wahkiakum County, Assessor

Legislative Advocacy

The 2023-2027 Strategic Plan directs staff to proactively support legislation that benefits Washington residents and WACO members. Ongoing services include:

- *Share practical, expert information with legislators to guide them in crafting effective legislation.*
- *Provide technical assistance for members, affiliate organizations, legislators, legislative staff, and stakeholders.*
- *Advocate for WACO priority bills, as well as bills and future policies with impact on our members.*

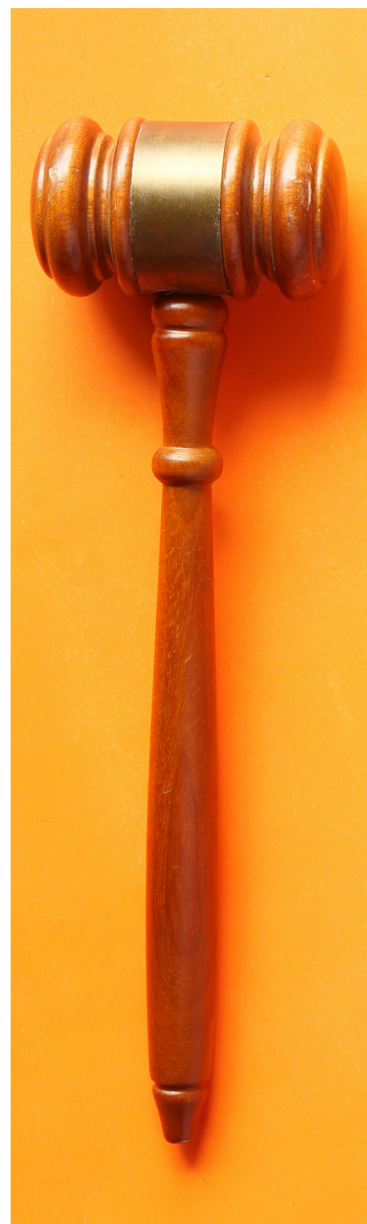
The Legislative Advocacy impact strategy is to anticipate future policy issues with significant impact across affiliate organizations and proactively engage with data, analysis, evaluation of fiscal impacts, and advocacy.

This year the legislature introduced a combined 2156 bills with only 485 clearing both chambers. This ought to give you an idea of how much was left on the cutting room floor to use a term from film. Time certainly was a factor to why so many policies failed to get advanced.

Despite this WACO was able to work well within this reality to move our priorities forward. We started the session off with six priority bills, three of which were passed by the legislature; one of which also required being funded in the 2023-2025 operating budget.

WACO Priority Legislation:

HB 1419 was a “good government” bill that modernized the process of registered warrants bringing policy in alignment with current practice. In addition to amending the language to reflect updates in practice, the legislation provides a means for issuing warrants where there are insufficient funds; and updates the language to provide for current practices and making the process less cumbersome. This bill passed through the legislature relatively fast, a rarity in this year’s session for a bill that many deemed “small” compared to the big issues the legislature was dealing with.



SB 5392 fixed an oversight made in the revision of the uniform unclaimed property act that created a system where counties would possibly pay more money to reimburse small amounts (under \$10) of court related overpayments than the actual reimbursement was worth to the recipient. The bill was a rare true bi-partisan effort and passed with relative ease.

SB 5523 creates a loan repayment program for board certified forensic pathologists providing services in identified shortage areas in WA state. The shortage areas are identified by FIC and the program is administered by the Washington Health Corps program. The program provides up to \$25,000 in loan payment per year of participation for up to four years. You must complete your service obligation or be required to repay the program. This program is anticipated to fund four slots per year.

Additionally, the Department of Health must enter a two-year contract with WACME for a marketing plan advertising Washington State as a place for forensic pathologists to live/work. WACME is additionally tasked with conducting a study of the shortage due Oct. 1, 2024 to the legislature.

Finally, counties may receive up to 40% reimbursement on transportation costs for autopsies. Effective July 23, 2023. SB 5523 Funded in the budget. Sec 222 (114) p. 341. Sec. 731 (3) Pg. 632

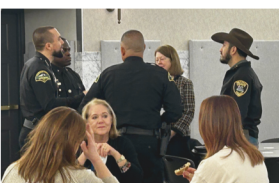
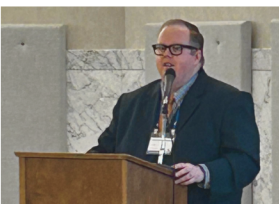
In addition to the three legislative priority bills that passed, we received positive feedback and assurances for the 2024 session on two additional priorities. **HB 1241** – Addressing harassment of elections officials, and HB 1205 alignment of duties in dependency cases (notifications). Both bills were victim to time with a number of house bills being assigned to the Law & Justice committee with not enough time to hear them all. We look forward to swift action on the bills in 2024.

Finally, **HB 1272** addressing standardization of voter pamphlets fell victim to being over amended to the point that the Auditors (and WACO) felt that they could no longer advocate for it to move forward. These amendments will be discussed in the interim for future consideration on the topic.

WSACA (Assessors) passed their priority bill (HB 1355), which updates thresholds for the senior citizen and disabled veteran property tax exemption, opening up the program in many more counties than is currently the case.

The Budget: The 2023-2025 biennium budget was adopted by legislature April 23, 2023. Please note that all notes regarding the budget remain preliminary as the budget has yet to be signed by the Governor. Here are some quick highlights of what is in the budget.

Day on the Hill 2024 - Snapshots





Outreach & Engagement

The 2023-2027 Strategic Plan directs the Board and Staff to increase coordination among our members and raise awareness of the needs of Washington's counties. Ongoing Services include:

- *Organize and convene WACO's Annual Conference.*
- *Produce materials describing the role of counties and elected county officials.*
- *Support Trustees at Large and Affiliate Representatives in outreach and engagement with WACO members.*
- *Host dialogue and work groups on current topical issues of concern to affiliate organizations.*

The Outreach and Engagement impact strategies are:

- *Expand à la carte support service offerings to meet identified needs of WACO affiliate organizations.*
- *Increase coordination with peer organizations and affiliate leadership.*
- *Create accessible and inclusive opportunities for members to build relationships, coordinate, and learn from one another.*
- *Raise awareness of county needs and WACO's role and value*

Know Your County Officials – During 2023 WACO continued producing Know Your County Officials videos. With the completion of the Treasurers' and Prosecutors' videos – staff ended the year with work on the final affiliate highlight video for the Sheriffs. This video will mark the seventh video and complete one for each affiliate. The project next pivots toward topic specific videos for the affiliates as we head into 2024 and beyond.

The videos are available on the WACO website alongside the Washington County Government book, downloadable infographics, and other resources dedicated to educating the public about the roles and duties of the WACO membership's offices.

Twitter – We continue to see a decrease in reach for Twitter (now called "X"). 2023, for the second year in a row we have seen a decrease in reach for our Twitter posts. The nearly 30% decrease is interesting considering consistent changes to the algorithm, as well as a large exodus of users due to changes in the platform's corporate governance and philosophical changes. However, more interesting is the monthly volatility in reach – as 2023 also saw a slight increase in the year's median reach.

While we have not abandoned usage of the social media platform – WACO staff has increased targeted direct communications with members to increase engagement to a high level of success.

Website – In 2023 the WACO website received 67% more views than 2022, with an increase of 5% for returning visitors. This marks a bounce back after a year of decreased utilization in 2022 (the first since tracking began in 2015).

CHJ – The Courthouse Journal newsletter held steady with 2022 numbers in 2023. With less than a 1% difference between the two years – The open range for a newsletter currently has an average of 32.5%, nearly a third of our membership. Note: this metric is only triggered by "read receipts" from various providers. Differences in network certificates and cookies reduce this number from "real" readership.

Direct Emails – in 2023 WACO kicked off an initiative to better stay in contact with each member across the state. We began sending emails to members monthly, not in batches through a third party mailing service but through direct one-on-one emails. The process takes some time, but the feedback has been, and continues to be, invaluable - giving a true look at what each office is facing in real-time.

Packed Lunch – WACO’s Packed Lunch series continues to be a highly anticipated event each month, with members requesting reminders and additional information on presenters and subjects. The breakout rooms in Zoom, divided by county category, continue to provide a safe space for county officials of similar sized counties to interact and share their operational tips, tricks, and advice to one another.



65th Annual Conference in Everett: A Record Breaking Event!

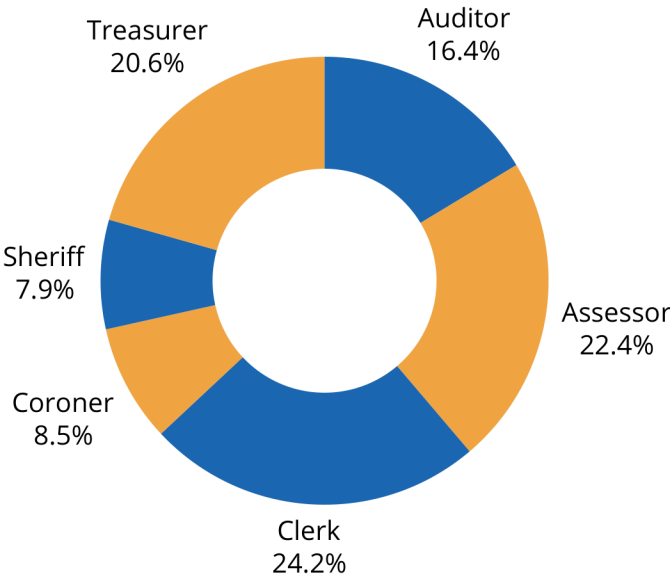


WACO’s 2023 Annual Conference in Everett was one for the books! No only was there a record breaking number of officials and deputies in attendance (181), but there were fantastic events, trainings, and keynotes that sparked new ideas and fostered peer relationships across the state.

"Each of us have a role, each of our offices touch another office. Knowing each other better, having others to rely on, and getting energy and synergy going - that is how we overcome differences. That is how we build and foster servant leadership."

-Jeff Gadman, 2023 WACO President & Thurston County Treasurer

Attendee Breakdown by Affiliate



Education & Capacity Building

The 2023-2027 Strategic Plan directs the Board and Staff to enhance the capacity and effectiveness of our members through Education and Capacity Building. Ongoing services include:

- *Deliver Annual Conference education sessions and Newly Elected Officials training.*
- *Host live and virtual training events and serve as a hub of educational resources.*
- *Provide technical services to record trainings and events.*

The Education and Capacity Building impact strategy is to provide enhanced training and targeted services to support the roles and responsibilities of our members.

Annually the Education Committee plans for the provision of quality education opportunities that support WACO members and their offices. The Committee endeavors to make WACO a go-to entity for its members, partners, and citizens on county matters involving the memberships' roles and duties.

Each year the Committee selects training topics for the membership. Educational trainings and programs include tools for being a county official that advance WACO members' skills, knowledge, and available resources as well as collective wisdom on county government operations.

The following trainings (among other affiliate requested trainings) were held in 2023:

- Uniform Unclaimed Property Act presented by Linda Brown, Department of Revenue Unclaimed Property Auditor
- Effective Delegation presented by Don Read
- Managing Stress, Time & Energy for Leaders presented by Jessie Cronin, DES Leadership Development Manager
- Electronic Records Best Practices presented by Rachel Wilson, Washington State Archives
- Basic Accounting and Budget Management presented by Acting Thurston County Manager Robin Campbell
- Legal Representation for County Officials presented by San Juan County Prosecutor Greg Banks



Additionally, the Committee selected the following trainings for the 2023 conference:

- Funding for Staff – How to move from a wage study to creating pay scale, and how to avoid legislative overreach – *Presented by Alex Sheets.*
- Recruitment and Retention – How to market your office as a place you WANT to work – *Presented by Devin Bales, Director of Research, DHM Research.*
- Elected County Officials Ethics – An overview of ethics from statute to practice including Public Disclosure Commission considerations – *Presented by Dan Bigelow, Wahkiakum County Prosecutor, and Peter Lavalley, Executive Director of the Public Disclosure Commission.*
- Working with Commissioners – A Panel discussion with Stacie Prada, Jefferson County Treasurer; Peter Van Nortwick, Clark County Assessor; and Rob Gelder former Kitsap Commissioner, Thurston County Deputy County Manager

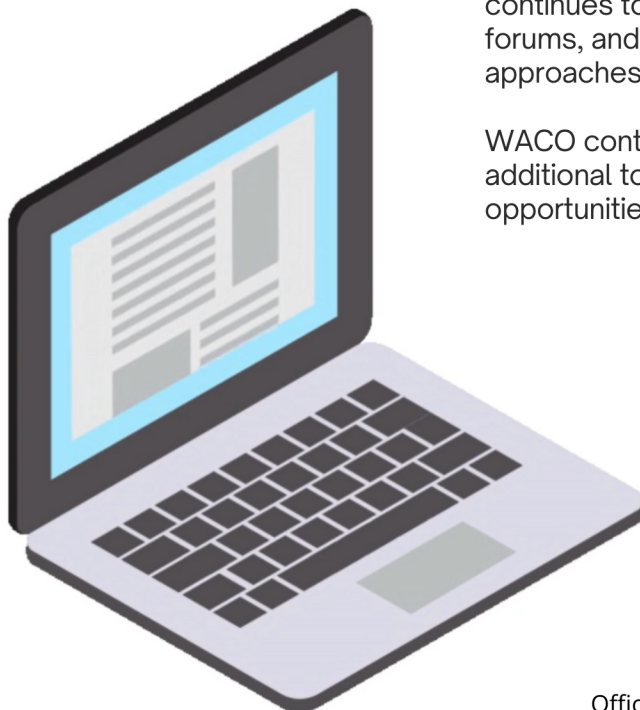
Trainings sessions are recorded for members to reference and view past the training date. WACO now hosts a robust library of training videos online for members and their staff to reference at their convenience.



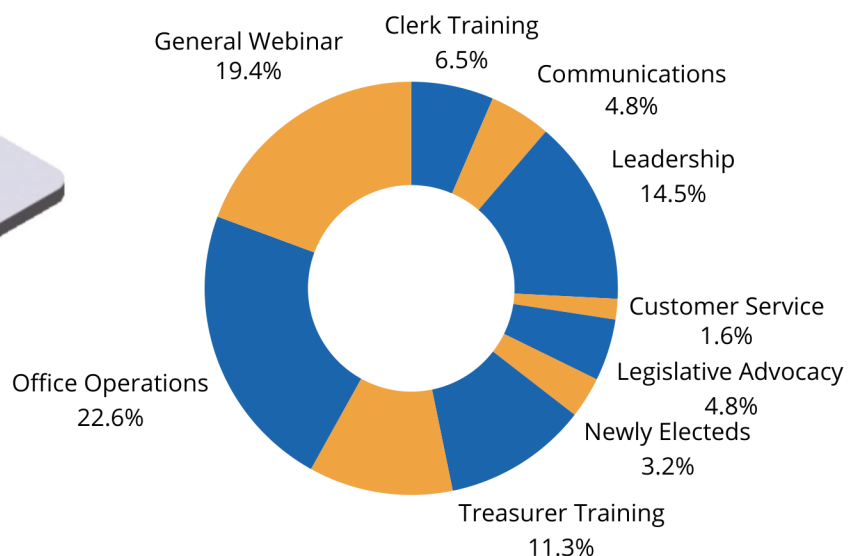
The WACO Education Hub: A 24/7 Resource for County Officials

The WACO Education Hub is a fantastic resource for county officials and their staff. The Hub features over 60 different trainings, webinars, discussions, and panels that can be accessed 24/7 with a computer, smart phone or tablet. The best part? The catalog of offerings continues to grow each month as WACO hosts trainings, discussion forums, and provides platforms for industry leaders to show innovative approaches to many county and state-wide issues.

WACO continues to engage with members consistently to identify additional topics of interest in order to provide additional education opportunities.



Content by Topic



Financials

Strategic Plan 2023-2027 Goals:

Financial Sustainability: Establish a sustainable funding plan aligned with WACO's changing service delivery model.

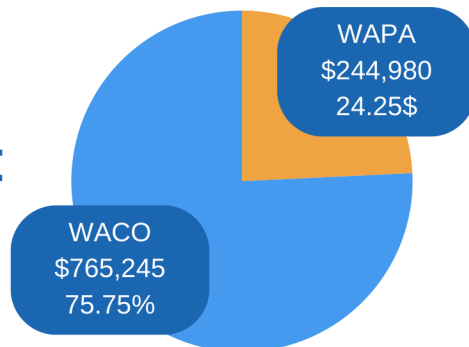
As an IRS 501c3 tax-exempt charity in good standing, WACO continuously seeks ways to improve through both independent audits of finances and procedures, as well as, through internal improvements.

In 2023, the Association passed an annual outside audit with no significant findings. At the end of 2023 Washington State Auditor's Office started the Association's accountability audit for the years 2020-2022. The Association is following the policies that are in place and is on the path to a more consistent budgeting plan so funds are available when needed. Funds are used towards its mission, programs, and activities, as well as critical areas for which WACO has significant interest, such as with the Washington Counties Building partnership with the Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC), the Newly Elected Officials Conference (NEO), technology and equipment replacement, and professional services specifically for legal fees and the State Auditor's Office (SAO).

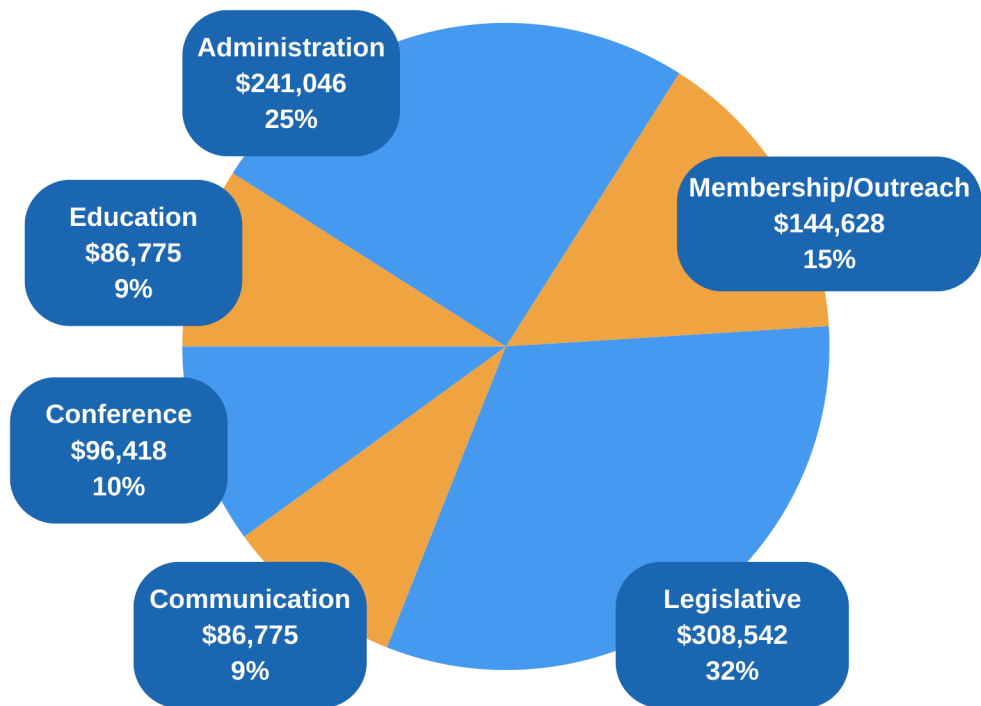
In July 2022, the WACO Board of Trustees adopted a 2023 budget with anticipated revenues of \$969,609. The 2023 anticipated expenses projection was \$969,609 creating a balanced 2023 budget.

In 2023, as per policy, \$244,980 (24.25%) of WACO funds were provided to WAPA to support the continuing civil legal education for prosecuting attorneys and their staff, and other WAPA functions. At year's end, WACO had revenues of \$979,214 and actual expenses of \$964,977.

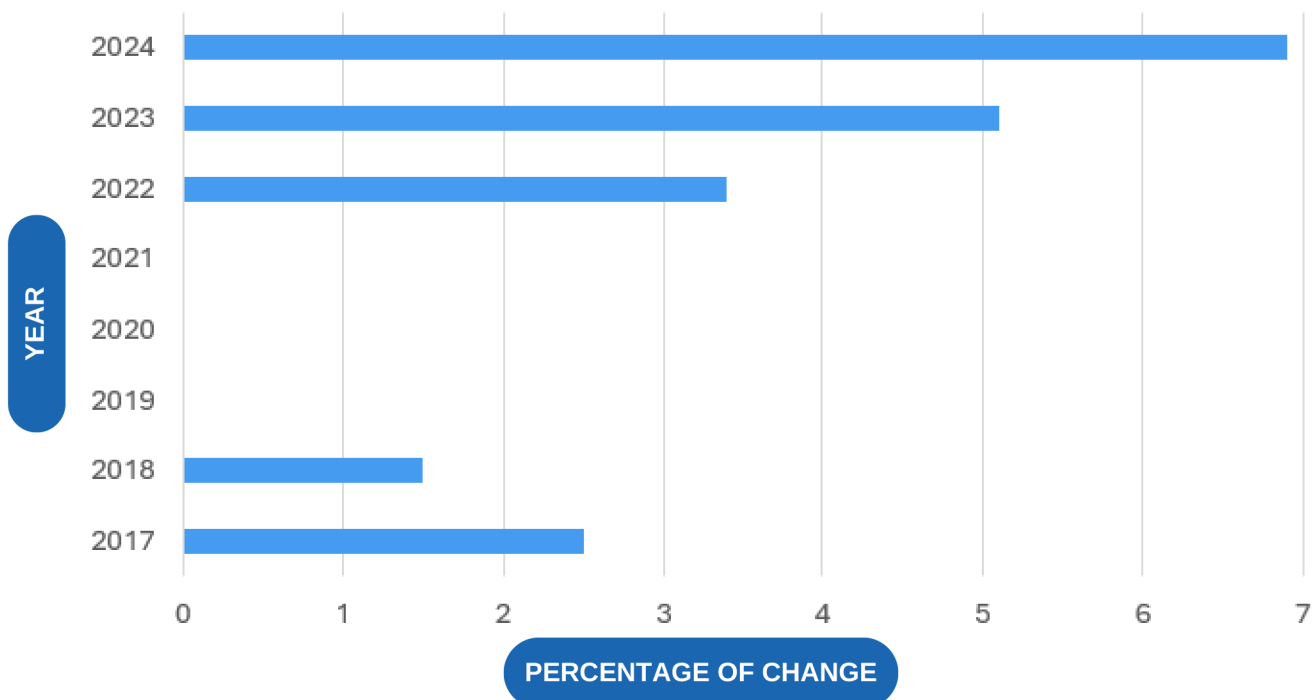
2023 Reimbursement Revenue Distribution



2023 WACO Expenses



2023 Historical Dues



Scholarship

The Washington County Scholarship fund awards three children of county officials, or their staff, \$3,000 scholarships each year. Recipients must be full-time students in a baccalaureate degree, associate degree, or vocational/technical certification program.

Funds for the scholarship are provided by members of the Washington Association of County Officials (WACO). Since 1993 the fund has awarded over \$310,000 to eligible students. The award amount is subject to change and reviewed by the Board of Trustees annually.

This year we had 21 complete applications that were eligible after review. 10 incomplete applications. 2 ineligible applications. Last year we had 24 complete applications that were eligible after review. 7 incomplete applications. 1 ineligible application. So, in total we process 1 additional application this year than last after full review.



Noah Croskey

Will be attending the University of Washington. Noah plans to complete a degree in Engineering. Noah's parent, Jing Zhang is a Legal Document Examiner at the Snohomish County Auditor's Office.



Teleaha P.M. Royal

Will be attending Bethune-Cookman University. Teleah plans to complete a degree in Mathematics Education. Teleah's parent, Teresa Love-Royal works in the King County DJA (*Clerks Office*).



Kiana Oos

Will be attending Western Washington University. Kiana plans to complete a degree in Environmental Studies. Kiana's parent, Anna Oos, is a Paralegal at the Snohomish County Prosecutor's Office.



Washington Association
of **COUNTY OFFICIALS**

MORE ABOUT US

The membership of the Washington Association of County Officials (WACO) includes elected county assessors, auditors, clerks, coroners and medical examiners, prosecuting attorneys, sheriffs, treasurers and comparable appointed officials in charter counties. WACO is a non-profit, nonpartisan organization. WACO works closely with the affiliate organizations for every executive level county official in Washington's 39 counties. These affiliate associations meet throughout the year, bringing colleagues together to discuss issues of common interest and to exchange ideas and opinions.



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