

# UTILIZATION & COMPENSATION SURVEY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Every other year, NALA conducts a survey of paralegals to explore their duties and responsibilities, as well as billing rates and compensation. NALA has compiled this survey since 1986. This is a summary of the findings of the 2020 survey, conducted from July to August 2020. For this year's survey we received 1,607 responses. With the U.S. Department of Labor reporting, on average, 336,669 paralegal jobs in 2020, and the number of responses in our survey, we have a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 3.00. Given the number of 2020 survey respondents, however, this study provides a generalization of the paralegal profession.

This article provides a summary of some of the survey findings. The full report is available to NALA members, and available for purchase to non-members.

## WHO PARTICIPATED?

Of the 1,607 participants, 94% were female and about 50 years old. Most of these individuals have received their Certified Paralegal (CP) credential (70%), and 32% of the respondents also hold the Advanced Certified Paralegal (ACP) credential. The most responses were from NALA members (73%).

The largest generation represented was Generation X (44%), followed by Baby Boomers (34%) and Millennials (20%). More than half (57%) have earned a bachelor's degree, and 9 out of 10 respondents stated they had received formal education (outside of on-the-job training) specifically in the paralegal field.

The majority (51%) of the paralegals who responded had more than 20 years of legal experience, with 19% of the paralegals who responded having one to five years of experience.

## WHERE ARE PARALEGALS WORKING?

Respondents were from 49 of the 50 United States. Most of the responses were from paralegals living in the southeast and southwest regions. The majority (55%) of the paralegals work in cities with less than 500,000 people. An additional 24% of the paralegals work in cities with more than 1 million residents.

## WORKING CONDITIONS

Most paralegals are working in private law firms (67%), with 29% and 4% working in the public and nonprofit sectors, respectively. Most paralegals (55%) support between 1 and 5 attorneys, and 11% support more than 45 attorneys. Just 1% of the respondents had a personal secretary, but nearly half (48%) had some shared secretarial support.

Some notable shifts in employment were seen in 2020 compared to 2018. Approximately 10% fewer employers offered paralegals a flexible work arrangement compared to 2018. The 2020 reasons for any increases in duties and responsibilities significantly declined from the past few studies where fewer paralegals indicated that their duties increased, such as in the area of work that involves independent judgement or the level of sophistication of work.

The percentage of paralegals who have employees who report to them stayed relatively steady at 21%. More paralegals are receiving their work from specific attorneys with an increase of 2% from 2018.

## SPECIALTY PRACTICE AREAS

Paralegals are spending 80 to 100% of their time in these 11 specialty areas:

1. Litigation – civil (40%)
2. Family law/domestic issues (30%)
3. Personal injury (33%)
4. Criminal (28%)
5. Insurance (26%)
6. Administrative/government/public, including compliance (23%)
7. Intellectual property (19%)
8. Medical malpractice (18%)
9. Mass tort litigation (17%)
10. Healthcare (17%)
11. Immigration (17%)

## BILLING RATES AND COMPENSATION

The studies continue to show that roughly half of paralegals are primarily paid hourly, while the other half are salaried. On average, paralegals work 40 hours per week where 29 of those hours are billable, which continues to be the trend since 2016. About 53% of firms bill paralegal time. Total compensation for paralegals continues to grow with an average of \$68,240 in 2020, which is a 1% increase compared to 2018 (\$67,578) and an 11% increase over 2016 (\$61,671).

For more information on how to obtain a copy of the full report, please visit the NALA website at [www.nala.org](http://www.nala.org).

NALA Members have exclusive access to the full report as a member benefit.

If you are not a NALA Member but wish to purchase the survey report, it can be purchased on our website for \$79.