

NALA Utilization & Compensation Report

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 2016 survey, conducted from October – November, 2016. For this year's survey we received 1,226 responses. With the US Department of Labor reporting more than 279,500 paralegals jobs in 2014 and the number of responses in our survey, we have a confidence level of 99% and margin of error of 3.68. Even with the amount of data collected, we are mindful that at best we are providing a generalization of the paralegal industry.

This article provides a summary of some of the survey findings. The full report is available on the NALA website at <https://www.nala.org/about-paralegals/research-and-survey-findings>

Who Participated?

Of the 1,226 participants, 95% were female and in their mid-40's. Most of these individuals have received their certified paralegal (CP) credential (two-thirds) and one quarter of the respondents hold the advanced certified paralegal (ACP) credential. The majority of responses were from NALA members (two-thirds).

Compared to the prior survey results, there was a slight dip in the number of paralegals who attained a Bachelor's Degree (48% to 46%). There was a slight increase in the number of paralegals who attained an Associate Degree and High School/GED.

The majority (33%) of the paralegals who responded had more than 25 years

of legal experience, with 23% of the paralegals who responded having one to five years of experience.

Where are Paralegals Working?

Respondents were from all over the United States. The most 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 (68%). This is an increase of 7% from our survey in 2014. Secretarial assistance is limited to almost the majority (49%) of paralegals, though a little over 20% report that they do have access to secretarial assistance.

Respondents reported that there has been a significant increase in the amount of work that involves independent judgement has increased 34% compared to the prior survey to a total of 86% vs. 52% in 2014. While the independent judgement has increased, the amount of client involvement has decreased by 15% overall to 59% vs. 75% in 2014. In case management and supervisory/administrative duties have increased from 2014 as well, 17% and 11% respectively.

Less paralegals (10%) have employees that report to them compared to 2014 data. More paralegals are receiving their work from specific attorneys with an increase of 24% from 2014.

Specialty Practice Areas

Paralegals are spending 80 to 100% of

their time in these specialty areas:

1. Litigation – civil (36%)
2. Personal injury (32%)
3. Family law/domestic issues (31%)
4. Insurance (25%)
5. Criminal (23%)
6. Intellectual property (22%)
7. Administrative/government/public, including compliance (22%)
8. Real estate (16%)
9. Healthcare (16%)
10. Medical malpractice (16%)

Billing Rates and Compensation

Paralegals are billing at rates similar to prior years with the larger firms having a higher billing rate and the more experienced paralegals billing at higher rates. Average compensation for paralegals has increased to \$61,671, which is a 6% increase compared to 2014 at \$58,410.

For more information, please visit our website for a complete copy of the survey results.

