

ViewPoint: Employment Options for Paralegals

Incredible Opportunities!

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The paralegal profession continues to offer fantastic opportunities. You will see just some of the fantastic opportunities detailed on this page.

Don't take our word for it. The *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics* states that:

- *Most entrants have an associate degree in paralegal studies, or a bachelor's degree coupled with a certificate in paralegal studies.*
- *About 7 out of 10 work for law firms; others work for corporate legal departments and government agencies.*
- *Employment is projected to grow much faster than average, as employers try to reduce costs by hiring paralegals to perform tasks once done by lawyers.*
- *Formally trained paralegals should have the best employment opportunities.*

Learn more about the outlook on the *Bureau's* web site. Once you are done reviewing this page, [click here!](#)



Law Firms and Corpora...



Government Positions



Businesses & Corporations



Nontraditional Employ...

Law Firms and Corporations

Litigation

Litigation is by far the largest area of practice for paralegal employment. Tasks include drafting discovery documents and pleadings, conducting law office investigation, arranging for service of process, setting trial dates, setting depositions, drafting deposition questions for the attorney, interviewing witnesses, conducting legal research, drafting legal memoranda based on research results, drafting motions and briefs, interviewing witnesses, interviewing clients, filing documents with the court and various duties related to court and administrative procedures.

Also, according to a recent survey of paralegal positions, litigation is responsible for the highest average compensation of all paralegal fields.

Construction Defect

A fast-growing area of paralegal employment is in construction defect, where they usually coordinate discovery documents. Due to the large amount of documentation involved, the paralegal will often coordinate document banks (or depositories), companies that hold all discovery in a centralized location.

Paralegals also arrange for depositions and arrange for (and often attend) destructive testing of buildings to determine the techniques and materials used in construction.

Personal Injury

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Personal Injury

Duties in personal injury are similar to standard litigation positions, but also likely to include obtaining medical records, arranging for expert medical testimony and possibly performing some initial accident scene photography. Any medical experience is helpful when seeking employment in this area.

Personal Injury



Bankruptcy

Paralegals commonly sit in on the initial client meeting, after which the attorney may ask the paralegal for preparation of the bankruptcy documents, including schedules of assets and debts. During this process, the paralegal may meet with the client several times to ensure the accuracy of the documents. The attorney will review the finished documents before they are filed with the court. After filing (depending on the chapter that the bankruptcy is filed under), a meeting is set with the trustee, during which creditors are allowed to ask questions of the debtor. Bankruptcy paralegals may also conduct a significant amount of legal research.

Transactional or Contract

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Transactional or Contract

Paralegals may be involved in drafting contracts and other agreements. In some cases, paralegals may be expected to track the performances of one or more parties who have entered into an agreement. For instance, one paralegal monitors reports from various television stations to determine whether advertisements were run at the proper time and in the agreed-upon frequencies.

If there are discrepancies, he or she contacts the stations to arrange for compensatory runs of the advertisements. Another drafts contracts for a Romanian cable company. The attorney he works for is in Europe (but licensed in the United States). When a cable company on the west coast agrees to offer the channel, the paralegal sends the contract to the attorney for review, then monitors the performance and ad revenue.

Transactional or Contract

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Incorporation

Incorporation is a document-intensive specialty that can be a rich source of employment for paralegals. Once a paralegal is familiar with the intricacies of preparing articles of incorporation and preparing annual reports and lists of officers, he or she becomes a valuable resource. An incorporation paralegal must have excellent long-term calendaring skills so that corporations do not fall dormant.

Immigration

Paralegals are especially valued in immigration positions if they speak more than one language. Common tasks include interviewing clients, legal research, assisting clients with form completion, and sometimes even acting as translator between the client and the attorney. Paralegals should not engage in freelance form assistance. Some of the decisions made in filling out immigration forms call for legal judgments only an attorney should make.

Real Estate

Real estate attorneys employ paralegals to conduct title searches, file titles with courts and draft leases or other documents for the attorney.

Intellectual Property

Patents, copyrights, and Internet design all involve the area of intellectual property. Paralegals are frequently used to research existing patents, assist with patent applications, and help determine copyright infringement and enforcement.

Probate and Estate

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Probate and Estate

Probate and estate paralegals are in great demand. Paralegals are used to conduct legal research, draft wills and trusts, meet with clients, contact family members, conduct skip-traces (looking for missing relatives), monitor and maintain trusts and open probate in the appropriate court.

Probate and Estate



Criminal

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Criminal

For many years, attorneys were reluctant to use paralegals in criminal representation where a client's personal freedom was at risk. But paralegals are now being used extensively in this area to handle communication with detained clients and with the prosecutor's office and to obtain police and other law enforcement records. Being a strong legal researcher is a real advantage in this work.

Criminal

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Law Office Manager

While not technically a paralegal position, a person with a paralegal background can make an excellent law office manager. Duties may include hiring and firing, ordering supplies, acting as arbiter for personnel conflicts, distributing work assignments, and conducting annual reviews. In some smaller firms, the office manager may be responsible for distributing paychecks and maintaining the firm's bank account, as well as handling overflow work as needed.

Government Positions

Courts

Some paralegals are hired as law clerks for judges. In this role, the paralegal conducts legal research, drafts orders, checks citations, and helps to set hearings and trials.

Office of Mayor or Governor

Working as a paralegal for a person who holds a political position can mean that the position lasts only as long as the individual remains in office.

Specialized duties include tracking legislative activity, drafting proposed legislation, coordinating travel and meeting schedules, arranging for special recognition of citizens and monitoring the press.

F.B.I.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation hires paralegals to work at its headquarters in Washington, D.C. and in its many field offices throughout the United States and within its special divisions. The FBI employs its own attorneys as legal counsel and paralegals are employed to assist these attorneys. Most asset forfeiture divisions throughout the country employ paralegals to assist in title searches, property seizure documentation, and preparation of court documents.

Prosecutors

State prosecutors, such as district attorneys, hire paralegals to prepare correspondence, draft pleadings and motions, research legal matters, and communicate with other government agencies. Federal employees include paralegals working for the United States Attorney General in Washington, D.C. as well as in all offices of United States attorneys throughout the country.

Social Services

State social service departments employ legal assistants to appear at administrative hearings, prepare documents related to child welfare, conduct research and monitor children in foster care settings.

Government Agencies

Federal and state administrative agencies use paralegals for many standard duties. In some cases, paralegals represent the agency and the agency's position. In many administrative settings, attorneys may not need to be present.

Businesses & Corporations

Corporations

Most large corporations have legal counsel and employ paralegals. Corporate salaries are usually higher than those in law firms or government positions and benefits are usually excellent. Duties vary according to the corporation.

Real Estate Offices

Real estate offices sometimes employ paralegals to conduct title searches, file titles with courts and communicate with outside counsel.

Hospitals

Hospitals sometimes have their own legal departments. In such cases, paralegals are used for standard duties as well as for tasks such as sanitizing hospital records, responding to discovery requests and communicating with insurance companies. Some hospitals without legal departments hire paralegals to perform within the hospital (but under the supervision of outside counsel) the tasks mentioned above.

Insurance Companies

These document-intensive companies use paralegals to review policies, request documentation of damages, and fulfill many standard paralegal duties.

Nontraditional Employment

Political Campaigns

Most federal political campaigns, and many state campaigns, hire paralegals to help monitor the press and opposition campaigns, conduct opposition research and track donations to ensure compliance with federal election laws. State and federal political parties also employ paralegals at headquarters.

Investigative Positions

In many states, investigators must be licensed. Paralegal education can benefit these individuals. In addition, some larger investigative agencies hire paralegals to conduct research, communicate with client attorneys, assist in skip searches, and monitor jury panels and interview witnesses.

Small Business Owners

Many individuals who own their own businesses obtain a paralegal education so they can conduct simple legal tasks. For instance, some landlords want to draft leases for their own properties or evict tenants without hiring a lawyer. As long as the individual is creating such documents for his or her own business, this conduct is permissible.

Freelance

Many paralegal service businesses have arisen throughout the country, some working as storefront operations, others from private residences, relying on newspaper or Yellow Pages advertising. Such paralegals specialize in document preparation and assist clients in filling out forms.

Providing such services to the general public without attorney supervision presents a serious dilemma. Determining the appropriate form and completing it often requires legal judgment. Although document preparers insist that they simply fill in the information provided by the client, it is very difficult not to express opinions in response to client questions. In other words, freelance paralegals are very likely engaging in the unauthorized practice of law.

However, there is a variety of freelance paralegal practice that is perfectly ethical and legal. These freelance paralegals, usually experienced legal

assistants, work for lawyers and law firms instead of the public-at-large. Since there is a supervising attorney, no ethical standards are compromised. In addition, paralegals working as freelancers for law firms are compensated at a much higher rate than those offering services to the public. Paralegals working for several firms, as on a contract basis, are often referred to as independent paralegals.

Paralegal Firms

The paralegal firm is a small and relatively new development. Typically, several paralegals form a company, hiring an attorney to review their work.

These businesses commonly prepare wills, draft contracts and leases, and appear at administrative hearings and in small claims courts where paralegal representation is allowed. It is critical that an attorney review virtually all work under such an arrangement. There may be additional ethical issues, such as the question of fees, which are supposed to be set by an attorney.