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**Paralegals – Top Organizations You Need To Know**

**By Scott Knutson**

The career field of paralegals began developing in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s as

lawyers began hiring the assistants to help them with paper work, case investigation and general duties. As more attorneys began hiring legal assistance, the American Bar Association formed the Standing Committee on Legal Assistance to help set the standard in the paralegal – attorney relationship, employment guidelines and other duties associated with the paralegal, or legal assistant. That committee was formed in the late 1960s and today is made up of both attorneys and professional paralegals. The American Bar Association offers a certification program to institutions that give courses in paralegal instruction which gives the bar association the opportunity to set standards in the education of legal assistants.

There are several major national professional organizations for paralegals in the United States, in addition to their representation in the American Bar Association. Some of those organizations have helped form the career field of the paralegal, or legal assistant.

Two professional organizations, the National Association of Legal Assistants (NALA) and the National Federation of Paralegal Associations (NFPA), together represent more than 30,000 paralegals across the U.S. The organizations, while both working to serve the paralegal profession, have been competitive while determining the language that helps shape the profession. The NFPA prefers usage of the word paralegal while NALA prefers the term legal assistant.

The American Association for Paralegal Education (AAfPE) is an organization of institutions and teachers of paralegal education programs. The organization strives for consistent paralegal education standards.

A new organization for paralegals began in 2003 and quickly began setting standards in the legal assistant field. The American Alliance of Paralegals serves individuals. Members in the American Alliance of Paralegals are required to meet certain educational or work experience guidelines in order to be a voting member. The organization was the first national organization for paralegals to become involved in setting minimum educational standards and guidelines.

## Paralegals – Top Organizations You Need To Know

If you are a paralegal hoping to gain membership in a national professional organization, do some research to see what type of associations are typical to your area. The national organizations will likely have state and regional groups meeting in your area, or a nearby area. Talk to other paralegals in your area to see if they have professional membership in one of these organizations. Ask about benefits and professional development training the organizations offer.

If you are just entering a career as a paralegal or just beginning training for such a career, see if a professional membership can help you in your career plans. Perhaps an organization that offers various networking or job notice work boards would be of benefit to someone seeking to enter the field. Membership could be like having an insider pulling for you. Also, if you are a student planning to enter the paralegal field, a national organization might be able to hook you up with scholarship or other financial award information to help you complete your training. Contact all the paralegal organizations you can find to see if they have special information that might help you along your path to your legal career.

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### **Career As A Paralegal**

**By John Daye**

The paralegal profession is currently experiencing a great deal of growth and prosperity. With the average USA annual salary averaging around \$34,000 for local and state work, nearly double that for Federal Government work, and much more in the private sector, it's no wonder this career field is growing. Let's take a look at just a few reasons why a career as a paralegal is so rewarding.

#### **Challenging Work**

Attorneys pass much of their workload along to paralegals, also known as legal assistants. However, paralegals may not perform all of an attorney tasks, these tasks include setting legal fees, giving out legal advice, and presenting court cases. But they may play a role in virtually everything else.

## Paralegals – Top Organizations You Need To Know

Case preparation is part of a paralegals workload. Paralegals often help lawyers with background information and research, legal history, case studies, fact-finding investigations, document preparation and analysis, plea documents, folder, record and file handling. The work they perform is often involved with hearings, trials, closing comments, and corporate functions.

Jobs are available for paralegals in many types of companies and organizations. They work with employee benefits, labor law, criminal law, corporate law, government (at all levels), real estate and bankruptcy. And you'll find them working in personal injury law and litigation as well.

### Career Tidbits

The following list includes a few pieces of interesting information concerning paralegals:

- Paralegals usually work year round, although temporary paralegal work is available. Although 40 hours is average, heavy workloads are a possibility. Work isn't always at the office; paralegals need to work in libraries and often travel in order to gather relevant information.
- In 2004, there were 224,000 paralegal jobs, with private practices employing roughly 7 out of 10 of them.
- Job opportunities for paralegals are expected to climb at a faster than average rate through the year 2014.

There's no better time to check into being a paralegal than now!

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