



1220 19th Street NW, Suite 401  
Washington, DC 20036-2405  
Phone: (202) 835-1001  
[www.nalp.org](http://www.nalp.org)

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Allison E. Beard, Director of Communications & Member Engagement  
[abeard@nalp.org](mailto:abeard@nalp.org), 202-835-1001

Date: May 22, 2019

## First-Year Associate Salaries on the Rise at Large Law Firms

Washington (DC) — The **National Association for Law Placement (NALP)** today released its **2019 Associate Salary Survey** report, showing that the overall median first-year salary as of January 1, 2019, was \$155,000, up \$20,000 (14.8%) from 2017, the year of the most recent previous survey. This increase comes at the same time that Big Law reported its most successful earnings cycle ever. Law firms of 251+ lawyers accounted for about 70% of responses.

The greatest salary growth was seen in firm sizes of 701+ lawyers, where median first-year base salaries increased \$25,000 from \$155,000 in 2017 to \$180,000 in 2019 (16.1% increase). Some modest growth was seen in firm sizes of 251-500 lawyers, with median first-year base salaries moving from \$150,000 in 2017 to \$160,000 in 2019 (6.7% increase). Median first-year base salaries in 2019 for firm sizes of 51-100 lawyers (\$115,000), 101-250 lawyers (\$115,000), and 501-700 lawyers (\$160,000) were flat or relatively flat compared to 2017.

The full 2019 *Associate Salary Survey* report is available in the NALP bookstore [here](#) for \$160 plus shipping and handling.

### Significant Findings:

- When \$190,000 first-year salaries were announced in 2018, the impact was similar to that in 2017 when large law firms announced a first-year salary hike to \$180,000 — there were still not nearly enough offices reporting a \$190,000 salary to push the median up to that level, even in the largest firms. However, \$190,000 was the modal, or most frequently occurring, first-year base salary reported, accounting for 29.3% of all reported first-year base salaries. It is also not necessarily surprising that offices paying \$190,000 are concentrated mostly within a few cities (including Dallas, the Los Angeles/Orange County area, New York City, and the Washington, DC area).
- The data suggest that as more law firms have grown through acquisition and merger, the largest law firms are not as similar to one another as they used to be. In addition to elite global law firms, there are many firms with more than 700 lawyers that are made up of numerous smaller regional offices, many of which do not pay the new benchmark first-year salary of \$190,000, and, as a result, the majority of large law firm starting salaries fall below that mark.

- Regionally, the highest median first-year base salaries reported were in the Northeast and South (\$165,000), followed by the West (\$160,000), with the lowest in the Midwest (\$120,000).

“There has been abundant news coverage of the salary hike to \$190,000 for first-year salaries at many of the largest law firms, and we see that reflected in the data collected in this year’s salary survey,” noted NALP’s executive director James Leipold. “As with other associate base pay hikes in the past, while the press focus is usually on how quickly law firms race to meet a market change like this one, the data reveal that there are in fact many large law firm offices that are still not paying \$190,000 as a base first-year salary. These hikes often take two or more years to move through the market. They also have the effect of driving up starting salaries in markets that have a lower base, and we see that movement in this year’s data as well,” he concluded.

### Median Base Salaries by Associate Year and Firm Size (in \$/year unless otherwise noted, as of January 1, 2019)

Associate Year	FIRM SIZE — Number of Lawyers													
	50 or fewer		51-100		101-250		251-500		501-700		701+		All Sizes	
	Median	# Rept	Median	# Rept	Median	# Rept	Median	# Rept	Median	# Rept	Median	# Rept	Median	# Rept
First	\$98,750	18	\$115,000	21	\$115,000	78	\$160,000	68	\$160,000	53	\$180,000	148	\$155,000	386
Second	105,000	13	120,000	22	115,000	73	165,000	66	170,000	43	190,000	149	160,000	366
Third	107,500	14	122,000	23	125,000	76	170,000	73	175,000	44	200,000	152	164,450	382
Fourth	114,000	16	127,500	24	132,825	76	173,000	71	190,000	43	207,000	160	171,200	390
Fifth	136,600	9	130,500	24	136,000	77	178,000	74	197,000	45	222,500	158	180,000	387
Sixth	133,250	10	132,750	22	148,000	78	183,000	75	193,650	45	242,500	150	186,250	380
Seventh	140,500	8	139,000	20	150,000	73	200,500	65	211,000	39	260,000	149	200,000	354
Eighth	138,000	7	150,000	13	157,900	61	197,600	51	216,000	39	252,000	149	204,000	320
<b>Summer Associates (\$/week)</b>														
1st Year	1,500	8	2,150	10	2,050	54	3,100	73	3,150	52	2,975	161	2,875	358
2nd Year	1,725	14	2,100	17	2,050	70	3,100	77	3,100	51	2,975	161	2,800	390
3rd Year	1,650	6	—	—	1,900	9	3,650	24	3,075	22	3,600	53	3,475	117

Note: All figures are based on average salaries reported.

The “# Rept” column indicates the number of offices reporting. For purposes of this summary report, medians have been rounded to the nearest \$25.

Published by NALP since 1996, the 2019 *Associate Salary Survey* report, available in the NALP bookstore, provides information about associate and summer associate salaries by firm size, region, and the metropolitan area population; detailed salary analyses for 24 major markets; analyses of salaries for offices using a levels-based compensation system; base salaries for class of 2019 associates by firm size and city; salaries for intellectual property lawyers, salaries for law clerks and staff attorneys; and more. Purchase your copy [here](#).

# # #

---

**About NALP:** NALP is an association of over 2,500 legal career professionals who advise law students, lawyers, law offices, and law schools in North America and beyond. What brings NALP members together is a common belief in three fundamental things. First, all law students and lawyers should benefit from a fair and ethical hiring process. Second, law students and lawyers are more successful when supported by professional development and legal career professionals. Third, a diverse and inclusive legal profession best serves clients and our communities. That's why NALP members work together every day to collect and publish accurate legal employment data and information, and champion education and ethical principles for recruiting, professional and career development, and diversity and inclusion. For more than 40 years, NALP has played an essential role in the success of our members and the lawyers and law students they serve. NALP maintains an online archive of press releases at [www.nalp.org/pressreleases](http://www.nalp.org/pressreleases). For additional information, contact NALP at [info@nalp.org](mailto:info@nalp.org) or call (202) 835-1001.

---