

ABOVE THE LAW

# 2022 Solo & Small Firm Compensation Survey Report



MATTERLY

Even though Biglaw grabs most of the headlines when it comes to compensation, the so-called Salary Wars are actually irrelevant to the majority of practicing attorneys. Most attorneys in private practice aren't at firms with hundreds of lawyers; they work in firms with fewer than 25 lawyers.

Yet reliable, detailed information on compensation for this majority of the profession is hard to come by. In order to fill the gap, Above the Law has regularly surveyed solo practitioners and small firm attorneys about their pay. Now, along with our friends at Matterly, we present this fourth installment of the ATL Solo and Small Firm Compensation Report.

Our survey captures the following data points:

- **Total annual compensation**
- **Target bonus (as a percentage of base pay)**
- **Average raise**
- **Percentage of total compensation based on collections**
- **Percentage of total compensation based on origination fees**
- **Percentage of firm revenue derived from respondent's book of business**

In addition, for this edition of the survey, which was conducted between November 2021 and August 2022, we asked attorneys about the impact, if any, the pandemic has had on their compensation. We have also segmented the data by various demographics, including firm size, position, practice area, and gender.

Lawyers at small firms — or those thinking to make the jump from a larger firm — need more compensation transparency to make smart career decisions. We hope this report serves as a useful resource for both law students considering joining a small firm or hanging out their own shingle, as well as practicing attorneys looking to benchmark their own compensation.



MATTERLY

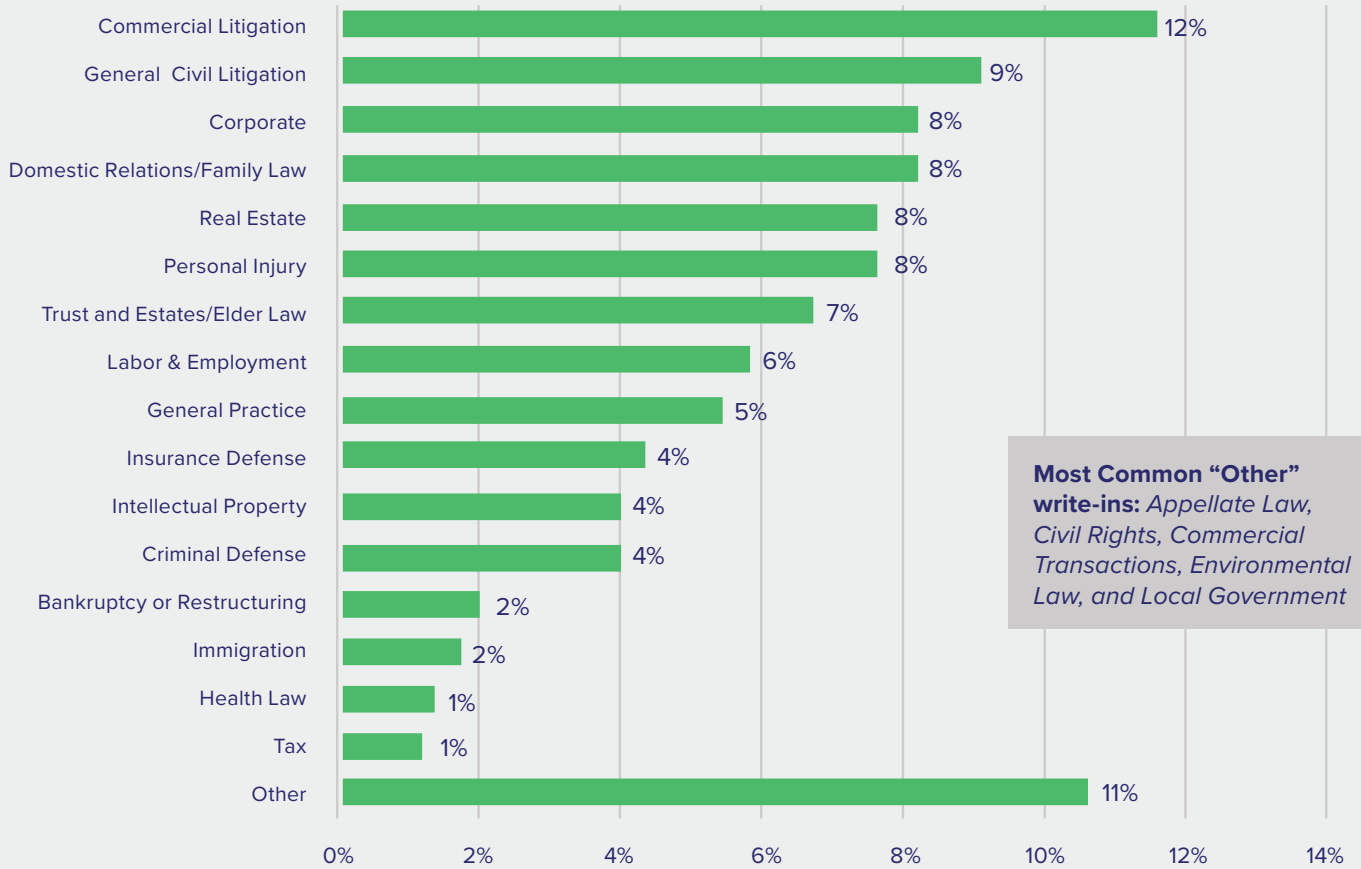
# RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

**1,113**  
respondents

**71%**  
work in a city or metro area  
with a population of  
**one million+**

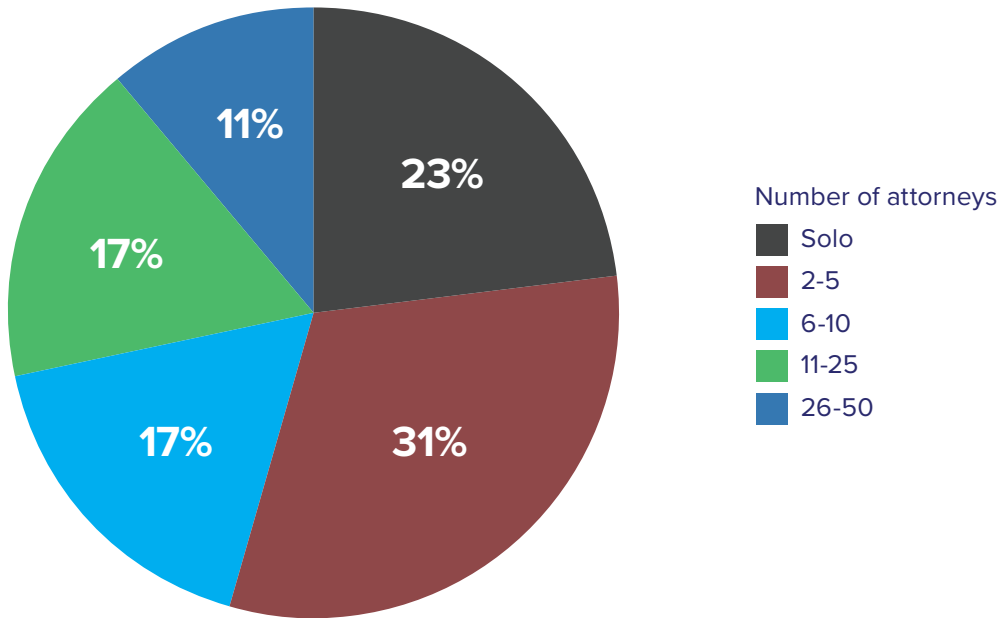
**49%** partners  
**35%** associates  
**6%** counsel  
**10%** owners/  
sole proprietors

## PRACTICE AREA



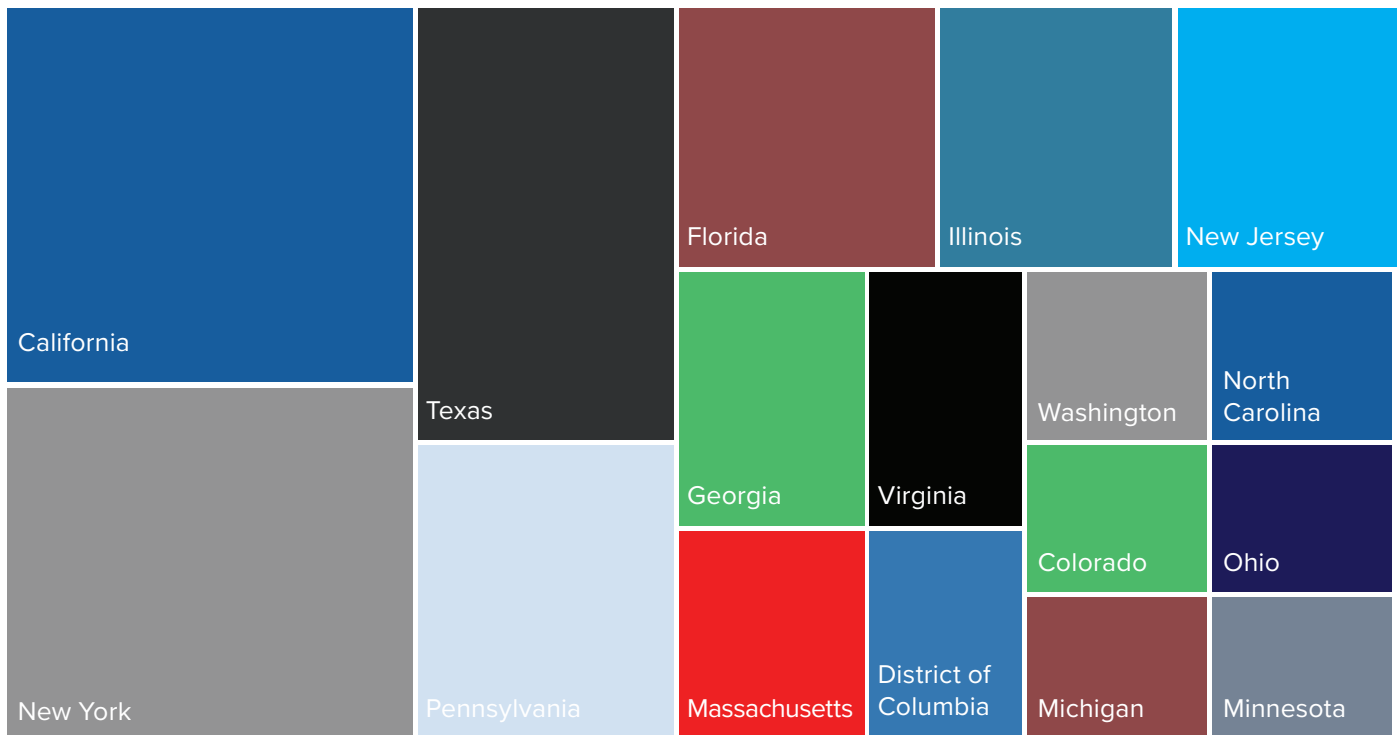
# RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

## FIRM SIZE



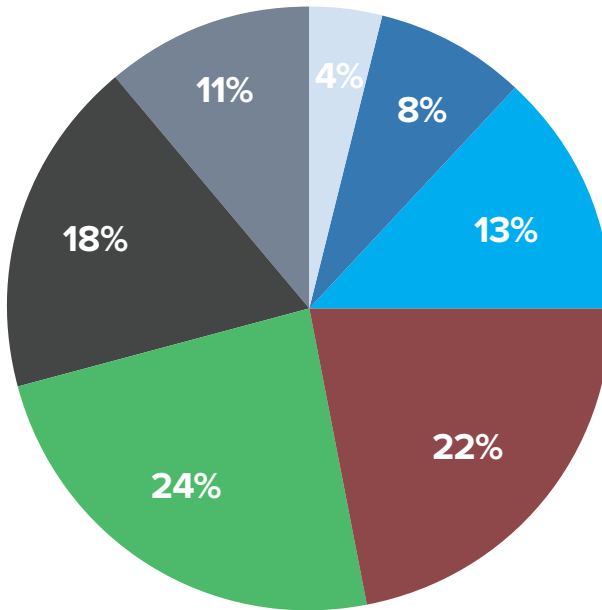
## GEOGRAPHIC REGION

Respondents are located in all 50 states and Puerto Rico. The regions with the most respondents are listed below.



# COMPENSATION

## ALL RESPONDENTS



**46%**  
of respondents earn between  
**\$100,000 and \$250,000**

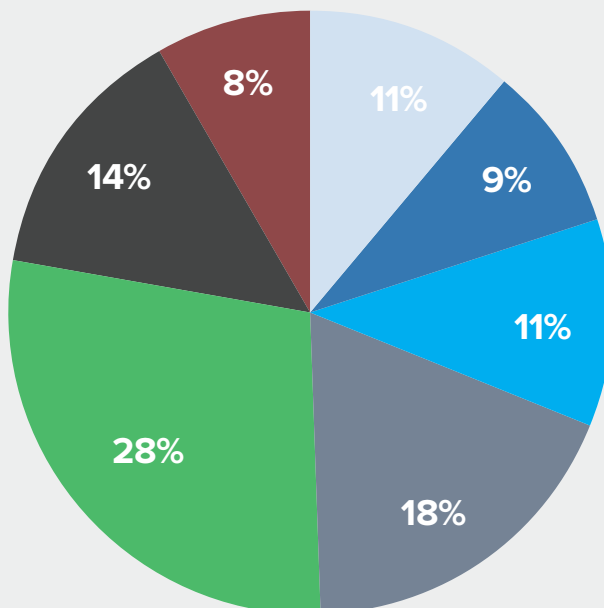
**29%**  
earn **\$250,000 or more**

**21%**  
earn between **\$50,000**  
and **\$100,000**

**4%**  
earn less than **\$50,000**

The results represent a significant shift since our last survey in 2020, when only 19% of respondents earned between \$100,000 and \$250,000 and 47% reported earning less than \$100,000.

## COMPENSATION: SOLO PRACTITIONERS



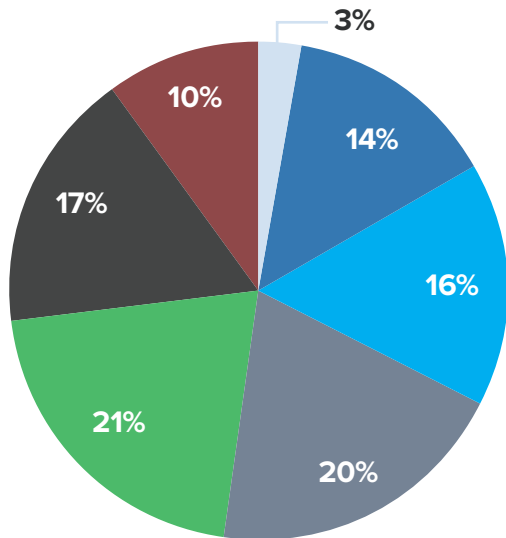
Among solo practitioners,  
**28% make between**  
**\$150,000 and**  
**\$250,000**

**18%** reported  
compensation between  
**\$100,000 and**  
**\$150,000**

**11%** of solos earned  
**less than \$50,000,**  
and **8%** earn  
**\$500,000+**

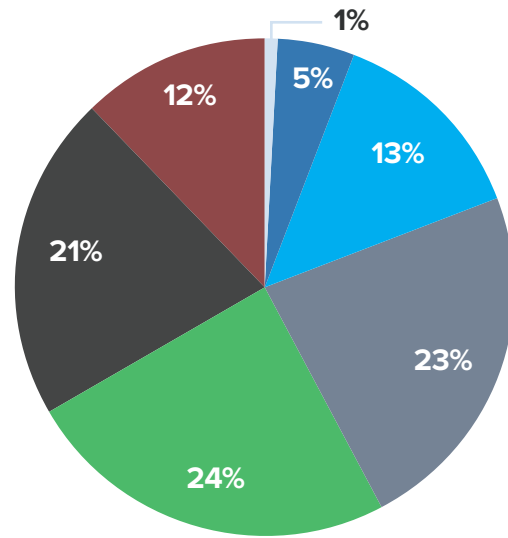
# COMPENSATION BY FIRM SIZE

COMPENSATION:  
FIRM SIZE 2-5 ATTORNEYS



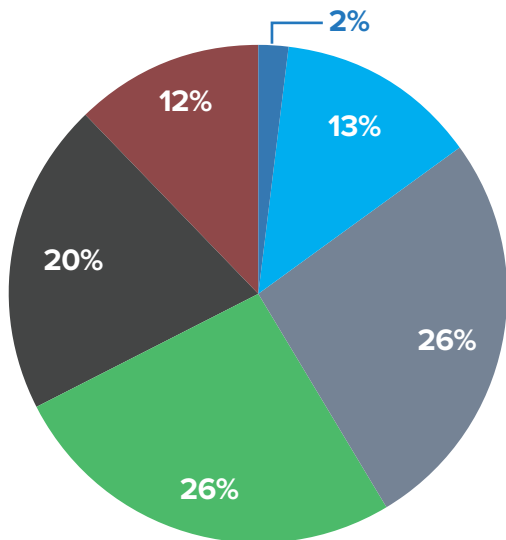
At firms with 2 to 5 attorneys, compensation covers the spectrum, but almost all lawyers earn at least \$50,000 and the majority make at least \$100,000.

COMPENSATION:  
FIRM SIZE 6-10 ATTORNEYS

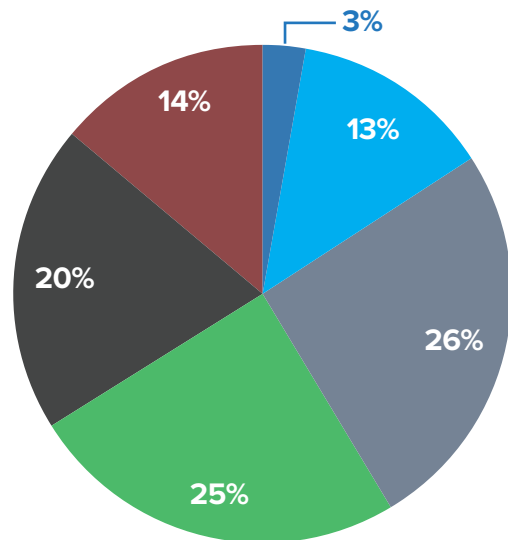


Among firms with 6-10 attorneys, **two-thirds** of respondents reported compensation between \$100,000 and \$500,000.

COMPENSATION:  
FIRM SIZE 11-25 ATTORNEYS



COMPENSATION:  
FIRM SIZE 26-50 ATTORNEYS

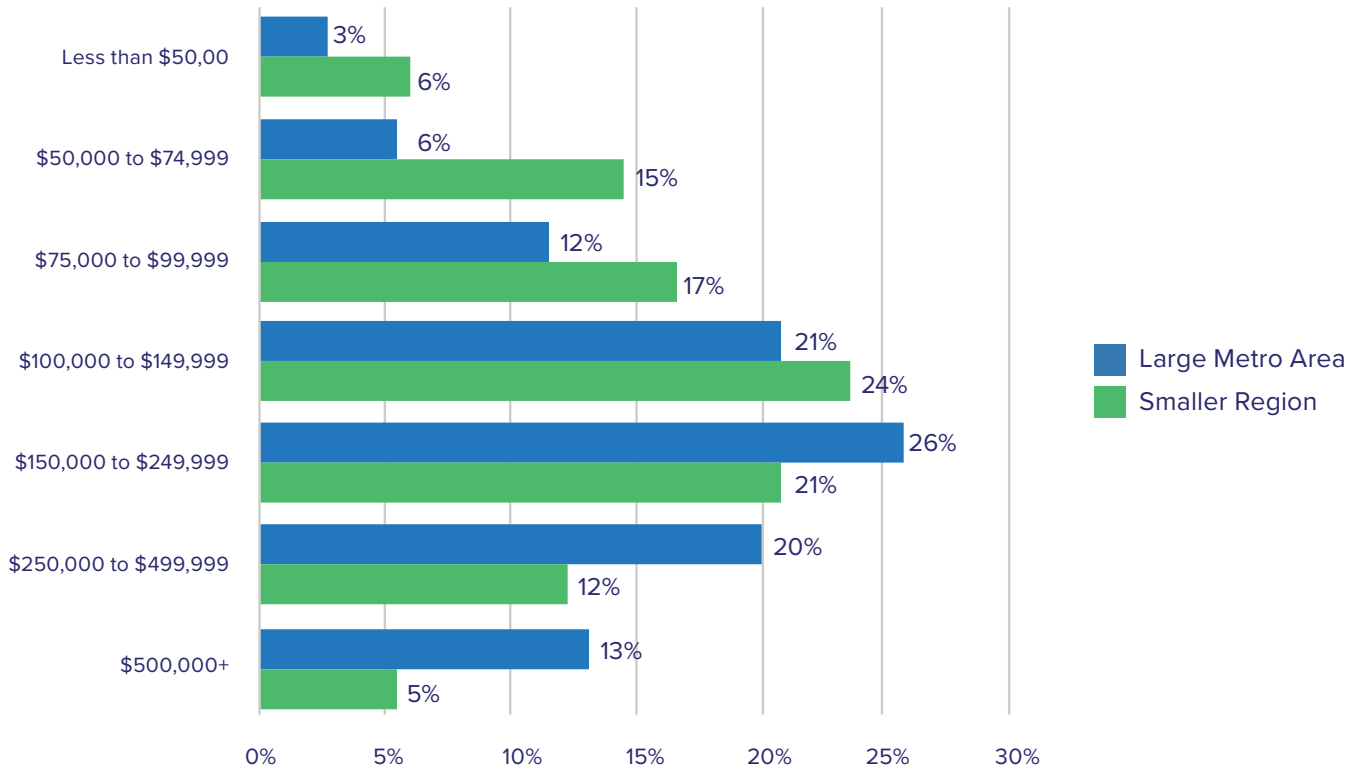


Compensation reported by respondents at firms with 11-25 attorneys is very similar to that reported by those in the 26-50 attorney range. For both firm categories, **more than half** of attorneys reported earning **between \$100,000 and \$249,000**, and roughly **one-third** earned **\$250,000 or more**.



# COMPENSATION BY MARKET SIZE

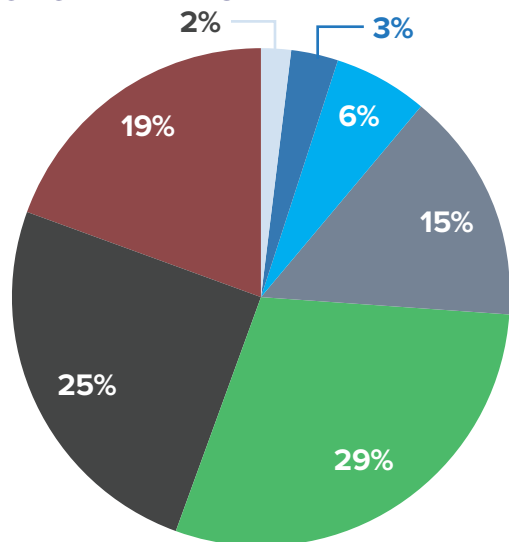
## COMPENSATION BY MARKET SIZE



Attorneys at firms in a city or metro area with a population of one million or more reported earning higher compensation on the whole than their counterparts in smaller regions. Among both sets of attorneys, the **largest groups** of respondents reported compensation **between \$100,000 and \$249,000**. However, **metro-area attorneys** were more likely to earn **\$250,000 or more**, while a higher proportion of attorneys in **smaller markets** reported salaries of **less than \$100,000**.

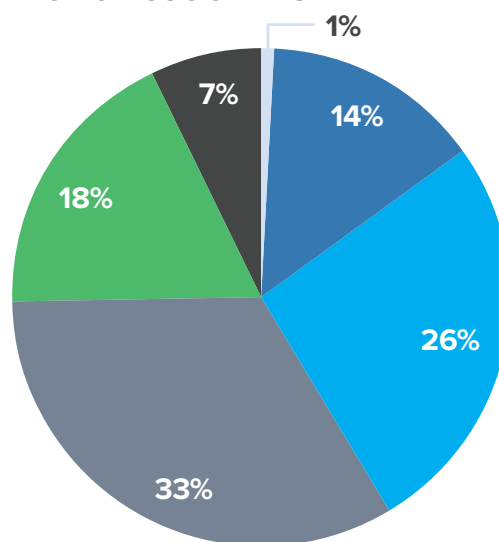
# COMPENSATION BY POSITION

## COMPENSATION: AMONG PARTNERS



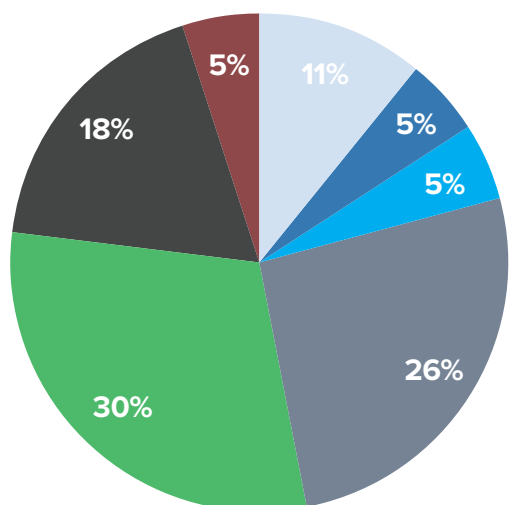
More than **70%** of partners reported compensation of **at least \$150,000**, and **44%** earn **\$250,000 or more**.

## COMPENSATION: AMONG ASSOCIATES



**One-third** of associates reported earning **between \$100,000 and \$150,000**. **More than one-fourth** reported compensation in the **\$75,000 to \$99,999** range.

## COMPENSATION: AMONG COUNSEL



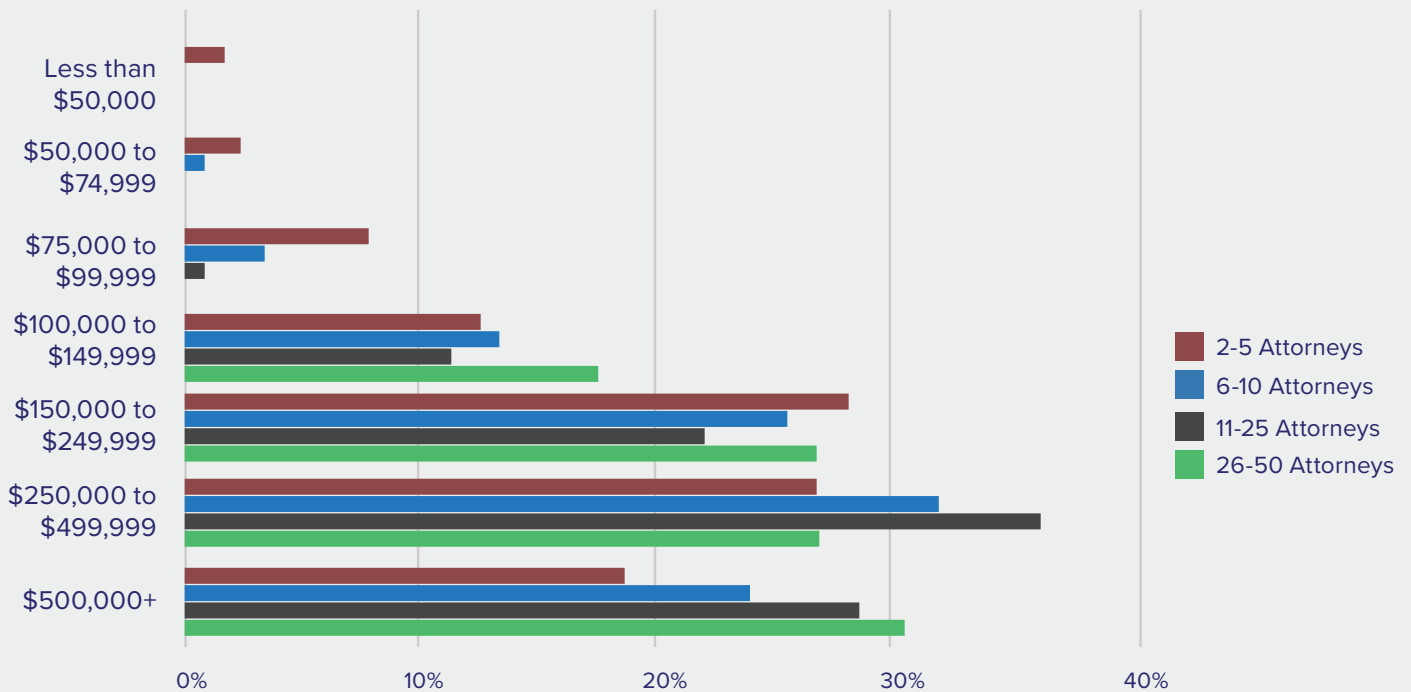
More than **half** of counsel earn **between \$100,000 and \$249,000**.





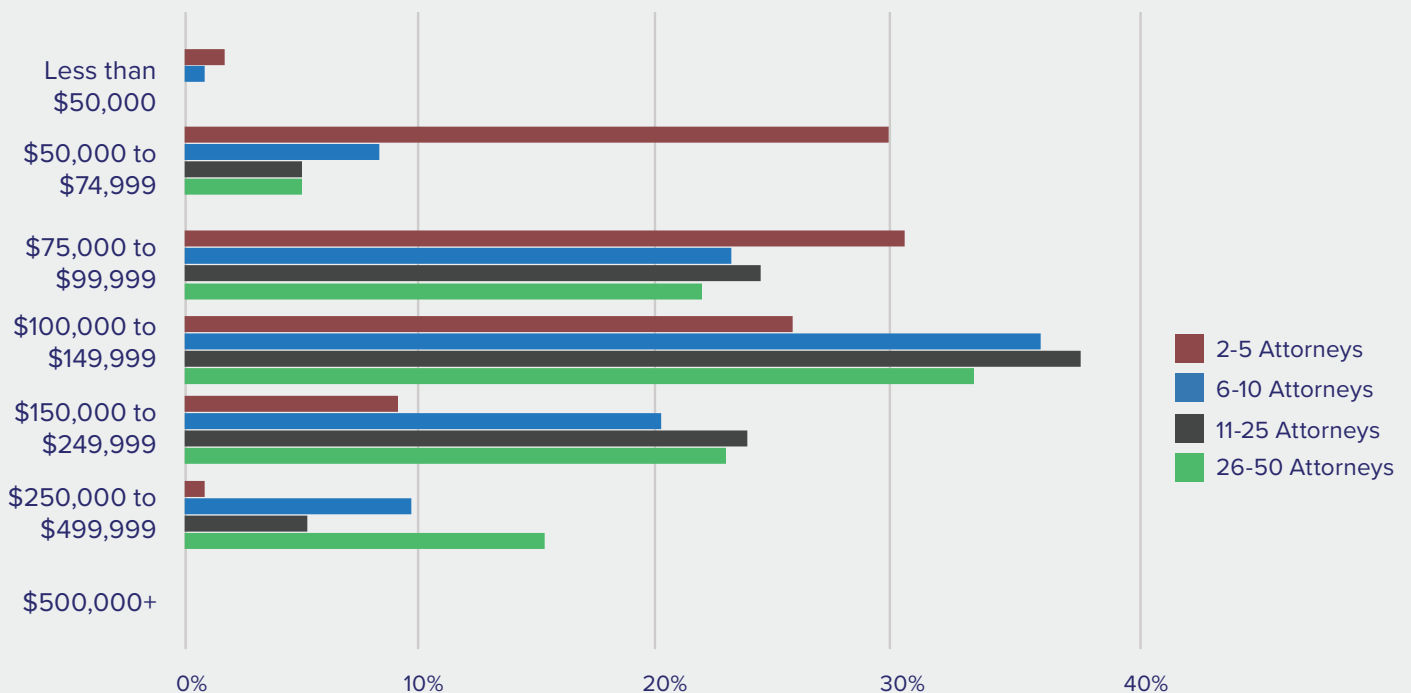
# COMPENSATION BY POSITION AND FIRM SIZE

## PARTNER COMPENSATION



Across firms of all sizes, the **majority of partners earned at least \$150,000**. More than **30%** of partners at firms with **26-50 attorneys** reported compensation of **\$500,000 or more**.

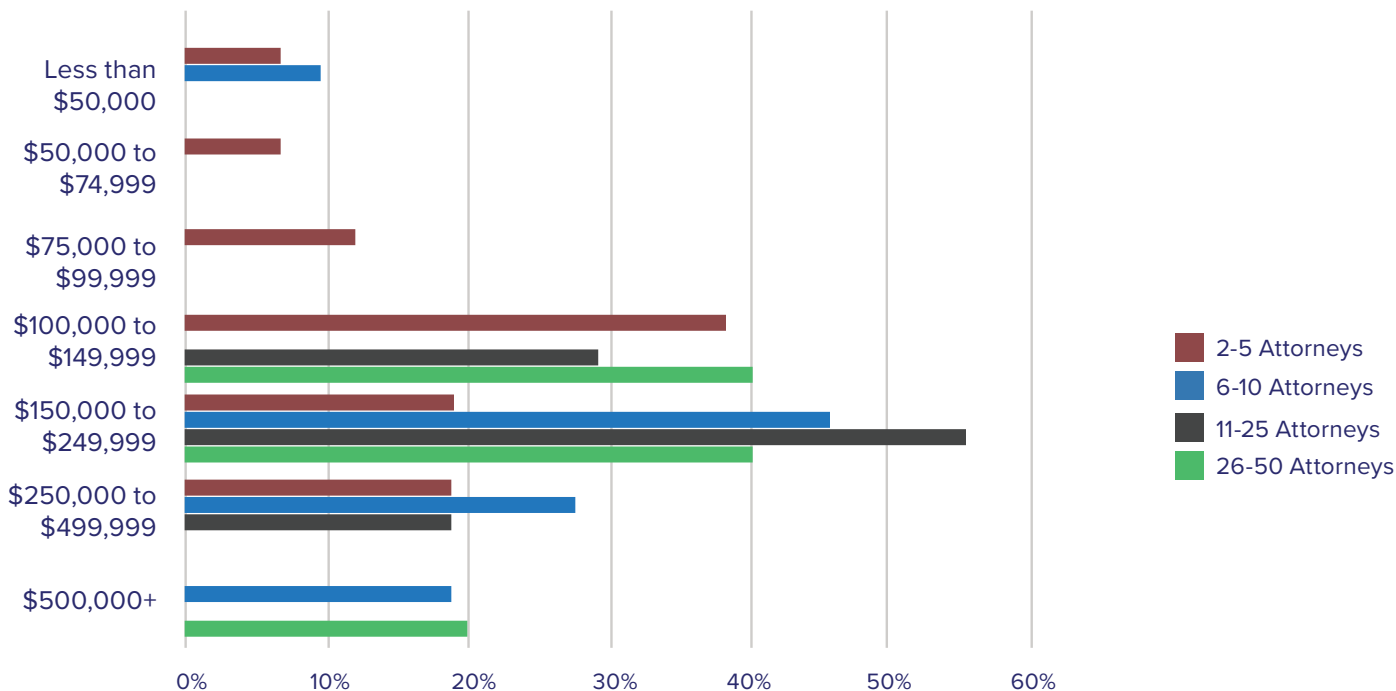
## ASSOCIATE COMPENSATION



More than **half of associates at the smallest firms** (2-5 attorneys) reported earning **less than \$100,000**. At firms with at least **6 attorneys**, the **most common range** was **\$100,000-\$150,000**.

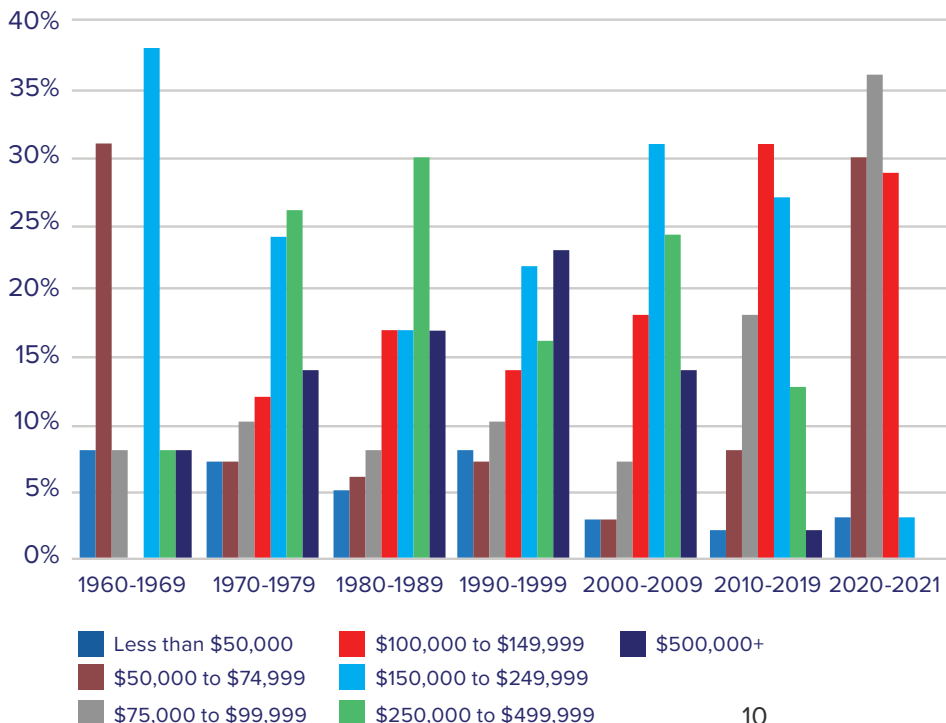
# COMPENSATION BY POSITION AND FIRM SIZE

## COUNSEL COMPENSATION



The majority of counsel reported earning at least \$100,000, regardless of firm size.

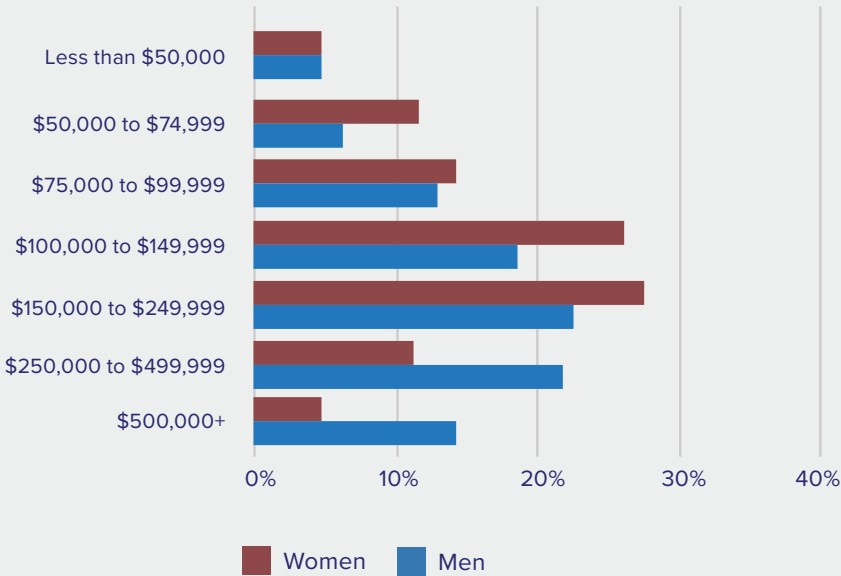
## COMPENSATION BY YEAR OF LAW SCHOOL GRADUATION



Compensation among the **most experienced respondents**, who graduated from law school in the 1960s, ranges widely, with the two largest segments reporting earnings either **between \$150,000 and \$249,000** or **between \$50,000 and \$75,000**.

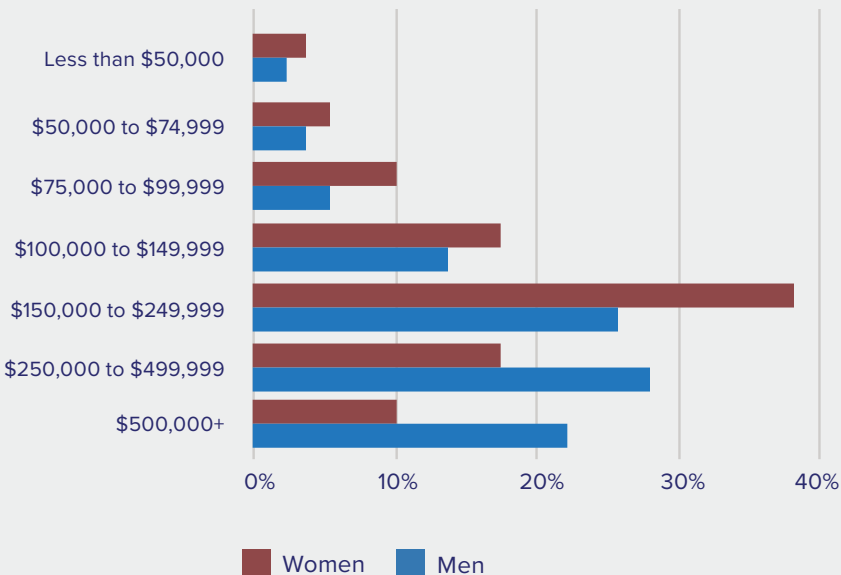
The **majority** of attorneys who graduated since the 1970s earn at least \$100,000. The most common range among 1980s graduates is \$250,000 to \$499,000. Among lawyers who graduated law school between 2000 and 2009, the highest proportion reported earning in the \$150,000-\$249,000 range, while more recent graduates are more likely to earn less. **Attorneys who graduated in the 1990s are the most likely to make \$500,000 or more.**

# COMPENSATION BY GENDER



Overall, more male respondents reported earning higher compensation than female respondents. Among **women**, the two largest groups of attorneys reported **compensation between \$100,000 and \$249,000**. Among **male attorneys**, the largest proportions earned **between \$150,000 and \$499,000**. While **36% of male attorneys** received compensation of **\$250,000 or more**, only **15% of female attorneys** did, and proportionately more women reported earning **less than \$75,000**.

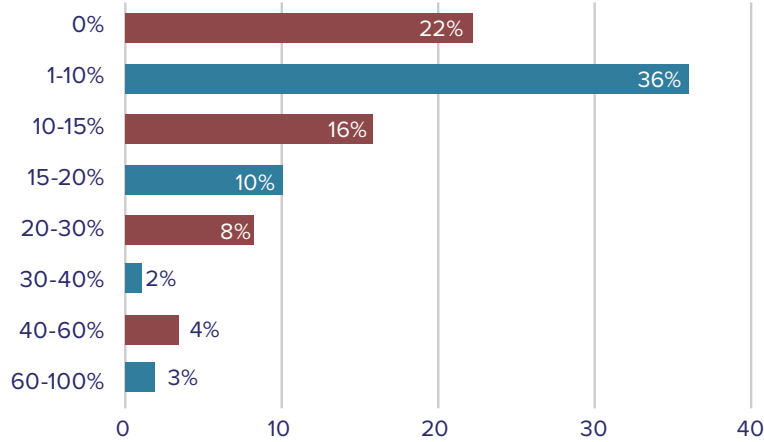
## PARTNER COMPENSATION



The results reveal similar gender gaps when comparing compensation just among partners: women are better represented at the lower end of the compensation scale and men are better represented at the higher end. **Half of male partners** at small firms **earn at least \$250,000**, but only **28% of female partners** reported earning \$250,000 or more.

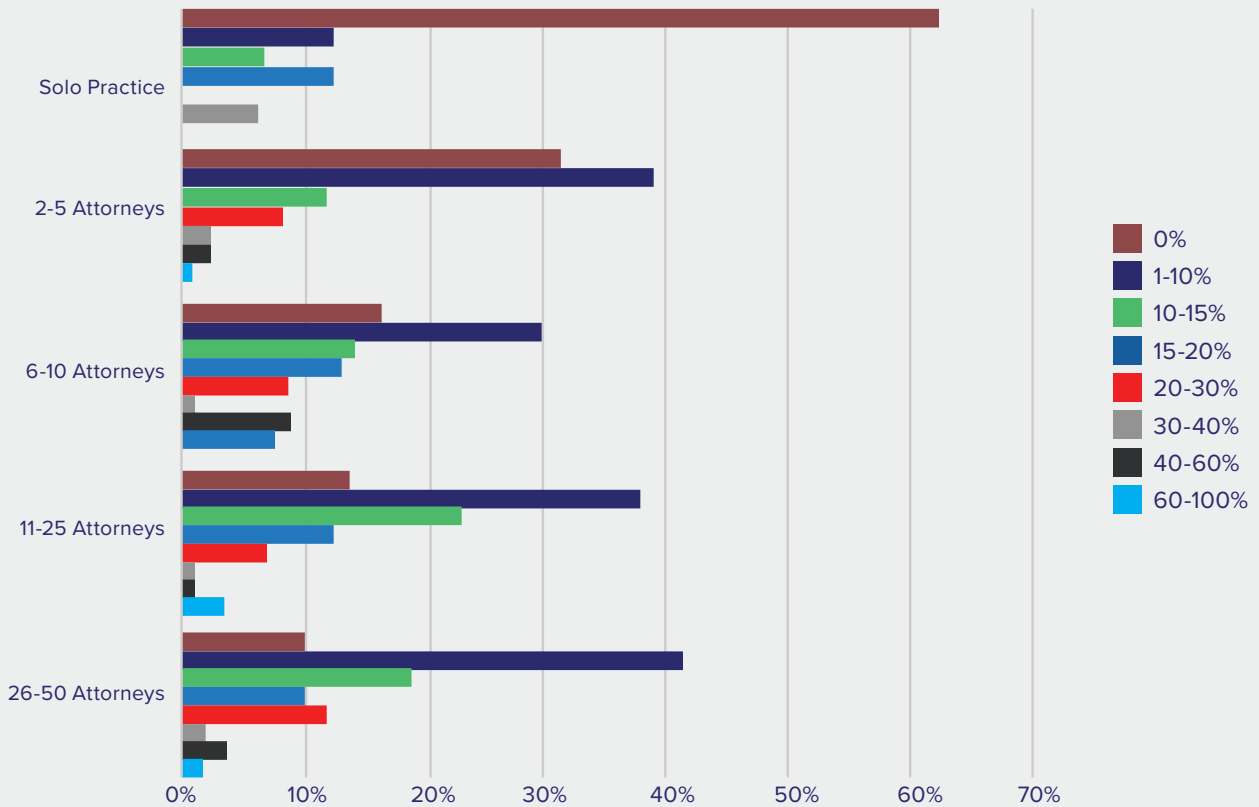
# TARGET BONUS

## TARGET BONUS AS PERCENTAGE OF BASE PAY FOR ASSOCIATES AND COUNSEL



The **largest group of respondents (36%) reported target bonuses of 10% or less**, a figure in line with previous years' results. More than 20% of attorneys do not receive bonuses at all.

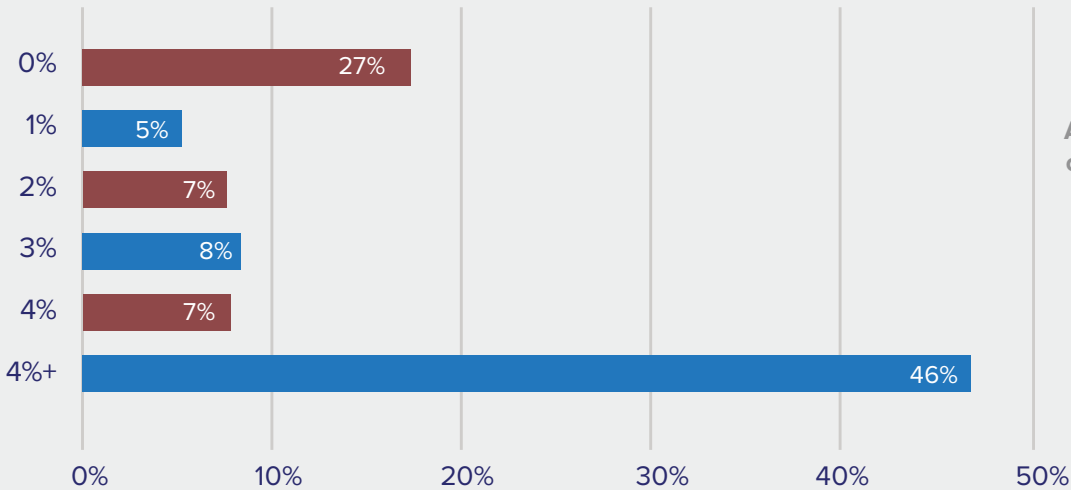
## TARGET BONUS BY FIRM SIZE



Attorneys in the smallest firms are the most likely not to receive a bonus. At all firms other than solo practices, the **most common range is 1-10%**.

# AVERAGE RAISES

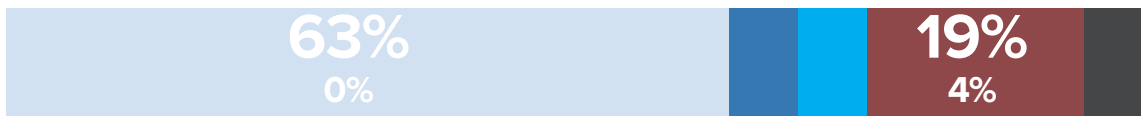
## AVERAGE RAISES AMONG ASSOCIATES AND COUNSEL



Almost half of associates and counsel (46%) reported raises of more than 4%. But more than one-fourth (27%) said they haven't received any raise in the last few years.

## AVERAGE RAISES BY SIZE OF FIRM

### SOLO PRACTICE



### 2-5 ATTORNEYS



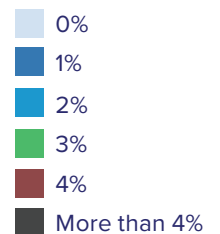
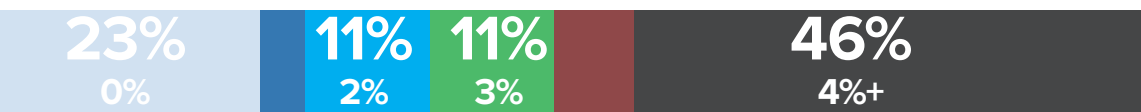
### 6-10 ATTORNEYS



### 11-25 ATTORNEYS

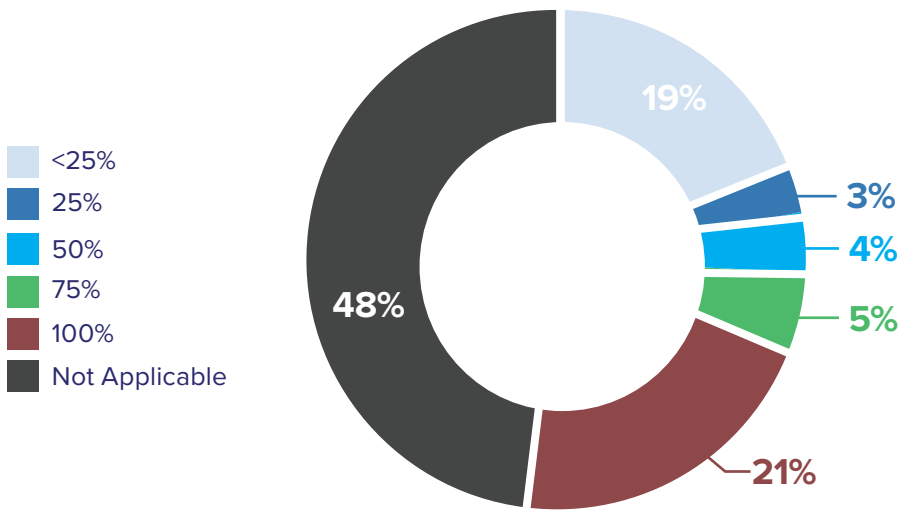


### 26-50 ATTORNEYS



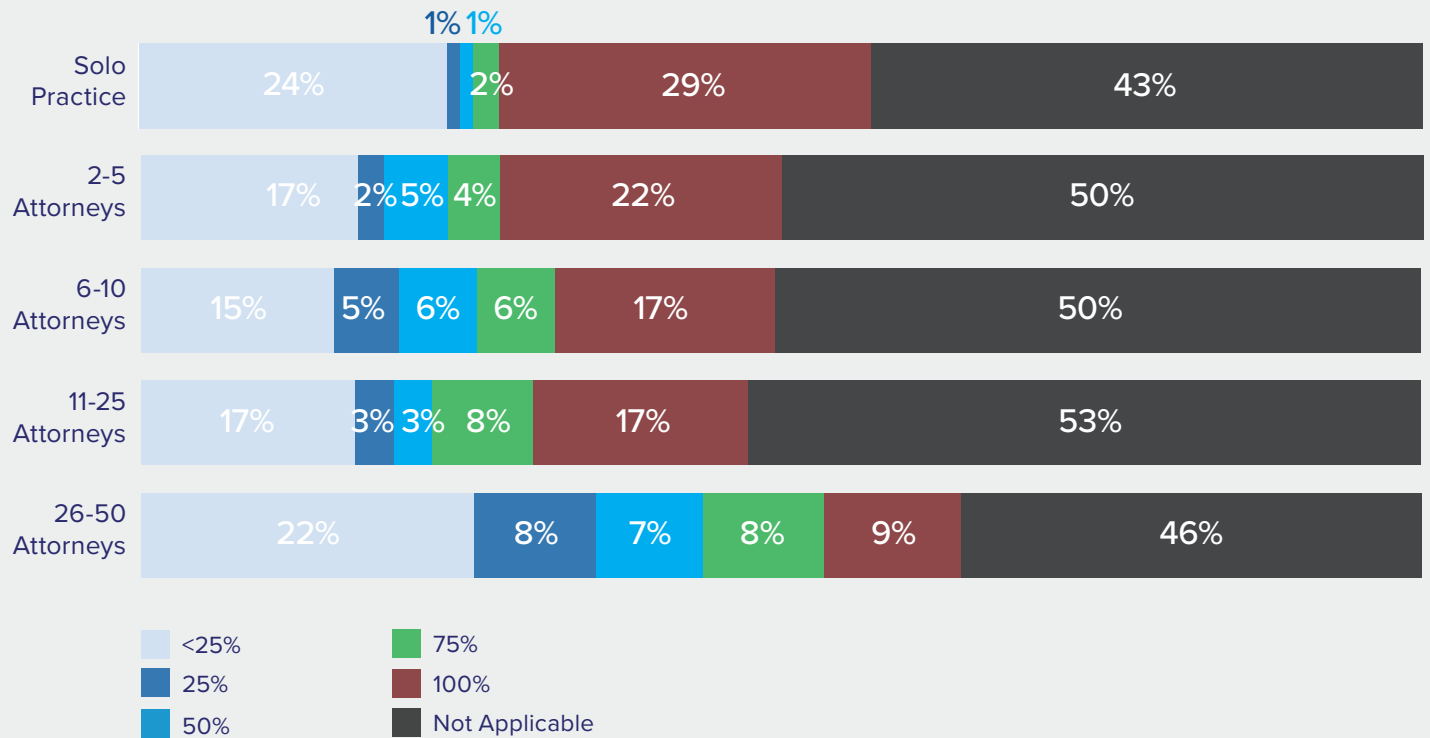
Solo practitioners were the least likely to report receiving a raise. At least 40% of attorneys in each of the other categories of firm reported receiving raises above 4%.

# PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL COMPENSATION BASED ON COLLECTIONS



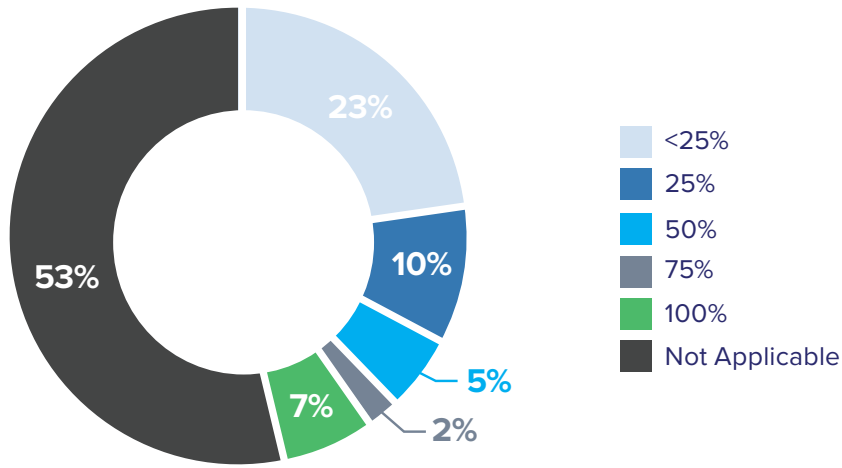
Collections have no impact on the compensation among nearly half (48%) of respondents. For **one in five attorneys** (21%), their **entire compensation is based on collections**.

## BY FIRM SIZE



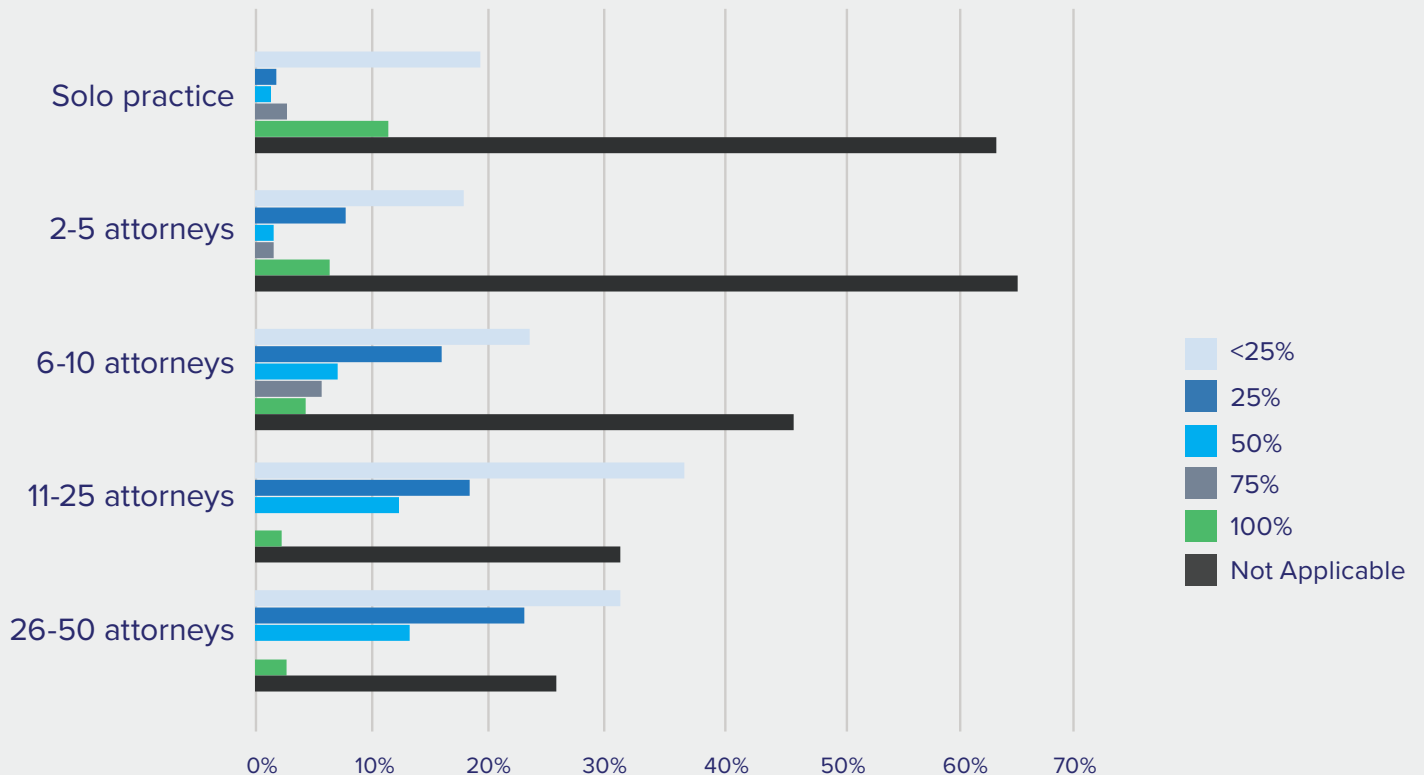
# PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL COMPENSATION BASED ON ORIGINATION FEES

## AMONG PARTNERS AND COUNSEL



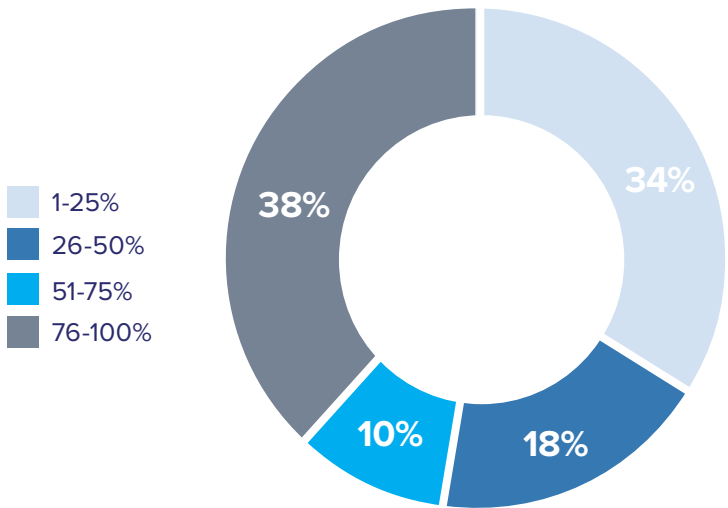
Among those whose compensation is based on origination fees, the largest group of attorneys (23%) says it **represents less than 25%** of their total compensation.

## BY FIRM SIZE



# PERCENTAGE OF FIRM REVENUE DERIVED FROM RESPONDENT'S BOOK OF BUSINESS

## AMONG PARTNERS AND COUNSEL



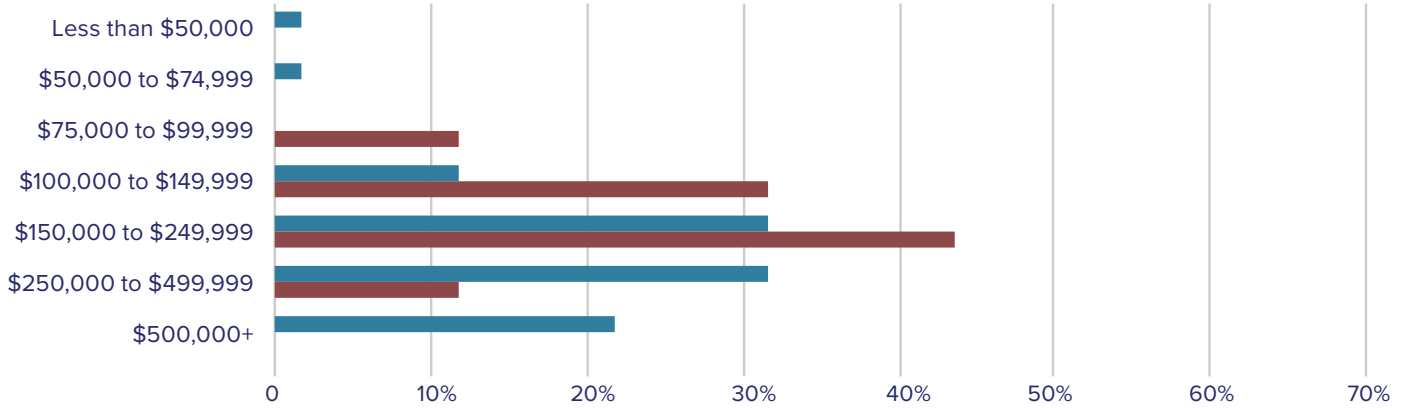
The **largest group of respondents (38%)** said that **76-100% of the firm's revenue** comes from **their book of business**. Most of these attorneys are at the smallest firms. The **majority of respondents at firms with more than 10 attorneys** said just **1-25% of their firm's revenue** is derived from their book of business.



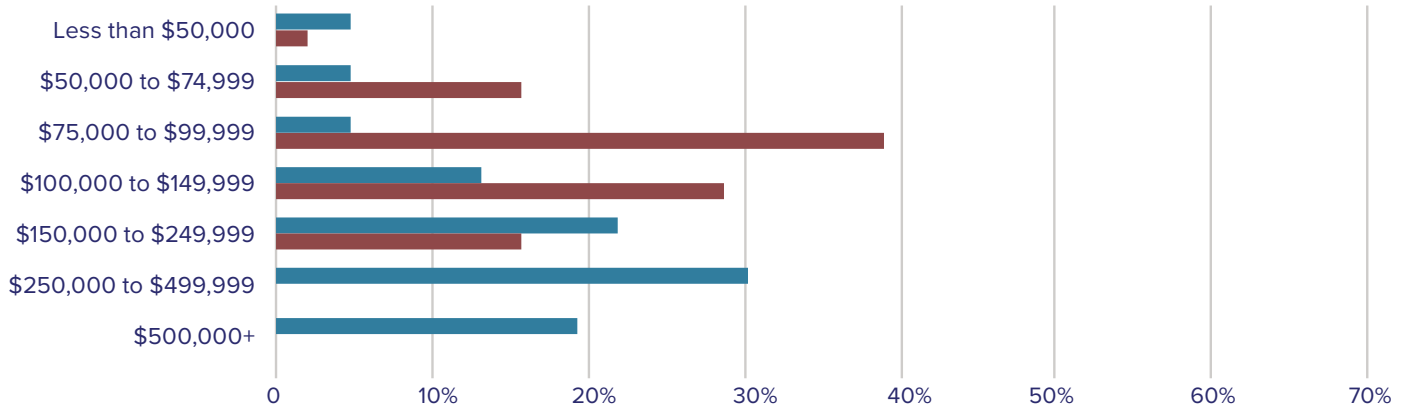
# APPROXIMATE ANNUAL COMPENSATION BY PRACTICE AREA

## COMMERCIAL LITIGATION

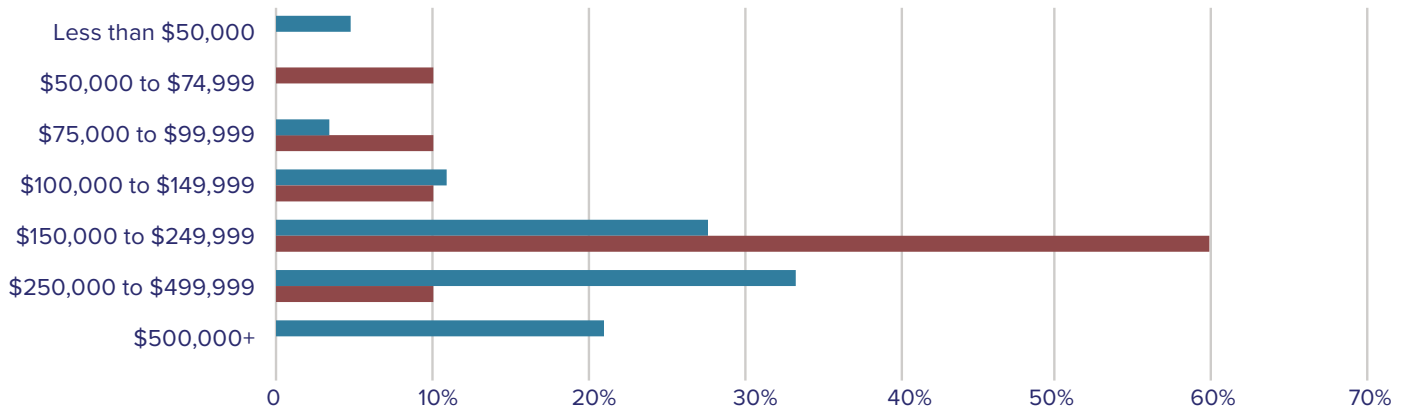
Partner  
Associate



## GENERAL CIVIL LITIGATION



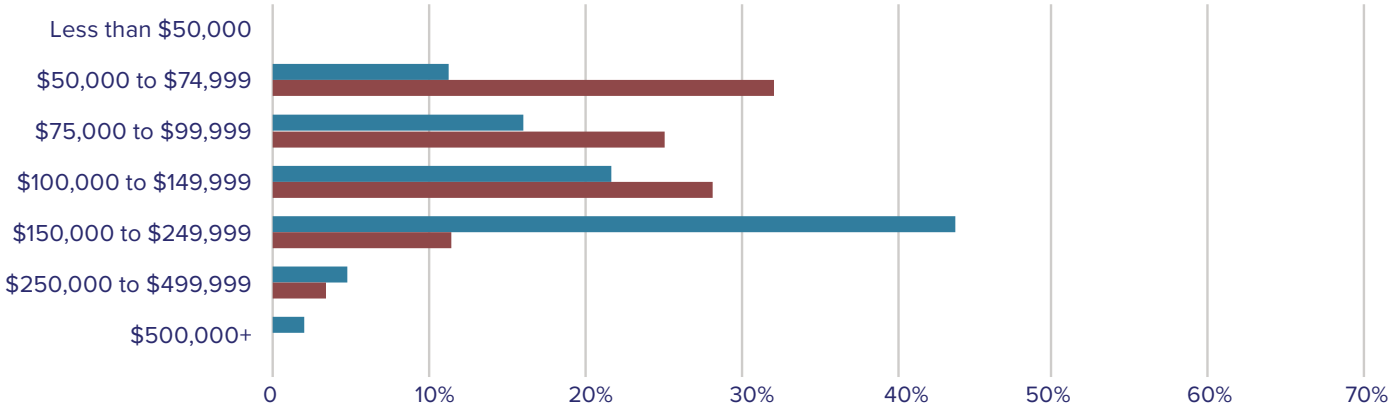
## CORPORATE



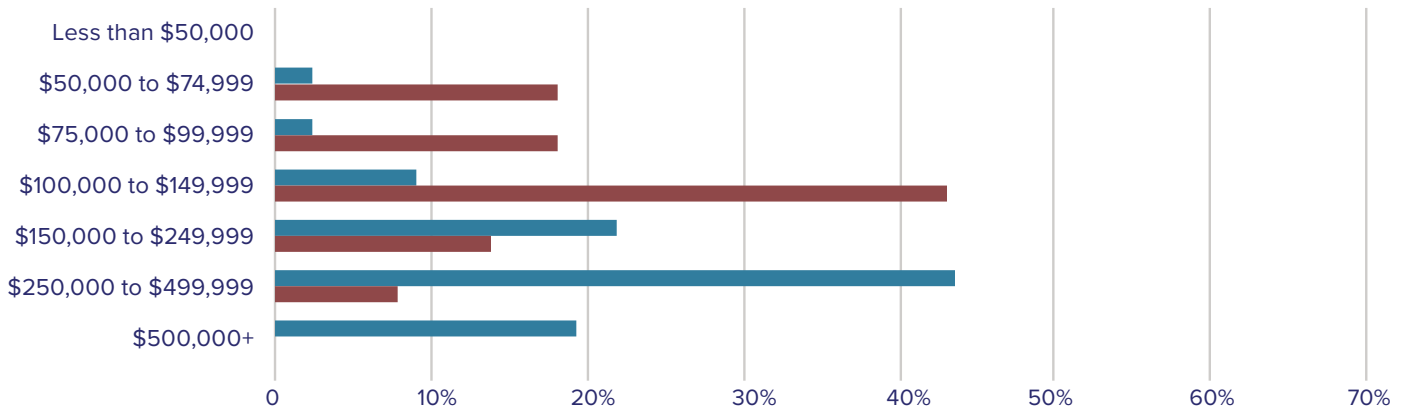
# APPROXIMATE ANNUAL COMPENSATION BY PRACTICE AREA

Partner  
Associate

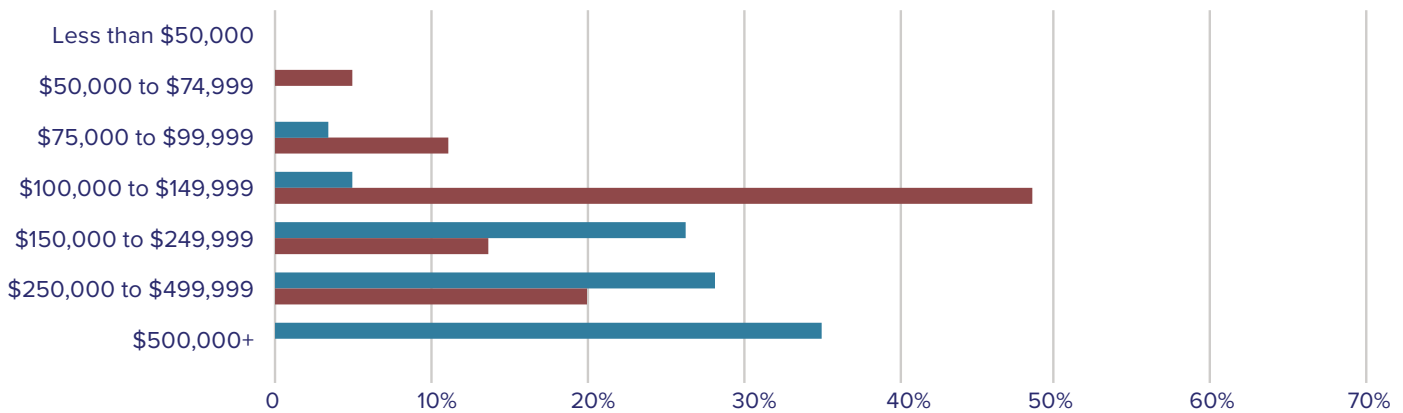
## FAMILY LAW



## REAL ESTATE



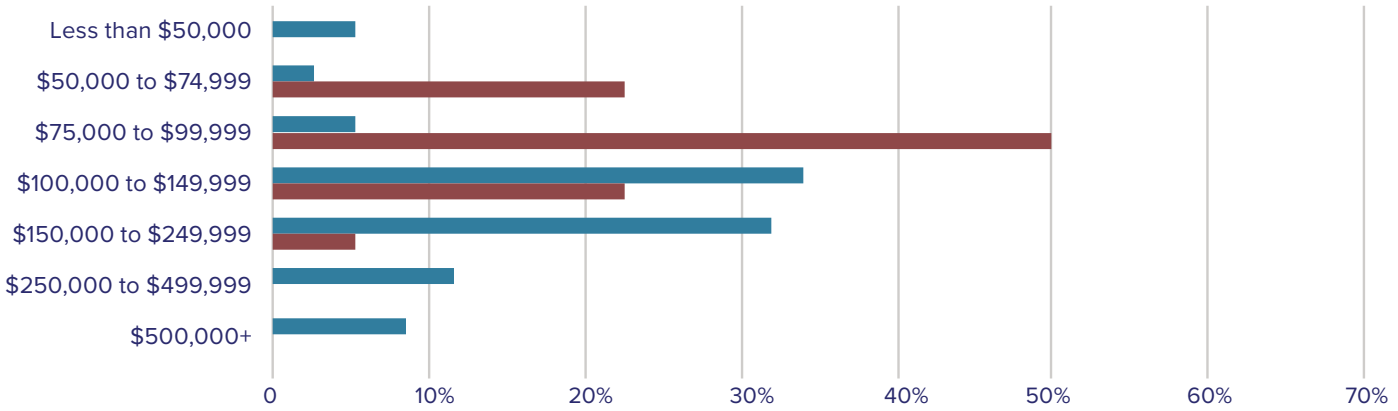
## PERSONAL INJURY



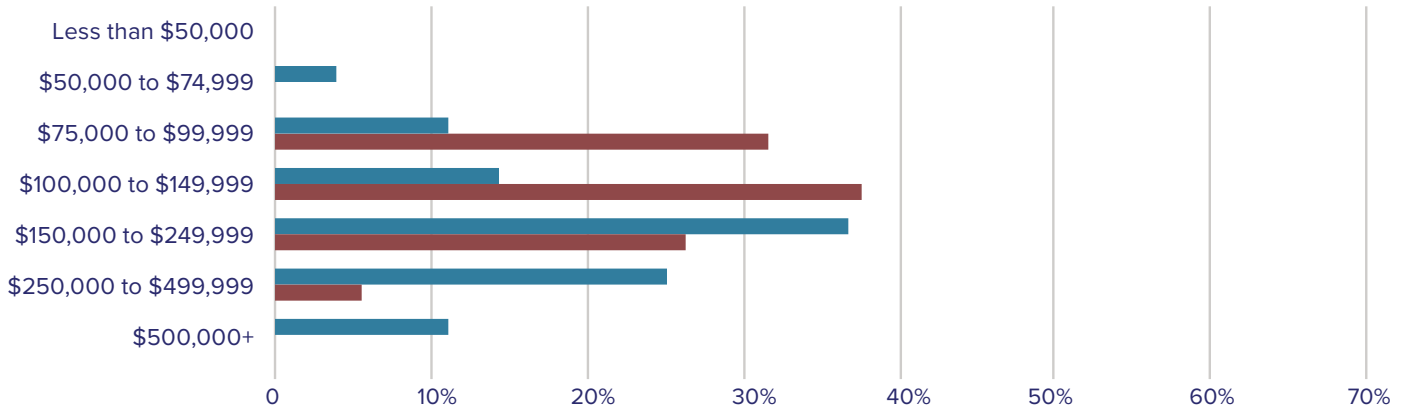
# APPROXIMATE ANNUAL COMPENSATION BY PRACTICE AREA

Partner  
Associate

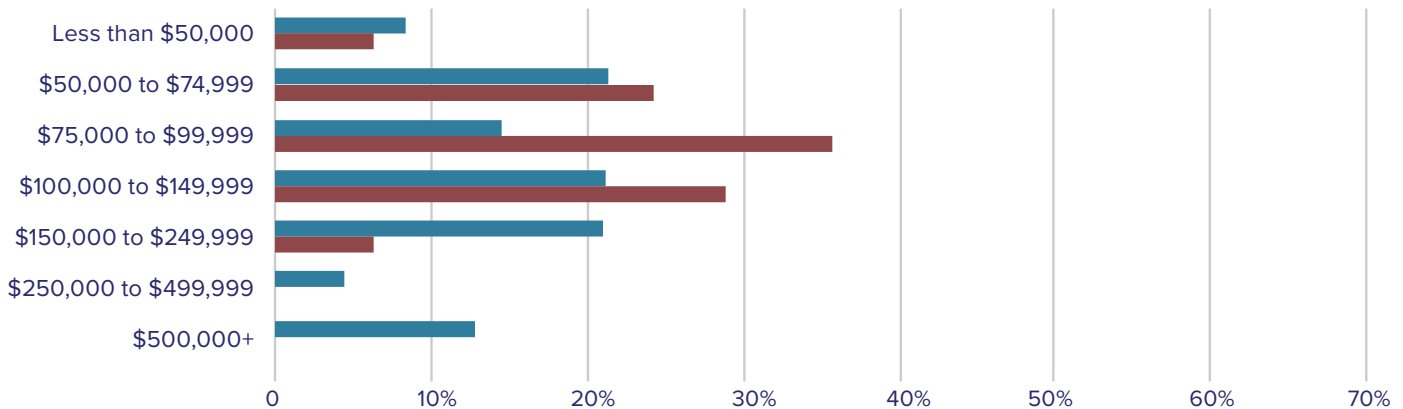
## TRUST & ESTATES



## LABOR & EMPLOYMENT



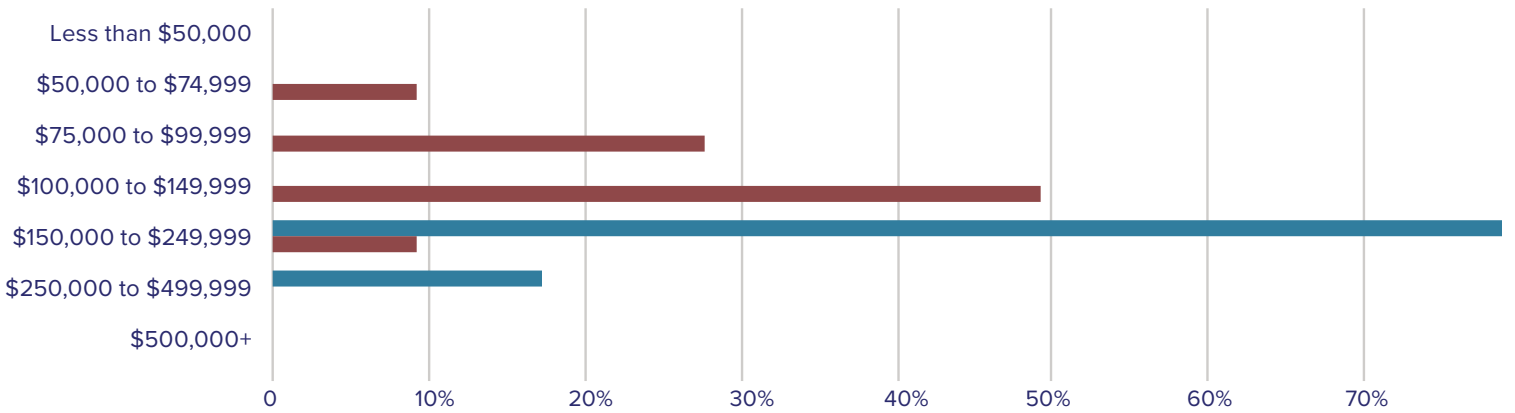
## GENERAL PRACTICE



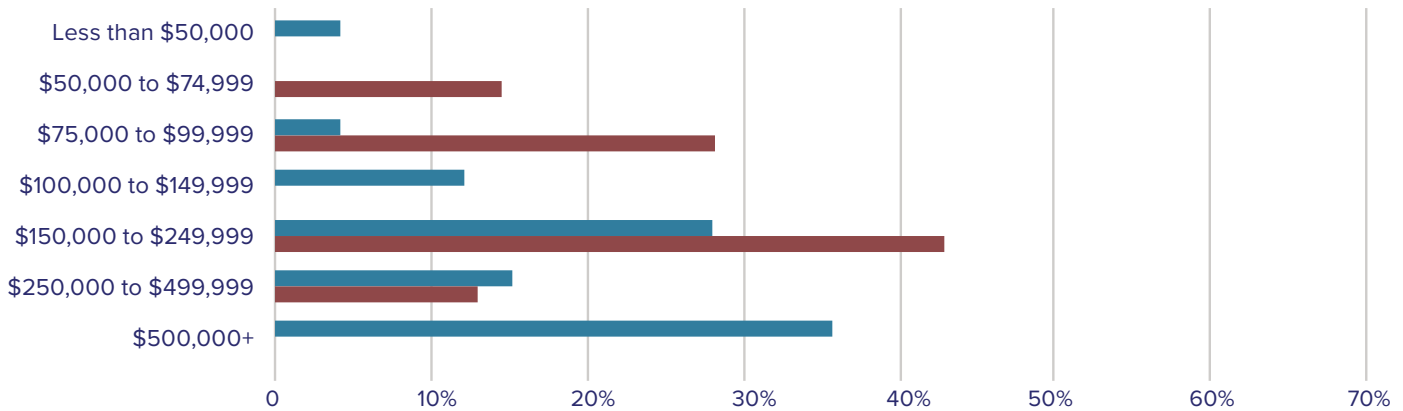
# APPROXIMATE ANNUAL COMPENSATION BY PRACTICE AREA

Partner  
Associate

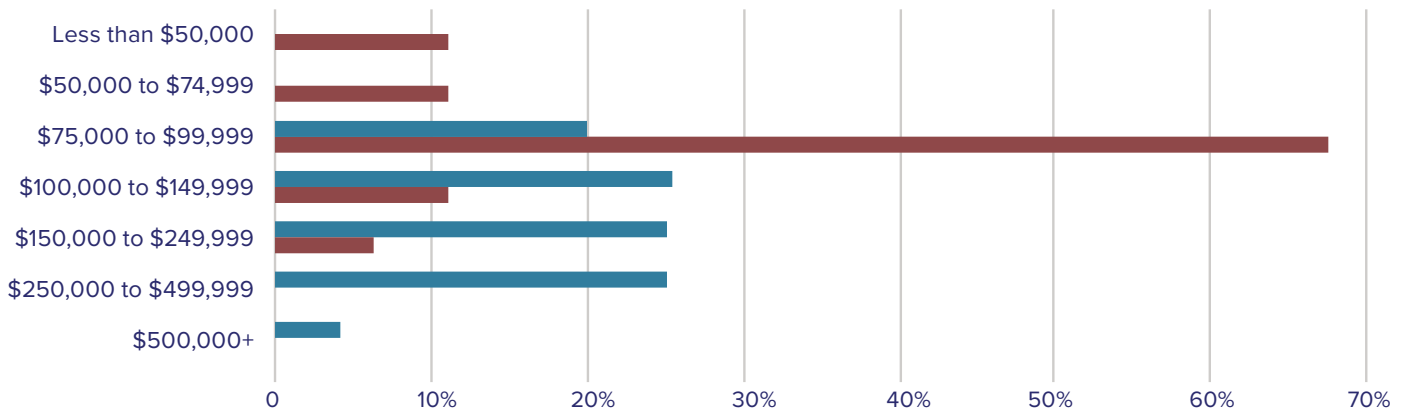
## INSURANCE DEFENSE



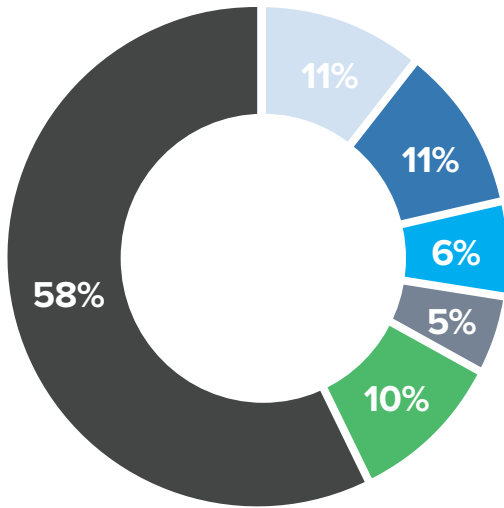
## INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY



## CRIMINAL DEFENSE



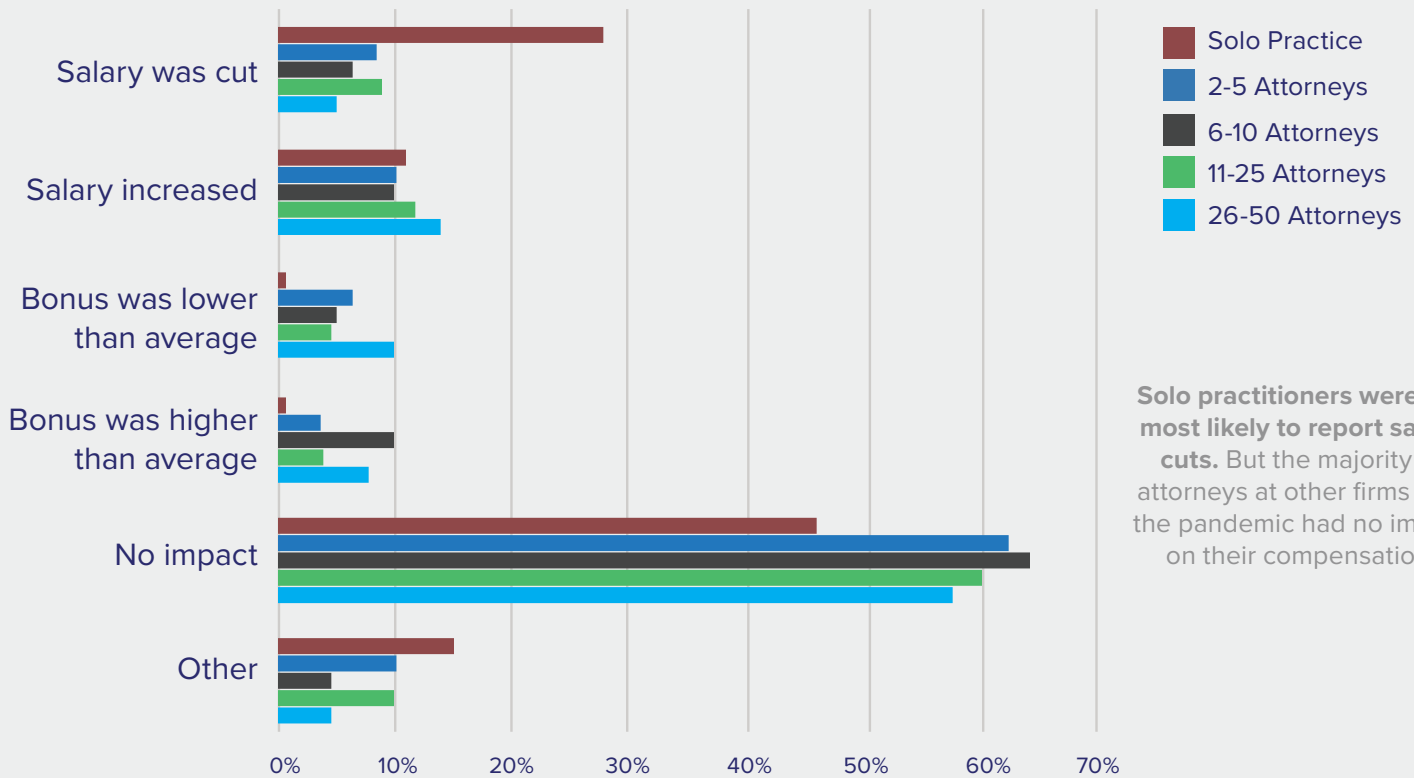
# IMPACT OF PANDEMIC ON COMPENSATION



A **majority** of respondents (58%) reported that the **pandemic had no effect on their pay**. Among those whose compensation was affected, responses were divided as to whether it had a positive or negative effect.

- Salary was cut
- Bonus was higher than average
- Salary increased
- Other
- Bonus was lower than average
- No impact

## BY FIRM SIZE



**Solo practitioners were the most likely to report salary cuts.** But the majority of attorneys at other firms said the pandemic had no impact on their compensation.

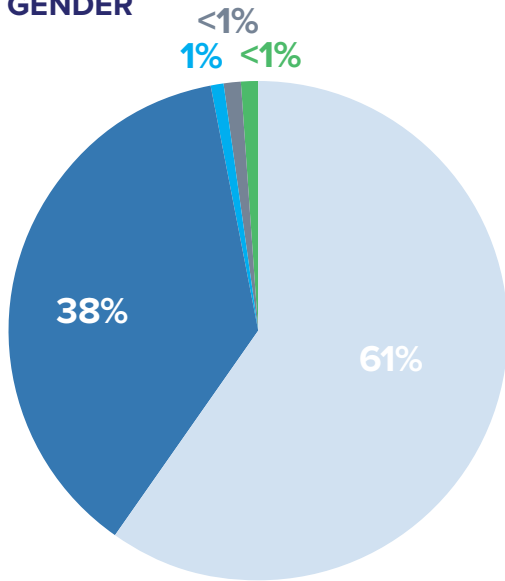
# IMPACT OF PANDEMIC ON COMPENSATION

Attorneys were asked to elaborate on how their compensation was affected by the pandemic. Here's a sampling of their responses:

- **2020—bonus was below average, 2021—business picked up and bonus was higher than average, 2022—bonus is average.**
- **2021 was the busiest year I have ever had.**
- **After a brief pause in transactional work in mid-2020, work has been steadily increasing.**
- **Because cases were not resolved, I was unable to submit for payment. Also, payments from governmental agencies were severely delayed.**
- **Business seemed to pick up with the pandemic, more people getting divorced.**
- **Courthouse was closed at times, clients scared to spend money.**
- **Cut was temporary. Salary and bonus increased after about 6 months.**
- **Gross revenues and case intake were both negatively affected by pandemic-related unemployment.**
- **Hours plummeted, so decreased collections meant less salary and less bonus; because our annual compensation is based on a 3-year average, the reduction in hours will continue to depress my compensation for the next few years.**
- **I brought in less fee and accordingly received less bonus.**
- **I have been exceptionally busy during the pandemic and remote appearances at court have cut my expenses, no rent, etc.**
- **I lost 3 months of compensation in 2020 due to the shutdowns and clients not paying.**
- **In order to keep up with large firm salary increases, our compensation has gone up to retain talent.**
- **It wasn't [affected], really. People still got arrested and divorced and died.**
- **Less work while courts were shut down.**
- **More estate planning and probate work calling in.**
- **My draw was much lower.**
- **My salary was briefly cut at the beginning, but quickly restored. I then received a surprise bonus at the end of the year.**
- **Our firm was VERY busy, which resulted in a 25% raise to base salary.**
- **Our municipal workload went through the roof with Covid, and so hours went up.**
- **The number of cases my firm took in skyrocketed but still waiting on collections.**
- **The pandemic made no difference at all to firm receipts and partner compensation.**
- **We had our busiest and most profitable year.**
- **Worked less, so earned less.**

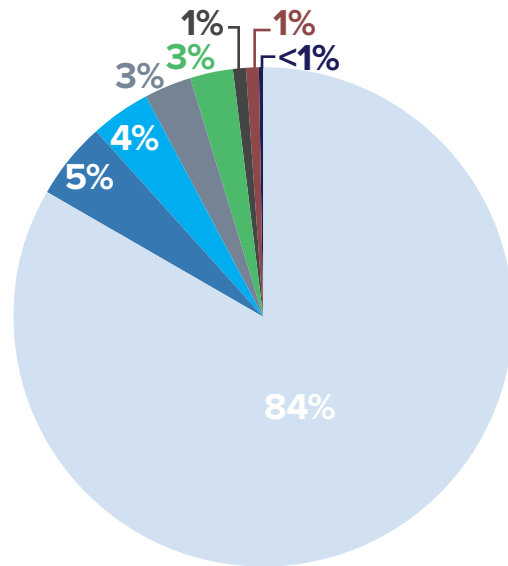
# ADDITIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

## GENDER



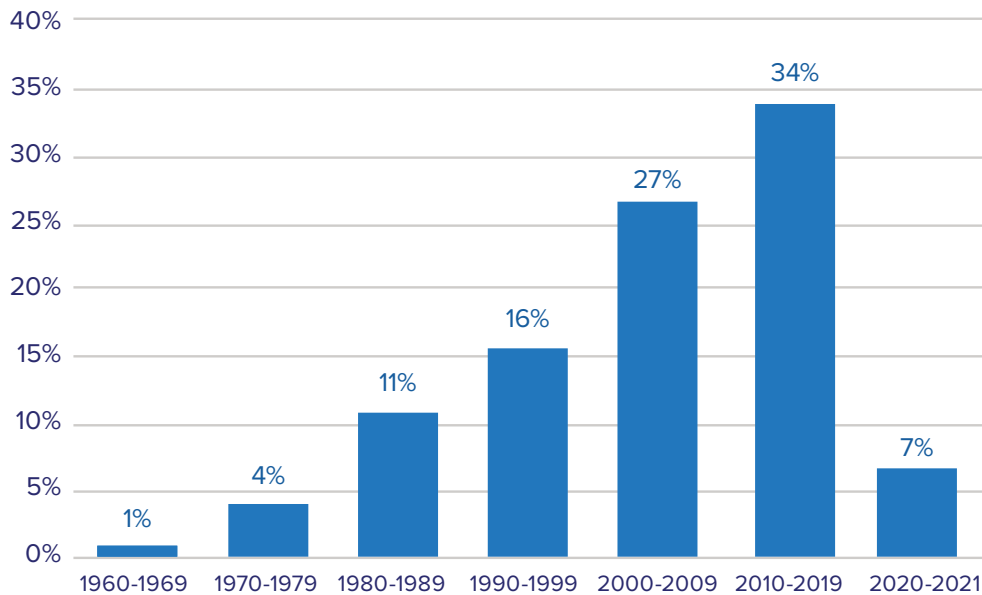
- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Transgender
- Prefer to self-describe

## RACE/ETHNICITY



- White
- Hispanic/Latinx
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Multicultural
- Middle Eastern
- Other
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (0%)

## YEAR OF LAW SCHOOL GRADUATION





MATTERLY

# Matterly.io

THE LEGAL SOFTWARE FOR  
EFFICIENT LAW FIRMS

Matterly

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## Automated Email Parsing



**Save Your Law Firm Countless Hours!**



# All The Standard Features - But Better

## Time Tracking

Advanced and visually pleasing time tracking tools make assignment tracking and billing easier than ever.

## Invoicing

Automatically generate invoices for your clients based off entered billable hours. Customizable to every client.

## Entry Wizard

The Matterly Entry Wizard makes entering matters easier and more organized than you could imagine.

## Assignment Tracking

Assign different tasks to different employees with ease, even separating hourly costs by task in a matter.

1

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2

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If you decide to stay on, all your data will be saved! No credit card required to download Matterly!

