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## NEWS

# Law Firm Associates, Staffers Continue to Put a Premium On Workplace Flexibility, Study Finds

"Every single associate I'm talking to these days, one of the top five questions they ask me is, 'What is your policy on being able to work hybrid?'" said Amanda Koplos, president of the Association of Legal Administrators.

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By Jon Campisi

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## What You Need to Know

- The 2024 Association of Legal Administrators' Compensation and Benefits Survey found that remote and hybrid work policies are still very much on the radar of prospective and current law firm employees.
- More than 82% of respondents said at least some portion of their staff worked remotely, a figure that the ALA says continues an upward trend that was also seen in surveys from previous years.
- Survey respondents also mentioned that the issue of paid parental leave is another strong factor in law firm compensation discussions.

Law firm employees continue to prize policies that allow them to spend part of their work weeks outside the office despite the ending of the pandemic, considering the arrangements to be a significant employee benefit along par with salary and even medical insurance, according to the 2024 Compensation and Benefits Survey by the Association of Legal Administrators, which was published this week.

The ALA's 2024 Compensation and Benefits Survey, which the organization says can be used by members to help inform annual budgetary and staffing decisions, included responses from 225 law firms representing more than a thousand office locations and 81 positions.

More than 82% of respondents said at least some portion of their staff worked remotely, a figure that the ALA says reflected an upward trend seen during the past few years of the survey, although respondents noted that the issue has likely plateaued by 2024.

ALA president Amanda Koplos and executive director Eryn Carter noted they recently touched on this issue while recording a podcast episode, prompting Carter to reflect on "how ingrained the remote work conversation is, and it really isn't going away."

"It's evident in the survey results," Carter said. "What it really is showing is that firms are continuing to have these conversations. That administrators, those who are responsible for kind of administering these policies and kind of keeping people informed ... how can they be prepared to be responsive to perhaps even additional requests, or something that may be new and different."

The survey showed that nearly 78% of respondents identified remote or hybrid work arrangements as a preferred benefit, and that remote work appears to be a significant draw for prospective legal job applicants.

One in five law firms responding to the survey said they added or adjusted remote and hybrid work schedules in 2023 alone.

"Once again this year, nearly all respondents were open to remote work for their majority of positions," the survey report states. "The portion of respondents who required in-person work for many positions was in the single digits."

Contrast this with the fact that more than 15% of respondents mandate that senior level positions, including many C-suite roles, work in-office,

and more than 61% of respondents required in-office attendance for office services and facilities managers, which was slightly higher than what was reflected in last year's survey.

"As for associates: The longer they remain with a firm, the more liberal the remote work policy," the report states.

The survey also says that the legal industry appears to have found what the ALA calls a "sweet spot" between remote and in-office work, as nearly nine out of 10 respondents said there would likely be no further change in remote work arrangements going forward, which was similar to a sentiment shared last year.

"Every single associate I'm talking to these days, one of the top five questions they ask me is, 'What is your policy on being able to work hybrid?'" Koplos said. "We struggle with associates... the age-old philosophy has always been that if you want to get work from a partner you need to be where the partner is."

"If you want to walk in and ask questions, it's an in-person concept," she continued. "Firms are really struggling with how we train and mentor, especially associates who don't want to be there, but we have no choice anymore, right? I cannot make my associates be in the office five days a week when every competitor in town will let them be remote at some portion of it."

The topic of remote and hybrid work is influencing law firm compensation and recruiting conversations for prospective employees, which was also reflected in the survey, and a point that is being raised by ALA membership across the country, Carter noted.

"Obviously, Amanda (who is based in Orlando) is very familiar with the Florida marketplace, but it's very similar from north, south, east and west," she said.

Koplos and Carter both said they were surprised that the remote and hybrid work topic was continuing to show up as a significant aspect of

the compensation and benefits survey, so much so that respondents consider the work arrangements to be as important as other compensation considerations. They said the survey results show that the issue will likely not be going away anytime soon.

Koplos and Carter said the survey did not address the issue of whether firms who remain rigid and require full-time, in-office attendance suffer any with regard to talent acquisition, recruitment or revenue decline, but there is the possibility that firm success may be connected, in some way, to such attendance policies.

"When you think about the general failure rate of firms, I'm sure that there's some correlation there between that failure rate [and attendance policies]," Koplos said.

Aside from remote and hybrid work arrangements, Koplos and Carter pointed out that survey respondents also noted that the issue of paid parental leave is one that is looked upon by law firm employees as being quite important in compensation discussions.

The survey showed that firms break down parental leave between maternity leave and paternity leave, and that the amount of leave offered varies depending on whether the employee is a birth parent or not.

The survey showed that 65.7% of firms offer some form of maternity leave for nonexempt staff, who are eligible for overtime pay, while 71.3% of firms offer maternity leave for exempt staff and 83% of firm give maternity leave for associates.

Paternity leave to nonexempt staff was offered by 58.9% of firms, to exempt staff by 66.6% of firms, and to associates by 82.5% of firms who responded to the survey.

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