

CAREER GUIDE FOR LEGAL ASSISTANT

SOC Code: 23-2011

Pay Band(s): 4 ([Salary Structure](#))

Standard Occupational Description: Assist lawyers by researching legal precedent, investigating facts, or preparing legal documents. Conduct research to support a legal proceeding, to formulate a defense, or to initiate legal action.

Legal Assistant positions in the Commonwealth are assigned to the following Roles in the [Hearing and Legal Services Career Group](#):

[Hearing and Legal Services Officer I](#)

While Legal Assistants within the Commonwealth are all located within the Hearing and Legal Services Career Group, individuals may want to pursue other opportunities within the Commonwealth depending upon individual training, education, knowledge, skills, abilities, and interests.

Other Career Group(s) that may be of interest are:

[Administration and Office Support](#)

[General Administration](#)

[Program Administration](#)

SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, ABILITIES AND TASKS

(Technical and Functional Expertise)

Skills

Note: *The technical and functional skills listed below are based on general occupational qualifications for Legal Assistants commonly recognized by most employers. Typically, you will not be required to have all of the skills listed to be a successful performer. Recruitment and selection standards for an individual state job must be based on the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for that job as indicated in the job announcement and job description in the Employee Work Profile.*

1. Understanding written sentences and paragraphs in work related documents.
2. Communicating effectively in writing as appropriate for the needs of the audience.
3. Using logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions, conclusions or approaches to problems.
4. Talking to others to convey information effectively.
5. Bringing others together and trying to reconcile differences.
6. Giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times.
7. Adjusting actions in relation to others' actions.
8. Persuading others to change their minds or behavior.
9. Identifying complex problems and reviewing related information to develop and evaluate options and implement solutions.
10. Understanding the implications of new information for both current and future problem-solving and decision-making.

Knowledge

Note: *The technical and functional knowledge statements listed below are based on general occupational qualifications for Legal Assistants commonly recognized by most employers. Typically, you will not be required to*

have all of the knowledge listed to be a successful performer. Recruitment and selection standards for an individual state job must be based on the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for that job as indicated in the job announcement and job description in the Employee Work Profile.

The **Knowledge** of:

1. Laws, legal codes, court procedures, precedents, government regulations, executive orders, agency rules, and the democratic political process.
2. Administrative and clerical procedures and systems such as word processing, managing files and records, stenography and transcription, designing forms, and other office procedures and terminology.
3. Structure and content of the English language including the meaning and spelling of words, rules of composition, and grammar.

Abilities

Note: The technical and functional abilities listed below are based on general occupational qualifications for Legal Assistants commonly recognized by most employers. Typically, you will not be required to have all of the abilities listed to be a successful performer. Recruitment and selection standards for an individual state job must be based on the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for that job as indicated in the job announcement and job description in the Employee Work Profile.

The **Ability** to:

1. Read and understand information and ideas presented in writing.
2. Listen to and understand information and ideas presented through spoken words and sentences.
3. Communicate information and ideas in writing so others will understand.
4. Communicate information and ideas in speaking so others will understand.
5. Apply general rules to specific problems to produce answers that make sense.
6. See details at close range (within a few feet of the observer).
7. Combine pieces of information to form general rules or conclusions (includes finding a relationship among seemingly unrelated events).
8. Speak clearly so others can understand you.
9. Arrange things or actions in a certain order or pattern according to a specific rule or set of rules (e.g., patterns of numbers, letters, words, pictures, mathematical operations)

Tasks

Note: The following is a list of sample tasks typically performed by Legal Assistants. Employees in this occupation will not necessarily perform all of the tasks listed.

Tasks

1. Gather and analyze research data, such as statutes, decisions, and legal articles, codes, and documents.
2. Prepare draft legal documents, under the supervision of an attorney.
3. Investigate facts and law of cases to determine causes of action and to prepare cases.
4. Prepare affidavits or other documents, maintain document file, and file pleadings with court clerk.
5. Appraise and inventory real and personal property for estate planning.
6. Arbitrate disputes between parties and assist in real estate closing process.
7. Call upon witnesses to testify at hearing.
8. Answer questions regarding legal issues pertaining to civil service hearings.
9. Direct and coordinate law office activity, including delivery of subpoenas.
10. Keep and monitor legal volumes to ensure that law library is up-to-date.

INTERESTED?

Like people, occupations have traits or characteristics. These characteristics give important clues about the nature of the work and work environment, and give you an opportunity to match your own personal interests to a specific occupation. When you choose a job in an occupation that matches your own interests you have taken an important step in planning a successful and rewarding career.

The Legal Assistant occupation has **Enterprising**, **Conventional** and **Social** characteristics as described below:

Enterprising — Enterprising occupations frequently involve starting up and carrying out projects. These occupations can involve leading people and making many decisions. Sometimes they require risk taking and often deal with business.

Conventional — Conventional occupations frequently involve following set procedures and routines. These occupations can include working with data and details more than with ideas. Usually there is a clear line of authority to follow.

Social — Social occupations frequently involve working with, communicating with, and teaching people. These occupations often involve helping or providing service to others.

LICENSURE, REGISTRATION, OR CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

Generally this is not required for Legal Assistant positions in state government.

Although most employers do not require certification, earning a voluntary certificate from a professional society may offer advantages in the labor market and for career enhancement. The National Association of Legal Assistants, for example, has established standards for certification requiring various combinations of education and experience.

Those who pass this examination may use the designation Certified Legal Assistant (CLA). In addition, the Paralegal Advanced Competency Exam, administered through the National Federation of Paralegal Associations, offers professional recognition to paralegals with a bachelor's degree and at least 2 years of experience. Those who pass this examination may use the designation Registered Paralegal (RP).

For information on the Certified Legal Assistant exam, schools that offer training programs in a specific State, and standards and guidelines for paralegals, contact: National Association of Legal Assistants, Inc: <http://www.nala.org>
Information on the Paralegal Advanced Competency Exam can be obtained from the National Federation of Paralegal Associations: <http://www.paralegals.org>

EDUCATIONAL, TRAINING, AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The Department of Labor provides the following information:

While lawyers assume ultimate responsibility for legal work, they often delegate many of their tasks to paralegals. In fact, paralegals—also called legal assistants—continue to assume a growing range of tasks in the Nation's legal offices and perform many of the same tasks as

lawyers. Nevertheless, they are still explicitly prohibited from carrying out duties which are considered to be the practice of law, such as setting legal fees, giving legal advice, and presenting cases in court.

Paralegals investigate the facts of cases and ensure that all relevant information is considered. They also identify appropriate laws, judicial decisions, legal articles, and other materials that are relevant to assigned cases. After they analyze and organize the information, paralegals may prepare written reports that attorneys use in determining how cases should be handled. Should attorneys decide to file lawsuits on behalf of clients, paralegals may help prepare the legal arguments, draft pleadings and motions to be filed with the court, obtain affidavits, and assist attorneys during trials. Paralegals also organize and track files of all important case documents and make them available and easily accessible to attorneys.

There are several ways to become a paralegal. The most common is through a community college paralegal program that leads to an associate's degree. The other common method of entry, mainly for those who have a college degree, is through a certification program that leads to a certification in paralegal studies. A small number of schools also offer bachelor's and master's degrees in paralegal studies. Some employers train paralegals on the job, hiring college graduates with no legal experience or promoting experienced legal secretaries. Other entrants have experience in a technical field that is useful to law firms, such as a background in tax preparation for tax and estate practice, criminal justice, or nursing or health administration for personal injury practice.

Paralegal programs include 2-year associate's degree programs, 4-year bachelor's degree programs, and certificate programs that can take only a few months to complete. Most certificate programs provide intensive paralegal training for individuals who already hold college degrees, while associate's and bachelor's degree programs usually combine paralegal training with courses in other academic subjects.

General information on a career as a paralegal can be obtained from:
Standing Committee on Legal Assistants, American Bar Association: <http://www.abanet.org>

The State Council of Higher Education lists many Virginia educational institutions having a paralegal program. The State Council of Higher Education's web site is <http://www.schev.edu/Students/FindaProgram.asp?from=k12>.

COMMONWEALTH COMPETENCIES

Competencies are a set of identified behaviors, knowledge, skills, and abilities that directly and positively impact the success of employees and the organization. Competencies can be observed and measured. When consistently demonstrated, competencies make employees particularly effective in their work. Competencies help lay out a road map to career success. You can use the Commonwealth Competencies to help improve your individual performance by adopting behaviors that make high performing employees successful in their jobs. In this way, you can use the Commonwealth Competencies for your further professional development.

The Commonwealth Competencies are:

1. Technical and Functional Expertise

2. Understanding the Business
3. Achieving Results
4. Serving the Customer
5. Teamwork
6. Interpersonal and Communication Skills
7. Leadership and Personal Effectiveness

The above competencies may be applied to employees throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. They can be rank-ordered by agencies and hiring managers to represent the needs of a specific job. The rank ordering will change depending upon the occupation, an organization's priorities, the actual job requirements, and the supervisor's preferences.

Career success is both about what you do (applying your technical knowledge, skills, and ability) and how you do it (the consistent behaviors you demonstrate and choose to use) while interacting and communicating with others. Hopefully, by studying the Commonwealth competencies, identifying your developmental opportunities, and working to refine your own competence, you can take charge of your career!

For additional information about the **Commonwealth Competencies** go to: http://jobs.state.va.us/cc_planningctr.htm. For the competencies, we first list the competencies and then define each. Finally, we list competency indicators; to describe what successful performance looks like.

COMMONWEALTH CAREER PATH

Career opportunities in the Commonwealth are not limited to moving “up” to the next highest role and pay band, changing positions, or to becoming a supervisor. That’s because most roles describe a broad group of occupationally related positions that perform a range of work that requires increased knowledge and skills. For that reason, Commonwealth roles describe the career paths within the same or higher-level role for the same or different Career Group. The broad salary range and the Commonwealth’s pay practices provide flexibility in recognizing career development and advancement. ([Salary Structure](#))

For example: **Legal Assistant**

PAY BAND	PRACTITIONER ROLES
4	Hearing and Legal Services Officer I

PAY BAND	MANAGER ROLES

Sample Career Path

Hearing and Legal Services Officer I

The Hearing & Legal Services Officer I role provides career track for legal assistants responsible for reviewing and analyzing investigative reports, preparing legal documents, and presenting cases before a presiding officer or board.

ADDITIONAL OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND AT:

O*NET (Occupational Information Network)

http://online.onetcenter.org/gen_search_page

Virginia Employment Commission

<http://www.alex.vec.state.va.us/>

Career One Stop

<http://www.careeronestop.org/>

Virginia Career Resource Network

<http://www.vacrn.net/>

American Bar Association,

<http://www.abanet.org>