

Paralegal Division

State Bar of New Mexico



A paralegal is a person who contracts with or is employed by an attorney, law firm, corporation, governmental agency or other entity; performs substantive legal work under the supervision of a licensed attorney who assumes professional responsibility for the final work product; and meets one or more of the education, training or work experience qualifications set forth in Rule 20-115 NMRA. "Substantive legal work" is work that requires knowledge of legal concepts and is customarily, but not exclusively, performed by a lawyer. Rule 20-102 NMRA

Contact Us

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All forms are available on our website

Purpose

The Paralegal Division of the State Bar of New Mexico was formally organized in 1995 and serves the professional goals of paralegals throughout the state by:

- *promoting the interests of the paralegal profession in the State of New Mexico;*
- *improving the relationships between the profession, the legal community and the public;*
- *promoting and providing legal education in technical fields of substantive law and practice;*
- *promoting and supporting the needs of all members;* and
- *fostering and maintaining high ideals of integrity, learning, competence and public service.*

Benefits of Membership

Paralegal Division members earn recognition for the professionalism and dedication associated with seeking and maintaining voluntary membership in the State Bar. Members have access to reasonably priced CLE and enjoy the opportunity to network with peers and other legal professionals. Members can stay in touch with local and national developments in the legal field through the Division's FOCUS newsletter; the Bar Bulletin, published by the State Bar; and through updates and links maintained by the Division and the State Bar on the website located at www.nmbar.org. Division members may join Sections of the State Bar (such as Real Property; Probate and Trust; Bankruptcy Law; and Family Law) and are encouraged to serve on State Bar committees.

Membership Involvement

The Paralegal Division relies on the support of all its members to meet its ambitious, continuing goals, which include educating the legal community and the public in the ethical, efficient, and effective use of paralegals. Members enhance the benefits of Division membership by participating in the various committees of the Division and the State Bar.

Qualifications for Membership

Rule 24-101A NMRA sets forth the following qualifications for membership in the Paralegal Division:

A. Membership. A person is eligible to become a member of the paralegal division of the state bar if the person meets the qualifications set forth in this rule and bylaws approved by the Board of Bar Commissioners.

B. Employment qualifications. A person may become a member of the paralegal division if the person:

(1) contracts with or is employed by an attorney, law firm, corporation, governmental agency or other entity;

(2) performs substantive legal work as defined in Rule 20-102 NMRA; and

(3) meets one or more of the qualifications described in Paragraph C of this rule.

C. Educational and experience qualifications. In addition to the employment qualifications set forth in Paragraph B of this rule, an applicant for membership to the Paralegal Division, shall meet one or more of the following educational or experience qualifications:

(1) graduation from a paralegal program that is:

(a) approved by the American Bar Association;

(b) an associate degree program;

(c) a post-baccalaureate certificate program in paralegal studies; or

(d) a bachelor's degree program;

(2) graduation from a post-secondary legal assistant program which consists of a minimum of sixty (60) semester hours or equivalent, as defined by the American Bar Association *Guidelines for the Approval of Paralegal Education Programs*, of which at least eighteen (18) semester hours or equivalent are general education courses and eighteen (18) semester hours or equivalent are legal specialty courses;

(3) a bachelor's degree in any field plus two years of substantive law-related experience under the supervision of a licensed attorney. Successful completion of at least fifteen (15) semester hours of substantive paralegal courses may be substituted for one year of law-related experience;

(4) graduation from an accredited law school and not disbarred or suspended from the practice of law by the State of New Mexico or any other jurisdiction; or

(5) certification by the National Association of Legal Assistants, Incorporated, the National Federation of Paralegal Associations, Incorporated, or other equivalent national or state competency examination plus at least one (1) year of substantive law-related experience under the supervision of a licensed attorney.

Organization

The Division's governing body consists of a Board of eleven Directors, including the offices of Chair, Chair-Elect, Immediate Past Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer, which meets at least quarterly to supervise the affairs of the Division. The six Directors have staggered two-year terms. Eleven Standing Committees perform the work of the Division.

Committees

The Division Standing Rules provide for permanent Standing Committees and for Special Committees that are established by the Board of Directors from time to time as the need arises.

Budget and Finance

This committee is chaired by the Treasurer and is responsible for analyzing the financial information of the Division, providing reports, making recommendations as requested, proposing amendments to the current year's budget and assisting the Chair in preparing the budget to present to the Board and State Bar.

Bylaws and Rules

This committee receives and studies suggested amendments to the Bylaws and makes recommendations to the Board, including concerning the Standing Rules.

Communications

This committee is responsible for the publication of the Division's quarterly newsletter, FOCUS, and for the design and maintenance of the Division's web site and other media-related services, as needed.

Continuing Legal Education

This committee develops and presents programs, seminars and materials relating to continuing legal education for the members of the Division, registers and monitors members' adherence to the minimum CLE requirements, and reports CLE credits to the Membership Committee.

Elections

This committee coordinates the election of Officers and Directors and the process of voting on amendments to Bylaws.

Equal Access to Justice

This committee develops and implements systems in which Division members may volunteer their time and talents to assist established programs that provide legal services to the disadvantaged in New Mexico.

Events Coordination

This committee works with the CLE Coordination Subcommittee and is the liaison with the State Bar for the planning of events, including the Division Annual Meeting; State Bar Annual Meeting CLE and/or events; hosting the "Meet and Greet" for the State Bar Staff; and an annual dinner meeting of the Board of Directors.

Independent Contractors

This committee is open to any Division member who is interested in the independent contracting of paralegal services to licensed New Mexico attorneys. Analyzing and disseminating information about current business trends and mutual concerns of independent contractors is the focus of this committee.

Membership

Chaired by the Chair-Elect of the Division, this Committee promotes membership and growth within the Division.

Professional Development

This Committee interprets and makes recommendations for amendments to the Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility. The Board may consult with this Committee regarding disciplinary procedures in furtherance of Standing Rule VIII. This Committee will also:

a. study, develop and implement various means to better inform the legal profession and the general public about the paralegal profession;

b. assist in various projects for enhancing the professional development of paralegals;

c. study and collect information with respect to standards for schools offering paralegal education and training;

d. interact with instructors and students of paralegal programs;

e. nurture positive relationships with local and national paralegal associations and other associations throughout the country; and

f. monitor legislation, court cases, publications, and other relevant information regarding the paralegal profession.

Paralegal Division Policy Statement Regarding the Unauthorized Practice of Law

The Paralegal Division of the State Bar of New Mexico promotes the highest ethical and professional standards for paralegal activities. The Division does not condone the offering of legal services to the public by any unlicensed person or any act that constitutes the unauthorized practice of law.