

## Corporate Counsel Hiring and Compensation Trends: 2025 Outlook



By: Megan Usovsky, [Robert Half](#)

Corporate legal departments are bringing more legal work in-house to control costs, including creating corporate counsel roles. Demand for specialized skills is also driving hiring, according to [Robert Half's Demand for Skilled Talent report](#). However, corporate legal departments are finding it difficult to match the rising salaries offered by law firms, leading to a competitive hiring environment.

### Compensation reigns supreme

According to the [2025 Salary Guide from Robert Half](#), the coming year will see continued salary growth in most legal fields, although increases may be more moderate than in the recent past. Still, legal hiring managers recognize that offering competitive compensation remains vital for retaining key staff and attracting top talent in a tight market.

The Salary Guide shows corporate counsel salaries are among those on the increase. For lawyers/attorneys with 10+ years of experience, the U.S. salary range is \$139,250 to \$195,500, with a median of \$169,000. For those with 4-9 years of experience, the range is \$107,500 to \$170,250, with a median of \$137,000.

It's important to note these figures represent starting compensation for someone new to a company in the given position and do not include bonuses, benefits or other perks. The actual compensation will vary based on lawyers' experience level, company size, industry and availability of flexible work options.

Offering salary transparency can help land skilled talent. Over 40% of workers across all industries now expect to see salary ranges in job postings, and corporate counsel jobs are no exception. Companies that aren't upfront about compensation risk having prime candidates ignore their postings.

## Specialized legal skills get noticed

Hiring managers are also researching the value of specialized legal skills — not just years of experience — when setting salaries. Identifying and compensating for in-demand skills could be key to securing standout legal talent.

Skill most companies look for when hiring corporate counsel may include:

- **Advanced communication skills.** Attorneys can get away with speaking legalese to one another, but corporate counsel must be ready to explain complex legal issues so everyone from the CEO to an administrative intern can understand. At the same time, they should be able to speak fluently the language of their own business sector.
- **Business acumen.** Corporate counsel must have a deep and thorough understanding of their industry. For example, in construction, an in-house lawyer might need to not only understand contract law but also be knowledgeable about construction timelines, zoning laws, building codes and the basics of materials costs.
- **Negotiation.** From working out contract details to managing mergers, the corporate counsel should be a practiced negotiator. This role understands the final objectives of the negotiations and the strengths and weaknesses of all parties involved. These professionals must also be able to build a rapport with the opposing side and act ethically at all times.
- **Digital and AI capabilities.** With the rapid digitization of the legal profession, digital skills are in high demand. Generative AI is having a profound effect on corporate legal departments and the skills corporate counsel are adopting for research, decision making and speeding up common tasks, such as drafting, negotiating and reviewing contracts. In the right hands, these tools give corporate counsel more time to focus on strategic business issues.

## Remote and hybrid work offset high salary expectations

On the issue of flexibility, Robert Half research found 46% of managers in the legal field allow employees to work remotely part- or full-time as a way to retain them. Still, that's fewer than half of employees in a field where 63% of professionals say remote work options are among the perks they value most.

Robert Half's data shows many legal professionals will turn down higher salaries in exchange for remote or hybrid work.

Law offices willing to adopt more flexible work policies could benefit from improved retention, expanded talent pools, cost savings and enhanced business continuity.

### **Leveraging contract corporate counsel**

Consider bringing in contract corporate counsel professionals to enhance your legal department's flexibility and capabilities. Robert Half research shows that corporate legal departments are taking this approach for several reasons.

The market for contract corporate counsel is robust for in-demand roles in key areas such as compliance, data privacy, risk management, and AI-related projects. You gain specialized expertise for specific initiatives without the long-term commitment of a full-time hire.

Many experienced professionals choose project-based corporate counsel positions, appreciating the flexibility and variety of work that comes with it. By tapping into the contract talent pool, you give your department access to seasoned lawyers who bring a wealth of experience from different industries and legal environments.

Contract roles can also serve as an effective recruiting tool. They offer an opportunity to "try before you buy," allowing you to assess a lawyer's fit with your team and corporate culture before considering them for a permanent position. This can lead to more successful long-term hires for your in-house legal team.

You can find permanent and contract in-house professionals by working with a [talent solutions firm](#) that specializes in legal roles. They can help simplify your search by doing the legwork for you. The best firms combine recruiter expertise with AI technology to connect you with top talent for your hard-to-fill positions.

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