



EXPANDED METHODOLOGY

For the 2018 “Best Law Firms” list, the methodology remained the same as in the previous seven years.

The *U.S. News – Best Lawyers*® “Best Law Firms” rankings are based on a rigorous evaluation process that includes the collection of client and lawyer evaluations, peer review from leading attorneys, and review of additional information provided by law firms as part of the formal submission process.

1 Eligibility

Firms who have at least one lawyer who has been recognized in the previous edition of *Best Lawyers* in a practice area and metro area currently ranked by “Best Law Firms” are eligible to receive a ranking. For more information on *Best Lawyers*, please visit bestlawyers.com.

Practice Areas

Practice area rankings are produced both nationally and within 186 metropolitan areas across the United States. Because some practice areas have minimal presence in particular legal markets, or because there was not enough data garnered for proper evaluation, some practice areas that are covered in our research are not represented in the national rankings or various metropolitan rankings. The 2018 “Best Law Firms” national rankings cover 75 practice areas, while as many as 122 practice areas are covered on the metropolitan lists.

Metro Areas

Metropolitan areas are defined by assessing the population of eligible law firms geographically to guarantee enough comparative data to produce accurate results. There are eight states that had a high percentage of eligible law firms located in one large metropolitan area. Because there are also eligible law firms outside of those metropolitan areas, but not enough to create accurate results for separate metropolitan rankings, results are produced for

the entire state. The states that fall into this category are: Alaska, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Utah.






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2 Submission Process

As part of our formal submission process, eligible firms are sent submission packets in January. This packet includes information about a firm's eligibility as well as a law firm survey.

A photograph showing three business professionals—two men and one woman—walking along a modern glass-walled building. They are dressed in business attire. The man on the left is carrying a briefcase. The woman on the right is carrying a white bag. They appear to be in conversation.

Clients are asked to provide feedback on firm practice groups, addressing expertise, responsiveness, understanding of a business and its needs, cost-effectiveness, civility, and whether they would refer another client to the firm. Clients also have the option to write in the names of law firms they've worked with on other matters and within practice areas beyond those they were asked to comment on by the submitting firm. Some clients choose to write a comment about their experience with the law firm. These comments are for reference only and are not

used as data points in the formal evaluation process.

On individual lawyer ballots, lawyers also cast votes and are asked to consider expertise, responsiveness, whether they would refer a matter to a firm and whether they consider a firm a worthy competitor. For the fourth year, a Law Firm Leaders Survey was implemented to provide personal insight on the legal landscape surrounding the nationally ranked practice areas. We ask this group to vote on law firms that have a preeminent national presence within specified legal practice area(s) they know well. In addition to information from these surveys, the rankings incorporate the 7.3 million evaluations of 54,463 individual leading lawyers collected by Best Lawyers in its most recent annual survey.

In addition to lawyer and client feedback, law firms are asked to provide us with general demographic and background information on the law firm and attorneys, and other data that speaks to the strengths of a law firm's practice areas.



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3 Ranking by Tiers

All of the quantitative and qualitative data is combined into an overall “Best Law Firms” score for each firm.

This data is then compared to other firms within the same metropolitan area and at the national level. Because firms are often separated by small or insignificant differences in overall score, we use a tier system rather than ranking law firms sequentially. The first tier in each metropolitan area includes those firms that score within a certain percentage of the highest-scoring firms; the second tier, those firms that score within a certain percentage of the next highest scoring firms, and so on.

The national rankings are based on metropolitan rankings as well as on the number of offices

each firm has with a metropolitan ranking and on the level of legal activity in each metropolitan area. The number of tiers included in each practice area or metropolitan area ranking varies, and some specialties may not be ranked in metro areas in which there is not enough data to provide rankings in a particular specialty. Of the 13,745 firms that were eligible to submit information for the 2018 edition ranking process, 13,372 firms, including a large number of one-person firms, received rankings, and 8,914 of those firms received first-tier national and/or metropolitan rankings.

4 Law Firm of the Year

One “Law Firm of the Year” was named in 74 of the nationally ranked practice areas. Law Firms receiving the “Law Firm of the Year” designation have an impressive

overall performance in our research of a given practice area, representing a significant showing in the 2018 *U.S. News – Best Lawyers* “Best Law Firms” initiative.

5 Award Announcement

Firms are notified of their rankings via email.

6 Public Release

On November 1, 2017, all of the rankings, in all tiers, were published online at <http://bestlawfirms.usnews.com>. The National and Metro Tier 1 rankings are also published in print in our Eighth Edition of “Best Law Firms” and in our fourth annual “Legal Issue”, which highlights our National Tier 1 firms with legal content provided by firms in collaboration with Best Lawyers and U.S. News.