

The "How To Guide" for Membership in the Paralegal Division:

***The "How To Guide" for Membership in the Paralegal Division:
What are the Requirements and Career Benefits of Membership?***

by Peggi Lowden

Are you wondering how to apply for membership in the Paralegal Division of the Utah State Bar (the "Division")? Am I a paralegal by the Division's definition? What are the educational and experience requirements for membership? How can I get the application forms? Once I'm a member, are there any CLE requirements to maintain my membership? We are frequently asked these questions. We are glad that you asked. To better serve you - a future member - we offer this "How To Guide" to answer your questions and to assist you in your application for membership in the Division.

First, *what* is a paralegal? The Division follows the Utah Supreme Court's definition of a paralegal:

[A] person, qualified through education, training or work experience, who is employed or retained by a lawyer, law office, governmental agency, or other entity in a capacity or function which involves the performance, under the ultimate direction and supervision of an attorney, of specifically delegated substantive legal work, which work, for the most part, requires a sufficient knowledge of legal concepts that, absent such an assistant, the attorney would perform the task.

Second, let's look at *who* is eligible for membership in the Paralegal Division. You are eligible for membership if you meet the following qualifications:

1. Currently work under the ultimate supervision of a duly licensed Utah attorney whenever you perform duties that are reserved to the practice of law. To meet this requirement, you must currently work under the ultimate supervision of a member of the Utah State Bar and perform the duties of a paralegal on a full-time or part-time basis. For example, you might be employed by (or volunteer with) a law firm, governmental agency, corporation, or nonprofit association.¹ Or, you might be a freelance contract paralegal working for a variety of entities.

2. Meet certain educational and/or work experience requirements. The Division attempts to capture the great variety of career paths one may take to become a paralegal. As a result, there are many choices that are available to help you meet this requirement. Please don't let the many educational/experience options stop you from reading on. It's painless! You need to meet *only one* of the following options:

A. Successful completion of a formal ABA-Approved program of paralegalism.

B. Successful completion of an institutionally accredited formal education program of paralegalism that consists of a minimum of 60 semester hours (or equivalent quarter hours) is required for this category. However, at least 15 of the 60 hours must be substantive legal courses, such as, contract law, civil litigation, constitutional law, etc.

C. Successful completion of an institutionally accredited formal course of college study that consists of 16 semester hours of substantive legal courses and 45 semester hours of general college courses, and at least one year of full-time experience as a paralegal under the ultimate supervision of a duly licensed attorney.

D. A minimum of five continuous years of full-time experience as a paralegal under the ultimate supervision of a duly licensed attorney and at least 16 hours of Continuing Legal Education (CLE) within the immediately preceding two years of your application for membership.

E. Successful completion of a baccalaureate degree in any field and two continuous years of full-time experience as a paralegal under the ultimate supervision of a duly licensed attorney.

F. Successful completion of the voluntary certification examination given by the National Association of Legal Assistants (CLA®/CP®), or comparable examination approved by the Division, and six months of full-time experience as a paralegal under the ultimate supervision of a duly licensed attorney.

3. No felony convictions for which you have not been pardoned or otherwise had your full rights restored.

4. No misdemeanor convictions involving theft, embezzlement, or fraud.

5. No expulsion or suspension from membership in a law related professional association without being fully reinstated.

6. Read and understand the Utah Supreme Court's definition of a Paralegal.

7. Read and agree to be bound by the Division's Code of Ethics and Guidelines for the Utilization of Paralegals.²

8. Agree to notify the Division of any change in employment status, address, or supervising attorney.

Third, *how* do you find the forms to apply for membership in the Division? The Division membership forms are available on the Utah State Bar's web site: <http://www.utahbar.org>. To navigate to the membership forms, go to the Bar's web site and find the link for *Sections & Committees*. Next, find the link to the *Paralegal Division*. At the Division's page, find the link to *Membership Forms*. The membership forms are available in PDF format and include instructions that are useful to help you submit your application. You may print and mail your completed application to the Utah State Bar, together with your annual membership dues in the amount of \$50.00.³

Fourth, the Division *requires* the completion of yearly CLE credit hours. The requirement consists of a minimum of ten CLE hours, including one hour of Ethics to be completed within each membership year after your initial application for membership. Proof of completion of the CLE hours is required upon renewal of your membership. The membership year runs from July 1 to June 30.

Now that you've learned about how you can become a member of the Division, explore a bit while you're visiting the Bar and Division's web sites. Check out the benefits available to you as a Division member. Briefly, membership benefits offer you a variety of options to help you meet your professional responsibilities and enhance your career options. The Division offers continuing education, networking with a variety of professionals, discounts on products and services offered to Bar members,⁴ the *Utah Bar Journal*, CLE opportunities sponsored by the Bar (including special discount rates *exclusively* for members of the Division to Bar conventions throughout each year), along with affiliate membership offered to Division members in specific practice areas. Currently, affiliate practice area membership status is available to Division members as follows: Alternative Dispute Resolution, Appellate Practice, Collection Law, Corporate Counsel, Family Law, Franchise Law, Intellectual Property, International Law, Real Property, Securities, and Young Lawyers.

Finally, you know more about the benefits, professional opportunities, and professional responsibilities of membership in the Division. Now is the time to consider making your application for Division membership a priority. Complete and submit your application, today. We welcome your questions and concerns as you work on your application for membership in the Division. Inquiries that you make to

the Bar are forwarded to a member of the Division who is qualified and available to respond to you. Of course, if you can track one of us down directly, it will be our pleasure to assist you as you complete your application for membership. We look forward to receiving your application for membership. We also look forward to welcoming you as a member of the Division. Make a positive move in your career and network circle by submitting your application for membership in the Paralegal Division. Then, consider becoming a volunteer leader in the Division. Membership and leadership are rewarding and may "super charge" your career!

1. There are other entity types that utilize paralegals.
2. Available on the Division's web site: <http://www.utahstatebar.org>
3. If you are not accepted as a member, your check will be returned to you. There is no fee to process your application.
4. Membership in the Paralegal Division does not confer membership in the Utah State Bar, nor does membership authorize a paralegal to practice law.

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