Best Law Practice Areas in 2026: Types of Lawyers in Demand

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Thanks to the increasing demand for legal services in recent years, many areas of law are experiencing shifts in their growth trajectories. These sudden changes have jump-started many new and emerging law practice areas.

We know that the pandemic helped contribute to these emerging areas of law. However, many other social, political, technological, and environmental factors in the background also affect the growth of different legal practice areas. Read on to learn more about the highest-growth legal practice areas for 2026 and beyond.

What are the most in-demand law specialties?

Several legal fields are experiencing rapid growth due to shifts in technology, demographics, and regulation. The most in-demand and emerging areas of law include:

- Cybersecurity
- Cannabis
- Labor
- Elder law
- Energy
- IP
- Health
- Student loan law

These growth areas don't only affect new lawyers who are interested in transitioning to these eight fields. They also impact more experienced legal professionals whose current area of practice overlaps with these emerging areas of law. For example, employment lawyers need to stay up to date on regulatory changes and laws related to labor law. The same goes for health lawyers and insurance lawyers.

At the same time, the practice of law is changing rapidly. Lawyers have become accustomed to hybrid and remote work, and emerging technologies like artificial intelligence are making a significant impact on the legal industry.

Thankfully, using cloud-based legal practice management software like Clio makes it easier than ever for lawyers to work more efficiently and automate routine tasks—no matter where they are.

Eager to learn more? Check out our free webinar: Watch How Law Firms Use Clio.

What types of lawyers are in demand?

Lawyers specializing in cybersecurity, intellectual property, health law, labor and employment, and cannabis law are in high demand. Emerging areas like elder law and student loan law are also growing rapidly due to societal and regulatory changes.

Emerging in-demand areas of law driven by technology

As technology advances, the need for legal laws and regulations to keep people safe will also continue to grow. New technological discoveries happen very quickly, sometimes outpacing the timeline it takes to create proper regulatory standards. The demand for lawyers in this field is high as this timeline and process evolve.

Artificial intelligence (AI)

Artificial intelligence is now embedded in everyday legal work, including research, drafting, document review, discovery, and law firm operations. As adoption grows, so does demand for legal guidance on how AI can be used responsibly and compliantly.

Today, AI law focuses less on speculation and more on practical risk and regulation, including:

- Lawyers' duties to understand and supervise AI tools
- Client confidentiality, data security, and privacy
- Accuracy, bias, and professional responsibility
- Disclosure and accountability for AI-assisted work

Governments and regulators are also introducing formal AI frameworks that govern how systems are trained, deployed, and audited, increasing the need for legal compliance and risk management support.

AI is creating new advisory and dispute work as well, including liability for AI-generated errors, ownership of AI-assisted work product, vendor contract disputes, and workplace issues tied to automation.

As AI becomes standard across legal and business operations, lawyers who understand both the technology and its legal implications will remain in high demand through 2026 and beyond.

Privacy and cybersecurity

Privacy and cybersecurity laws are complex and vary between states (e.g., CCPA laws). Lawyers in this field need to assess and audit current policies. Also, these lawyers reduce privacy and security risks to comply with applicable state and federal laws.

These laws also vary by industry, depending on who you're doing business with. A good privacy and cybersecurity lawyer needs to understand how certain policies such as GDPR (Europe), HIPAA (US healthcare), FDIC (banking), and more can apply to their clients.

Liability issues from smart technology

Smart technology—such as speakers, wearables, digital assistants, smart appliances and more, is increasingly prevalent in people's homes and work environments. These smart objects collect images, voice messages, and video recordings. Because of the data stored in these smart objects, some lawyers may opt to use this data as evidence in litigation or mediation cases.

Existing technology (like security cameras) can guide lawyers when presenting this type of evidence in court. But it's important to build expertise and verifiability of data collected by these new types of smart technology.

What are the most lucrative law fields?

The highest-paying legal fields typically include corporate law, intellectual property law, medical malpractice, tax law, and complex litigation. Lawyers in these areas often handle high-stakes matters for large clients, leading to substantial compensation.

Drones

Like other technology mentioned on this list, laws surrounding drones and their operations rapidly change as they overlap with IP, safety, and privacy laws. Each state has different laws on drones. But a few universal ones include drone registration requirements, and drones being in the line of sight of the operator at all times. Lawyers need to understand different drone laws at both the federal and state level while keeping up with any potential changes.

Intellectual Property (IP)

Intellectual property cases can get complex and challenging depending on the medium and parties involved. For example, Non-fungible tokens or NFTs have taken this complexity to the next level.

NFTs are a unit of data based on blockchain technology that's to record and track transactions and ownership of data. Typically, when a copyright owner sells their intellectual property to a third partner, the original owner doesn't benefit from the increased valuation of that property. However, with NFTs, specific programs allow the original owner to continually benefit as the intellectual property is resold.

Currently, there are no regulations surrounding NFTs. But as they run counter to current IP laws (with ownership, in particular, being a flexible term), lawyers need to better equip themselves with knowledge of how NFTs are sold, bought, and transferred.

Legal Engineers

As law firms increasingly adopt advanced technologies like AI and cloud-based software, a new role has emerged at the intersection of legal knowledge and technical expertise: the legal engineer.

Legal engineers apply process design and technology to improve how legal work gets done. Instead of offering legal advice, they help law firms automate workflows, implement new tools, and streamline operations—freeing up lawyers to focus on higher-value tasks. Their work includes building document automation templates, integrating legal tech platforms, and optimizing processes like contract review and client intake.

Legal engineers are becoming essential to modern firms as client expectations shift toward faster, more affordable legal services. Whether working in private firms, in-house legal departments, or legaltech companies, legal engineers bring a systems-thinking approach that's reshaping the way legal services are delivered.

Want a deeper dive into what legal engineers do, where they work, and how they're transforming legal practice?Check out our full blog on legal engineers.

Labor law

Labor law mediates the rights and responsibilities between workers, unions, employers, and government authorities. Another key attribute of labor laws—both federal and state governments set these laws. However, all state-level regulations must comply with the federal-wide National Labor Relations Act.

Unions usually hire labor attorneys themselves, or through corporations that hire unionized employees. Although labor law is often confused with employment law, the key difference is that labor law always involves unions and unionized employees.

With the demand for better pay, healthier working conditions, and more employee protections, labor law is an emerging area of law that will only continue to grow.

Elder law

Elder law focuses on the needs of older adults, including but not limited to issues relating to retirement, long-term care planning, healthcare, guardianship, and financial and estate planning.

This particular area of law is unique as elder lawyers are more involved in the client's day-to-day affairs—such as the actual care of seniors—and handling important legal matters like drafting wills. As a result of these ongoing, long-term client relationships, this area of law requires a high level of empathy and patience to address the sensitive physical and emotional needs of the elderly.

Elder law will keep developing and seeing demand for new lawyers as more and more adults reach retirement age.

Which niche areas of law are in high demand?

Beyond the more traditional legal specialties like corporate or criminal law, several niche areas are rapidly gaining traction due to evolving societal, economic, and regulatory landscapes. Fields such as cannabis law, driven by changing legalization policies, are seeing increased demand. Likewise, student loan law is becoming more relevant as borrowers seek guidance amid shifting repayment programs and forgiveness policies. Health law is also on the rise, particularly with growing complexities around healthcare compliance, telemedicine, and patient rights.

Environmental law

Environmental law deals with laws and regulations around sustainability, air and water quality, hazardous wastes, agriculture, and biodiversity. This emerging area of law is broad and can require lawyers to act as advisors, compliance consultants, policy analysts, risk assessors, and plaintiffs in court.

Climate change has highlighted the need for urgent action on sustainable development and environmental protection. As we try to combat and minimize the impacts of global warming, the need for environmental lawyers will only continue to grow.

Thinking about becoming an environmental lawyer? Check out our post on environmental lawyer education requirements.

Health law

Health law is one of the emerging areas of law associated with the operation, provision, and delivery of health care services. Lawyers who work in health law advocate for high-quality patient care, promote better access to care, work to reduce healthcare costs, and protect consumers as they look for insurance and other types of coverage.

This emerging area of law has seen a surge in demand because of the 2020 pandemic and shows no signs of slowing down. With this heightened importance on health and hygiene, more people will be seeking legal advice and guidance on obtaining more affordable and accessible healthcare.

Cannabis law

Cannabis law involves navigating changing policies around the legalization of marijuana. This area of law is nuanced and requires a thorough understanding of policy timelines. While marijuana was federally decriminalized in December 2020 and is currently legal in many states, federal law still classifies it as an illegal substance.

With marijuana recently reclassified as a less dangerous drug, we're significantly significant shifts in policy—along with federal protections for financial institutions that provide services to state-legal cannabis businesses.

Cannabis law is a quickly emerging area of law that will continue to grow. As more businesses receive licenses to sell cannabis, more patients will get better access to medicinal marijuana. Also, other federally regulated bodies will provide more financial services, such as loans and insurance to cannabis-related businesses.

Energy law

Energy law includes the use, taxation, legal provision, and regulation of renewable and non-renewable energy. This emerging area of law is complex. Most energy lawyers act as in-house counsel for corporations to help clients stay compliant with current energy laws and regulations. They also often help with litigation and formal hearings if compliance issues arise with agreements relating to energy harvesting, production, and use.

The Department of Energy regulates federal energy laws, which can change quickly. The ability to learn and quickly adjust and audit current company policies is a must-have skill for this field. Also, the Department of Energy employs energy lawyers who can influence public policy and international relations.

Climate change policies directly affect this emerging area of law. The demand for energy lawyers will continue to surge as innovations in alternative energy continue to move forward.

Student loan law

Chances are, if you're an attorney, you're not surprised to hear this is a growing area of law. With the student loan crisis continuing to climb, the demand for legal professionals with related expertise has never been higher.

So, what is a student loan lawyer? Attorneys specializing in student loans have advanced knowledge associated with these specific kinds of loans. More specifically, they understand the ins and outs of associated interest rates, how to transition loan recipients into more affordable repayment plans, and more.

Law practice industry trends in 2026 and beyond

There currently are more than 1.37 million lawyers in the US, with job growth projected to increase up to 4% between 2024 and 2034 (about as fast as the average for all occupations). As the emerging areas of law grow, the need for lawyers practicing in these specialized fields will also grow.

Prioritize clients to survive and ultimately succeed

No matter what area of law you practice, every lawyer needs to be deeply empathetic towards clients and their needs. Clients are often confused and nervous when dealing with something they're unfamiliar with.

They'll count on you to be the expert. Lawyers like yourself need to lead changes and innovation in your practice. Think about "What will this mean for my client?". Keeping your clients' needs top of mind will ensure that you're successful no matter how the legal industry changes and evolves.

Find the fit between product and market

Before you dive into a new practice area, do your research and understand what clients are looking for. One of the biggest mistakes you can make is offering a service that isn't necessary or will quickly become obsolete. For example, offering advisory and consulting services on the legalization of marijuana to dispensaries in Oregon, since most dispensaries are already well-established and understand the industry.

The future of law firms will be defined by technology

Earlier, we talked about how technology is reshaping certain types of law. But it's also changing how law firms operate. Our *2024 Legal Trends Report* found that law firms have been steadily increasing their technology investments, with software spending growing by an average of 20% annually since 2012.

It's easy to see why: solutions like Clio practice management software streamline client intake, invoicing, building, document storage, and more. These advancements help lawyers spend less time on non-billable tasks by automating manual processes and

optimizing workflows.

Our report also found that firms with above-average productivity—those billing more than the industry average of 33% of their workday—tend to invest more in technology. These firms spend 12% more on software, proving a clear link between tech adoption and financial success.

Final thoughts on the emerging areas of law

As the legal industry continues to evolve and change, lawyers need to stay updated with new emerging areas of law. Keeping up with the latest trends in the legal industry may seem daunting for lawyers.

However, innovation never happens in a vacuum. These eight practice areas will continue to grow, build upon, and branch off. Lawyers need to understand the basics and foundations of how social, political, technological, and environmental factors can affect the law. By also keeping up with changing regulations, lawyers can adapt to any situation.

Lawyers can also easily stay up to speed by continuously educating themselves through industry reports, ABA resources, and networking with their peers.

Frequently asked questions

What area of law is most in demand?

The main areas of law with the highest demand are: cybersecurity, cannabis, labor, elder law, energy, IP, and health law. And this demand doesn't only impact new lawyers looking to transition—it also impacts more experienced lawyers whose current area of practice overlaps with these emerging areas.

About Clio

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