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Headcount declined sharply in New York, Atlanta and Philadelphia

Leigh Jones
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A look at attorney headcounts in major U.S. cities reveals big declines in New York, Atlanta and Philadelphia, according to the NLJ 250, *The National Law Journal's* annual survey of the nation's largest law firms which was released Monday.

New York lost 13.3% of its attorneys working at big firms, the results of 32nd yearly ranking show. Philadelphia's headcount plunged by 9.6%, and Atlanta's totals shrank by 9.4%.

The overall decrease among all NLJ 250 firms was 4%, the biggest loss since *The National Law Journal* began compiling headcount data in 1978, and only the third time that the totals among firms had dropped.

The lower numbers in New York largely were attributable to firms that closed during the survey period, which was Oct. 1, 2008, to Sept. 30, 2009. Closed firms that had their largest or principal office in New York included [Thelen and Thacher Proffitt & Wood](#). In addition, [McKee Nelson](#) was absorbed by [Bingham McCutchen](#). Irrespective of the closed firms, New York firms that survived 2009 were down by 6.6%, compared with 2008.

The [demise of 298-attorney WolfBlock](#) contributed to Philadelphia's losses, as did [Morgan, Lewis & Bockius' decline](#) by 198 attorneys. Even without the failure of WolfBlock, Philadelphia firms showed a backslide of 5.6%

Atlanta said goodbye to 195-attorney Powell Goldstein this year. At the same time, Alston & Bird shed 105 lawyers. Of the nine Atlanta law firms on the NLJ 250, two added attorneys: Fisher & Phillips increased its numbers by 23 to 229 attorneys, and McKenna Long & Aldridge gained three attorneys.

Dallas lost 5.9% of the lawyers working at its biggest firms, while Houston sent packing 5.4% of its attorneys. Boston's headcount waned by 5.2%, Phoenix's totals fell by 4.8%, and Chicago dumped 4.1% of its lawyers.

In California, San Francisco's numbers dropped by 3.9% and Los Angeles sank by 2.3%. Washington, D.C., bolstered by Covington & Burling's addition of 102 lawyers, dipped by just 1.5%. Minneapolis basically held steady with a 0.6% loss.

The results are based on the location of the firms' largest or principal office.



Leigh Jones can be contacted at ljones@alm.com.

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Headcount Declined Sharply in New York, Atlanta and Philadelphia

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Drop Zone

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The NLJ 250

Our annual ranking of the nation's largest law firms.