In 2009, U.S. government employment grew by more than 82,000 employees, a huge increase. That growth trend appears to be continuing in 2010.

No organization can provide a precise number for the attorney population of the U.S. government—neither the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) nor the Bureau of Labor Statistics have an exact figure. This information gap is largely due to the fact that attorneys occupy numerous federal law-related positions that do not carry the title “attorney.” The best estimate is that there are more than 40,000 attorneys currently working for the federal establishment in “mainstream” legal positions with the job title “attorney.” They work primarily in offices of general counsel, offices of chief counsel, other predominantly legal offices, and in operational, program, and administrative support offices.

Approximately 11,000—or just over 25 percent—of the federal attorney workforce is in the Department of Justice. The Justice Department is far and away the largest legal employer in the U.S. government. Other federal organizations with a high concentration of attorneys include the following:
Chapter 1

Agency Approximate # Attorneys
Department of Treasury 2,000+
Securities and Exchange Commission 1,000+
Department of Commerce 690
Federal Communications Commission 400+
Department of Labor 380
Environmental Protection Agency 350
Department of State 325
Department of Transportation 325
Federal Trade Commission 315
Department of Veterans Affairs 290
Department of Defense 280*

*These are civilian positions. The number does not include 6,000-plus military lawyers who work in the Judge Advocate Generals' Corps of the Armed Services.

In addition to the 40,000-plus mainstream government lawyers, there are a very large number of attorneys who work in one of the more than 150 law-related jobs in the government. Again, no one has undertaken a census of law-related government professionals. The following are some educated guesses as to the federal law-related job titles that employ the largest number of attorneys.

Job Title(s) # Employees Estimated # Attorneys
Contract administrator 37,000 7,500
Compliance specialist 14,500 4,500
Employee/labor relations specialist 4,000 800
Claims administrator 4,000 400
Environmental protection specialist 3,715 550
Hearings/appeals officer 2,200 2,000
Patent examiner 2,000 1,300
Administrative law judge 1,500 1,500
Regulatory analyst 1,500 750
Legal researcher 1,500 1,450
Legislative affairs specialist/analyst 1,000 600
The number of federal law-related jobs is growing steadily and attorneys are increasingly sought after by federal employers for a number of different positions. The reasons for this are the utility of legal training and legal analysis for these positions, which give lawyers a huge advantage over non-lawyers. Moreover, the track record of attorneys holding such positions is very impressive. Federal employers know that they will be getting hard workers who can move up the learning curve very quickly and are both alert and analytical, with strong organizational skills and good judgment.

In addition to the law-related job titles listed above, some of the other more interesting law-related positions include:

- analyst in social legislation
- asylum officer
- bankruptcy analyst
- civil rights investigator
- competition advocate
- ethics program specialist
- export control specialist
- FBI special agent
- foreign commercial service officer
- foreign law specialist
- foreign service officer
- futures trading investigator
- GAO evaluator (tax)
- intelligence research specialist
- land law examiner
- licensing specialist
- mediator
- pension law specialist
- privacy officer
- realty specialist
- scientific attorney investigator
- securities transaction analyst
- tax law specialist
- technical publications writer/editor (legal)
- technology transfer officer

Many of these positions are discussed in Part VIII.