

ABOVE THE LAW

2021 In-House Compensation Survey Report

How much do corporate counsel really make? How do their salaries compare to those of outside counsel? What about raises and bonuses? Is company stock a significant part of an in-house lawyer's compensation package?

If you're a lawyer in a corporate legal department looking to benchmark your pay or a law firm attorney thinking of transitioning in-house, you want a sense of the compensation universe.

Unlike the world of Biglaw, where lockstep salaries and hours-based bonuses are both common and relatively transparent (or at least not that hard to find), uncovering how much in-house lawyers make can be a trickier prospect.

To address this information gap, Above the Law has conducted a series of surveys of in-house counsel over the last several years. This report highlights the results of the latest 2021 ATL In-House Compensation Survey.

More than 1,000 in-house attorneys took part in this year's survey, in which they were asked to provide the following information:

- year of law school graduation
- whether or not they work in a big city (which can affect compensation)
- company size (including six categories, from "Small Private Company" to "Fortune 250")
- type of work they engage in (corporate, employment, litigation, etc.)
- base pay
- target bonus (as a percentage of base pay)
- actual bonus received for the last few years
- average raise received over the last few years
- what, if any, stock compensation they receive (as a percentage of base pay)

Our survey respondents work at companies of varying size and stature, from small companies with fewer than 100 employees to businesses featured in the Fortune 500. The majority work in large cities. Many have decades of

experience while others are more recent graduates; more than half of survey participants graduated law school between 2007 and 2017.

Compared with the results of ATL's last In-House Compensation Survey, conducted in 2017, corporate counsel are, on the whole, making more money. If the ceiling remains hard to reach—salaries in excess of \$400,000 are still relatively few and far between—the floor has been raised. This year, only a handful of respondents said they made less than \$100,000, whereas four years ago more than a quarter of counsel surveyed reported base salaries below \$100,000. By contrast, two-thirds of attorneys said their base is at least \$200,000 in 2021.

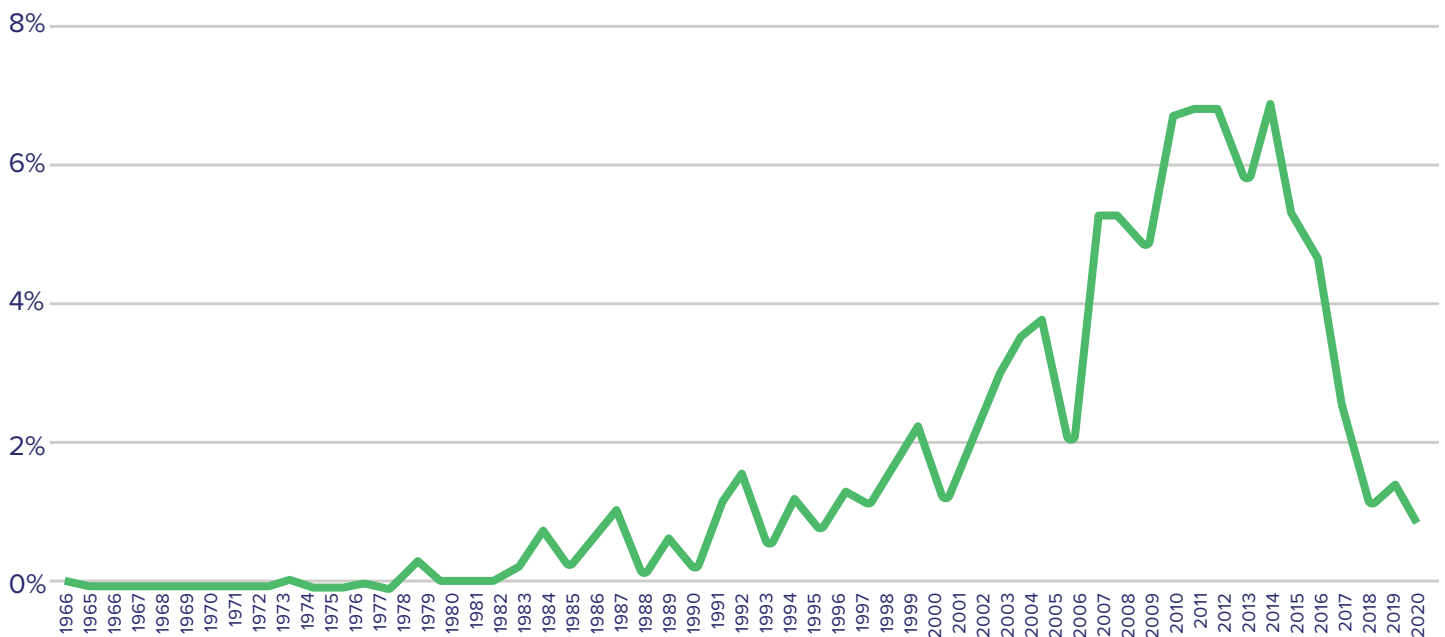
As one might expect, lawyers at larger companies typically earn a higher salary, and bonuses and stock are more significant components of their compensation packages. However, for lawyers at companies of all sizes, annual raises are comparatively—in relation to law firms—low. Of course, bonuses and company stock, where available, boost the total package. But relatively meager annual increases and bonuses that are determined by base salary underscore the importance of that starting figure.

Our survey suggests that when joining an in-house team, you should arm yourself with all the available information in negotiating a deal, because you may find yourself locked in. For those seeking insights into the compensation practices across corporate legal departments, this report will prove a useful resource.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

1,000+ total respondents

LAW SCHOOL GRADUATION YEAR



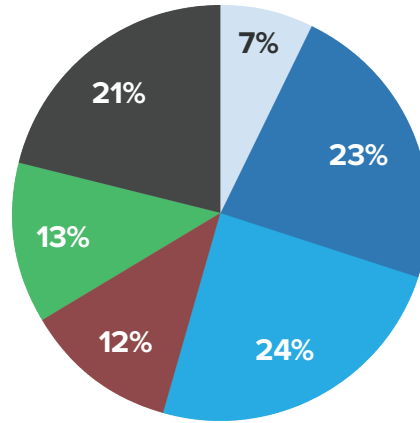
Survey respondents represent a wide range of experience, including some attorneys who graduated law school more than 30 years ago as well as a handful who just finished law school last year. Nearly **60%** of respondents graduated between 2007 and 2017.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

MARKET SIZE

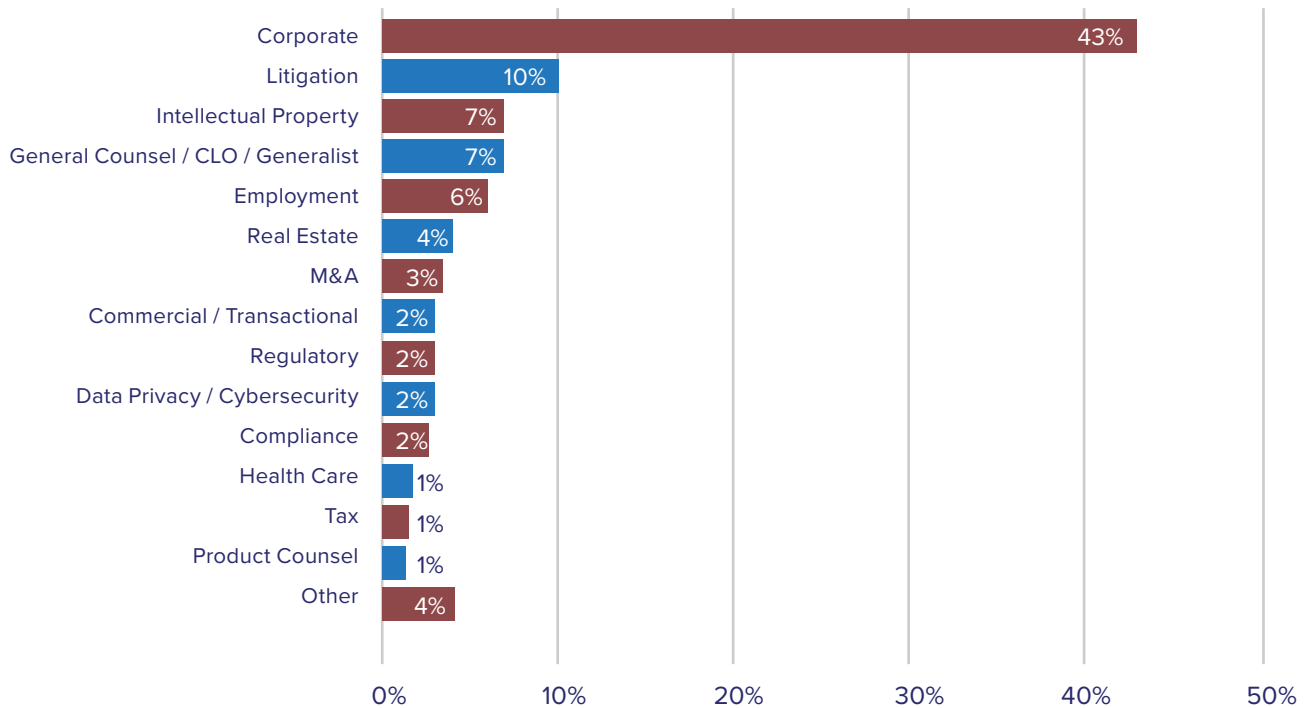
75%
of respondents
practice in
a city of
1 million+

COMPANY SIZE



- Small private (fewer than 100 employees)
- Medium-sized private (100-1000 employees)
- Large private (more than 1000 employees)
- Fortune 1000
- Fortune 500
- Fortune 250

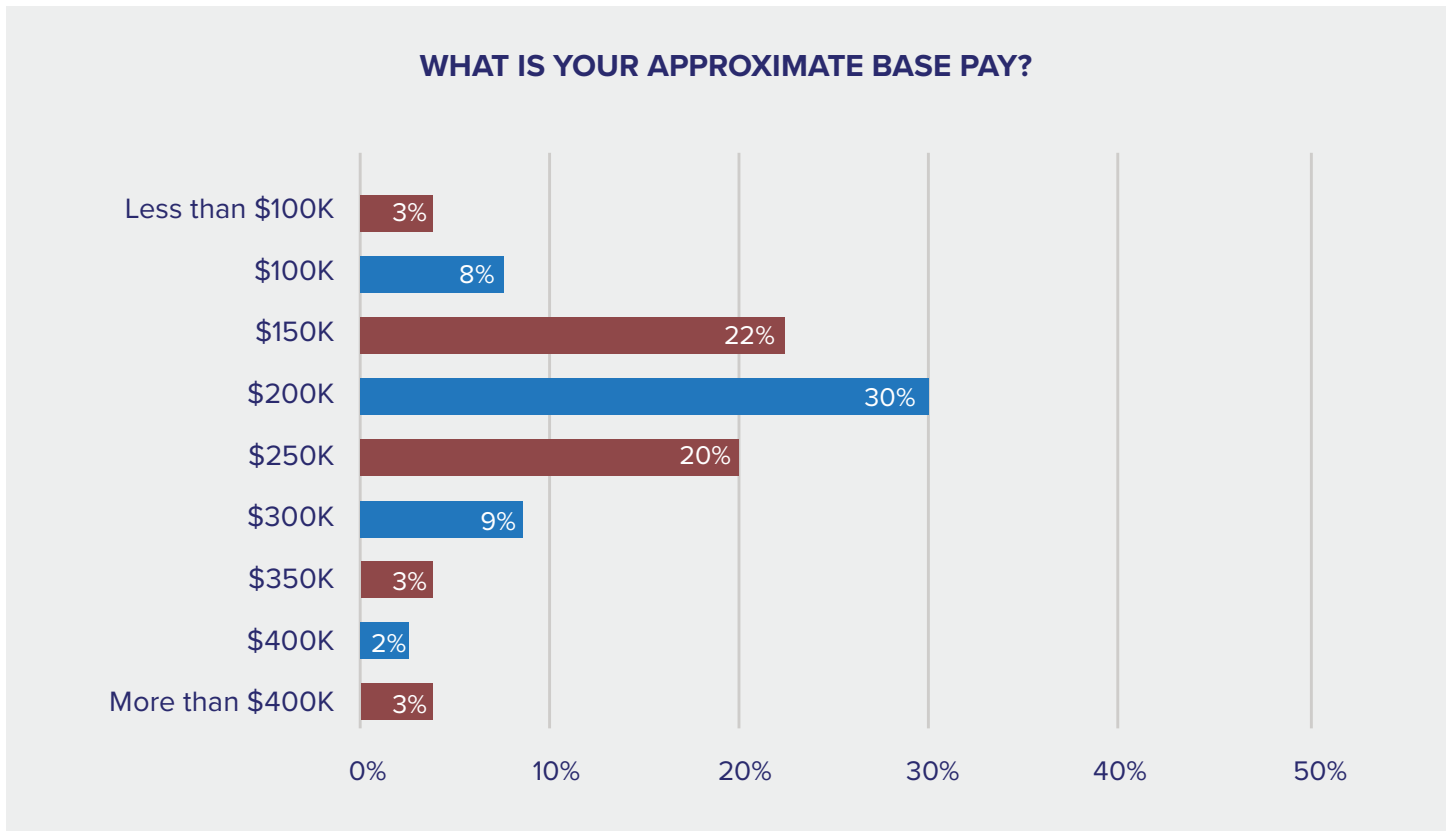
AREA OF PRACTICE



“OTHER” RESPONSES INCLUDED

- Antitrust
- Energy
- Technology
- Biotech
- Entertainment/
Media
- Education

SURVEY FINDINGS



89% of all respondents reported earning **\$150,000 or more** in base pay.

The largest cohort of respondents, at **30%**, reported that their approximate base pay is **\$200,000**.

67% reported earning **\$200,000 or more**.

Only **11%** reported earning **\$100,000 or less**.

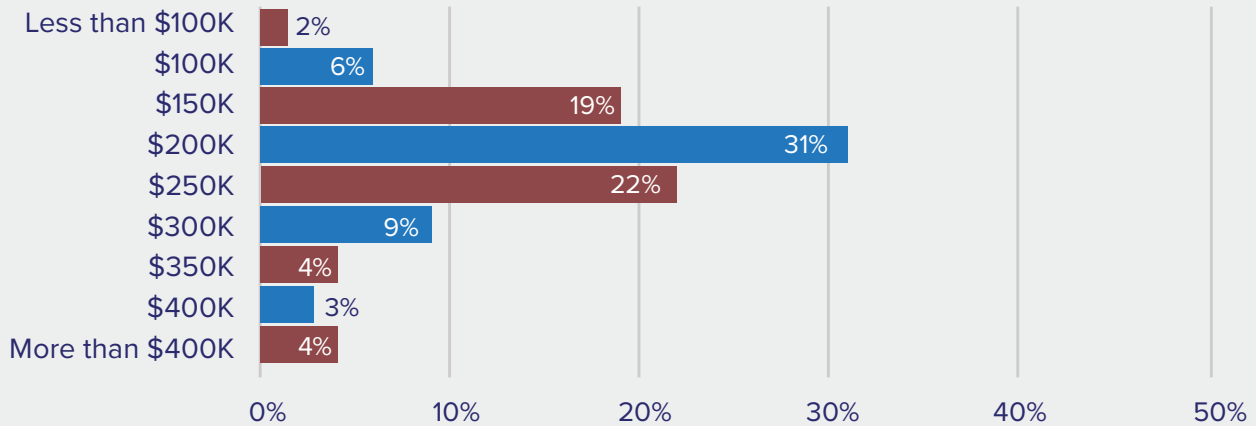
Even fewer (less than **6%**) reported a base of **\$400,000 or more**.

These results show notable increases over the 2017 survey. In 2017, the largest group of in-house counsel (**30%**) reported base salaries of approximately **\$150,000**; four years later, the largest group is making **\$200,000**.

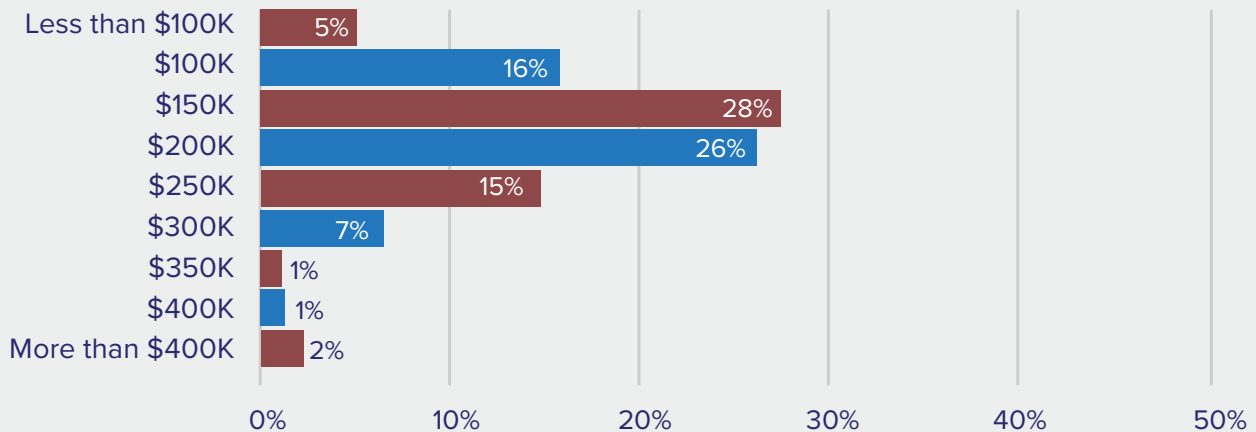
In addition, just **3%** of respondents this year reported that their base pay was **less than \$100,000**. In 2017, the **under \$100K** cohort represented **14%** of the survey pool.

APPROXIMATE BASE PAY BY MARKET SIZE

APPROXIMATE BASE PAY IN CITIES OF ONE MILLION+



APPROXIMATE BASE PAY IN CITIES OF LESS THAN ONE MILLION



Unsurprisingly, corporate counsel working in larger markets are generally likely to make more money than those in smaller markets.

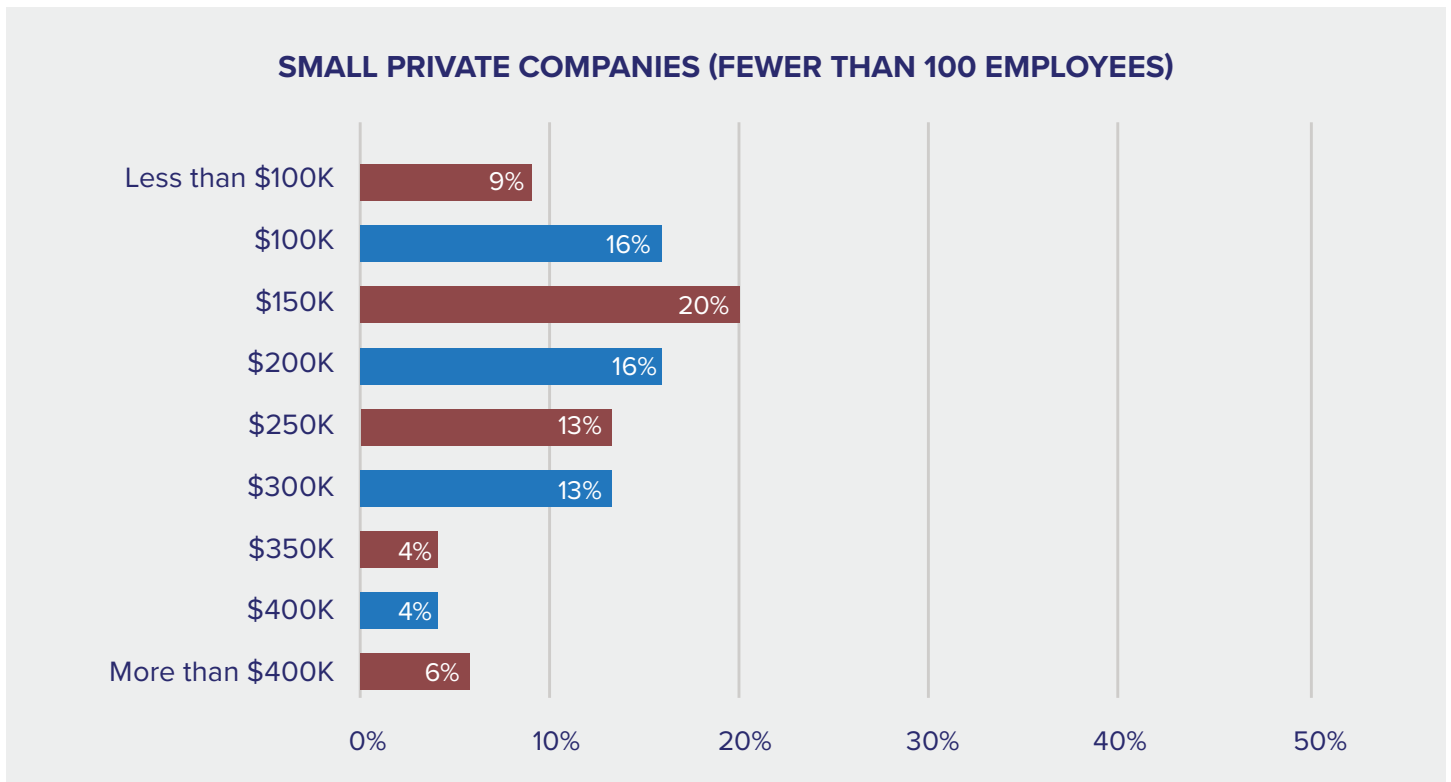
92% of respondents in cities of one million or more reported base pay of **\$150,000 or higher**, compared to **80%** of respondents in smaller cities.

Both figures represent notable increases over 2017, when **81%** of respondents in major cities and **61%** of respondents in smaller markets reported base pay of at least **\$150,000**.

At the high end of the spectrum, **7%** of respondents in large cities this year reported receiving at least **\$400,000** in base pay, while **less than 3%** of in-house counsel in smaller cities did.

Approximately **20%** of respondents in cities of less than one million earn salaries of **\$100,000** or less, compared to **8%** of the respondents in bigger cities.

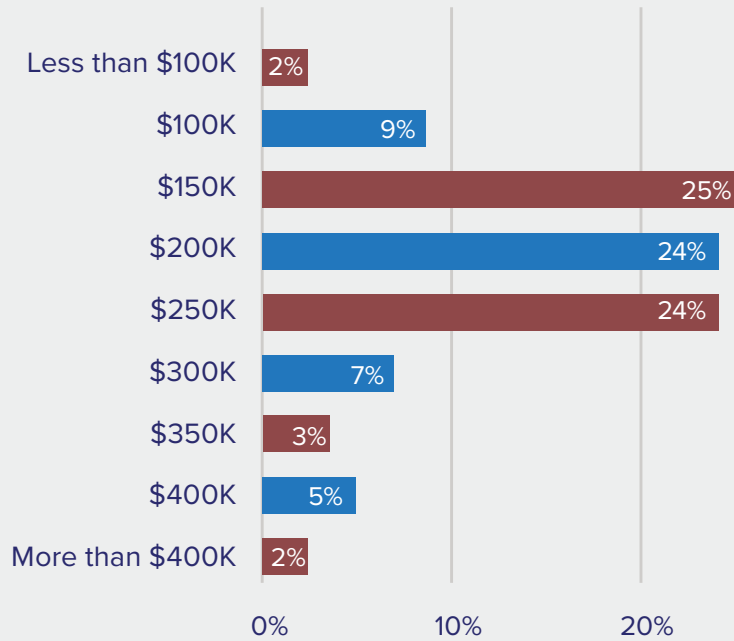
APPROXIMATE BASE PAY BY COMPANY SIZE



In 2017, the largest group of respondents (**27%**) at small private companies reported making **less than \$100,000**. This year, just **9%** of in-house counsel at small companies said they earn less than \$100,000 in base pay. The largest group of respondents (**20%**) now reports making **\$150,000**.

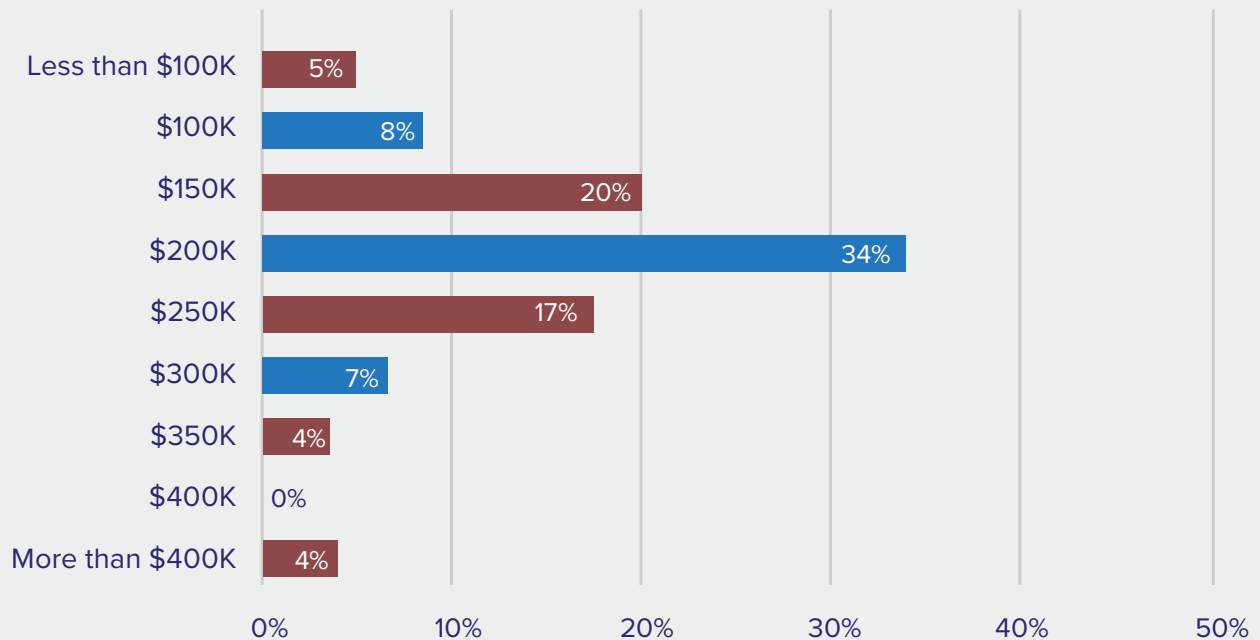
Additionally, whereas none of the counsel at small companies reported making **over \$400,000** in our previous survey, this year, almost **6%** of them fall in this salary range.

MEDIUM-SIZED PRIVATE (BETWEEN 100 AND 1000 EMPLOYEES)



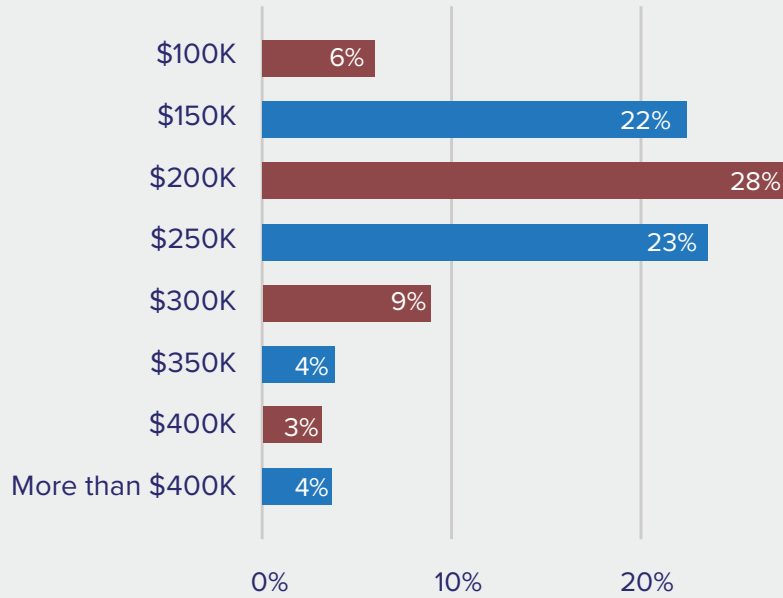
Nearly three-fourths of counsel at medium-sized private companies reported base pay somewhere in the range of **\$150,000 to \$250,000**.

LARGE PRIVATE (1000+ EMPLOYEES)



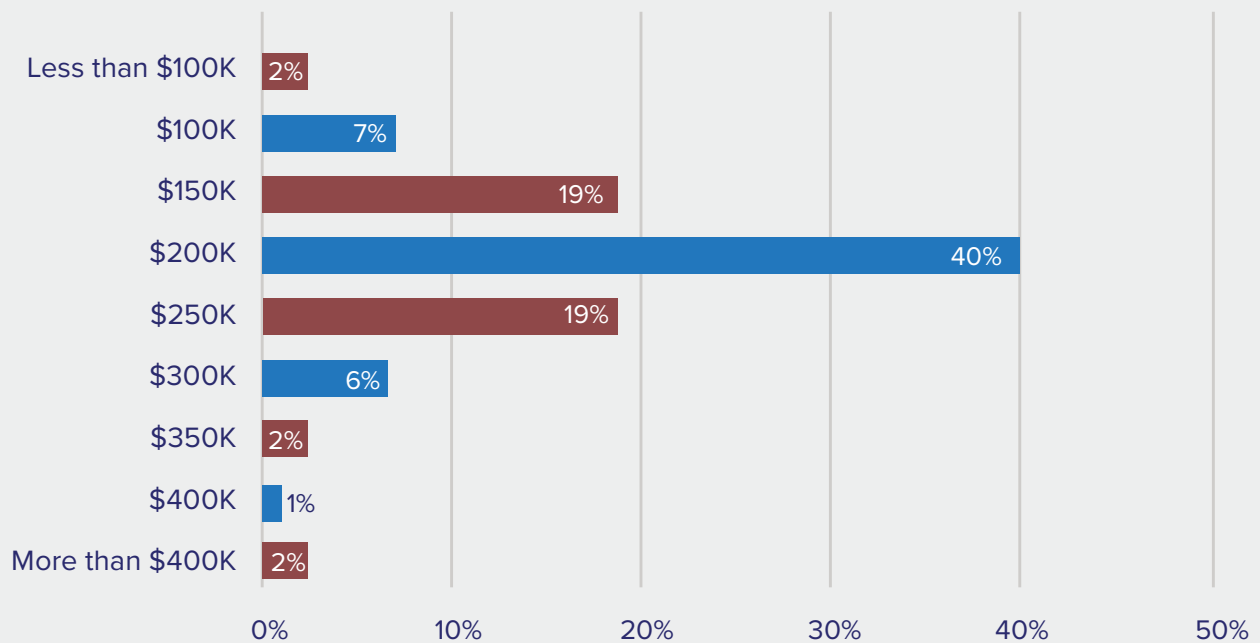
Among private companies with **1,000+** employees, the largest cohort of respondents, at **34%**, reported making **\$200,000** in 2021. This is a change from 2017, when the most commonly reported salary was **\$150,000** and **less than 20%** of respondents reported salaries of **\$200,000**.

FORTUNE 1000

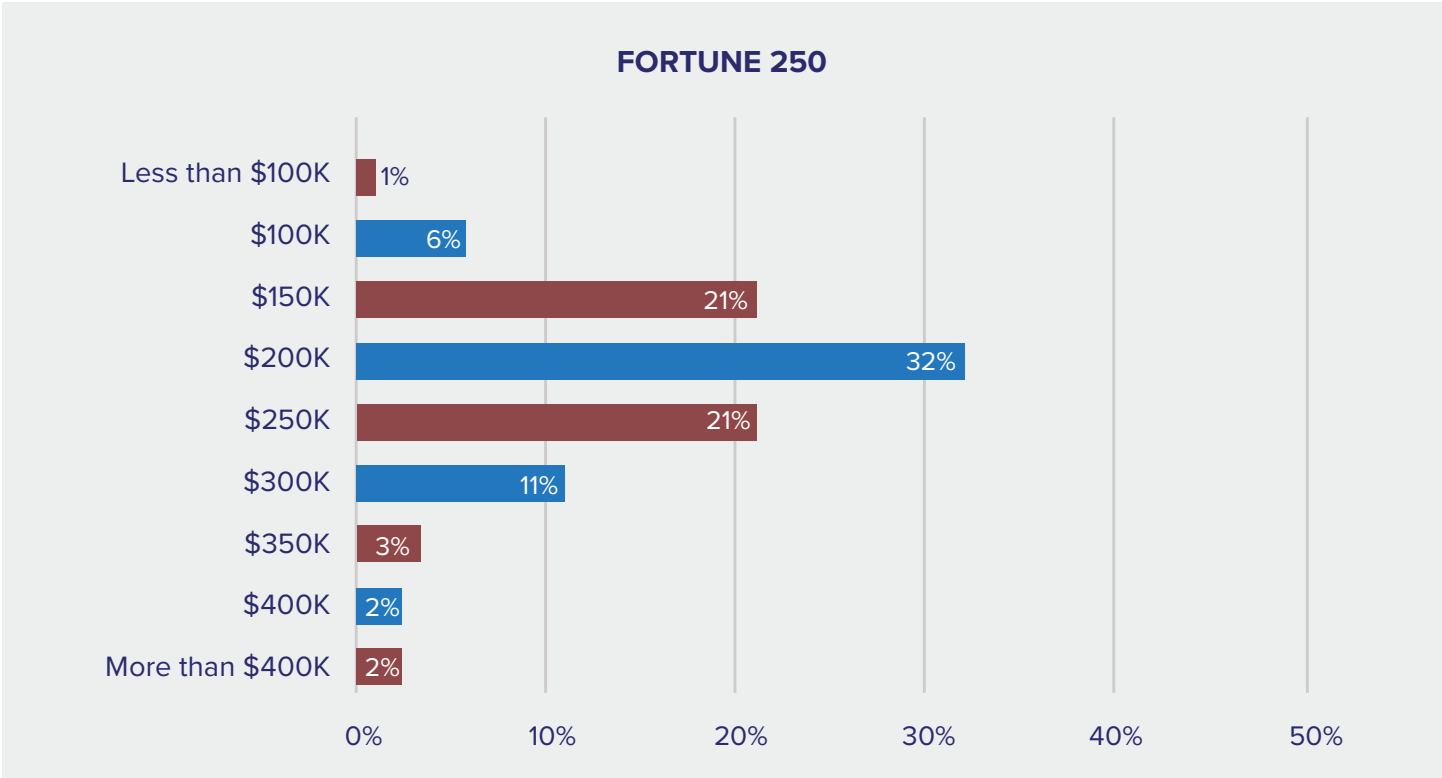


In 2017, about **13%** of respondents at Fortune 1000 companies reported their approximate base pay as less than **\$100,000**. Notably, none of the Fortune 1000 respondents in 2021 reported making less than **\$100,000**.

FORTUNE 500



More than **40%** of respondents at Fortune 500 companies in 2021 reported their approximate base pay to be **\$200,000**. This represents a shift from 2017, when **\$150,000** was the most commonly reported salary.

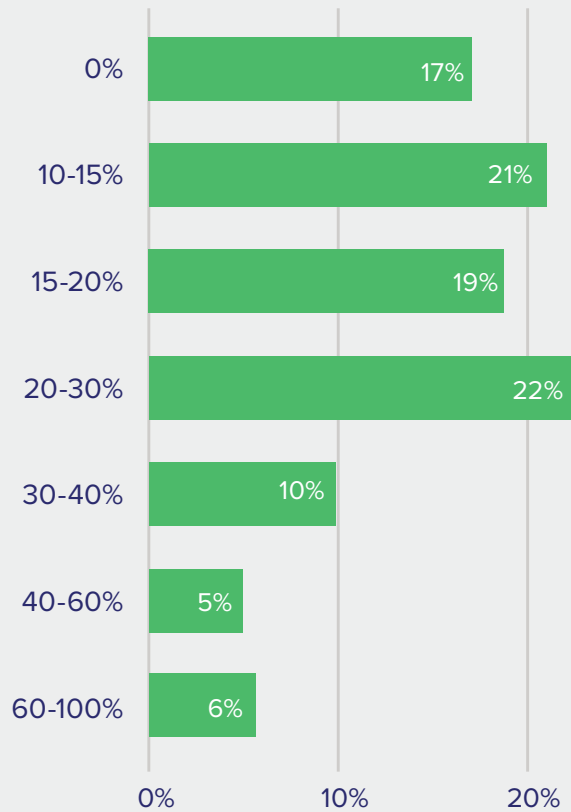


Similar to our 2017 findings, **92%** of in-house counsel at Fortune 250 companies reported base pay of **\$150,000 or higher**.

Almost **40%** of respondents at Fortune 250 companies reported annual base pay of **\$250,000 or more**.

While high salaries may still be more common among larger companies, base pay has increased across the board. In 2017, only **50%** of respondents at small companies and **62%** at medium-sized companies earned base salaries of **at least \$150,000**. In 2021, **76%** of respondents at small companies and **89%** at medium companies reported salaries of **\$150,000 or more**.

WHAT IS YOUR TARGET BONUS (AS A PERCENTAGE OF BASE PAY)?

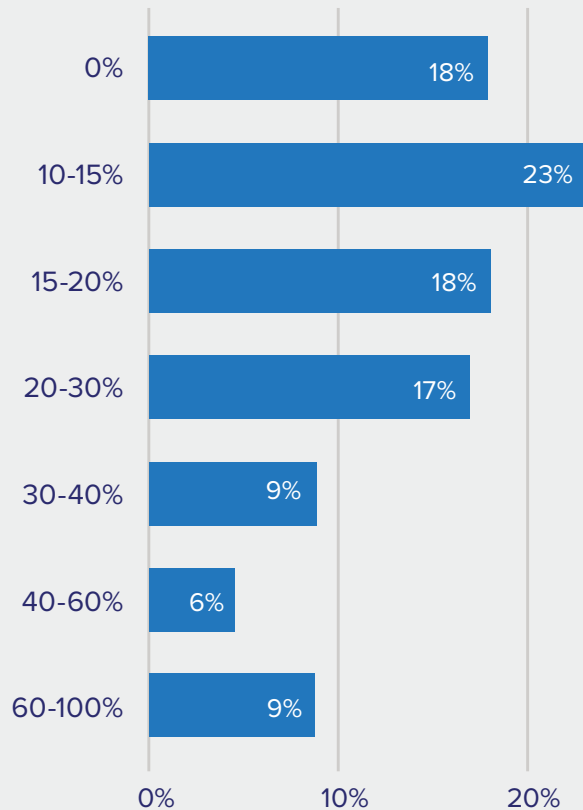


Most respondents reported that their target bonuses are **no more than 30%** of their base pay. The most common ranges were between **20 and 30%** (22% of respondents) and from **10 to 15%** (21% of respondents).

In 2017, **19%** of respondents reported no target bonus at all. This number dropped slightly in 2021, to **17%**.

62% of respondents reported having bonus targets of **between 10 and 30%** this year, an increase of almost **10 percentage points** since 2017.

IN WHAT APPROXIMATE RANGE HAS YOUR ACTUAL BONUS BEEN IN THE PAST FEW YEARS?



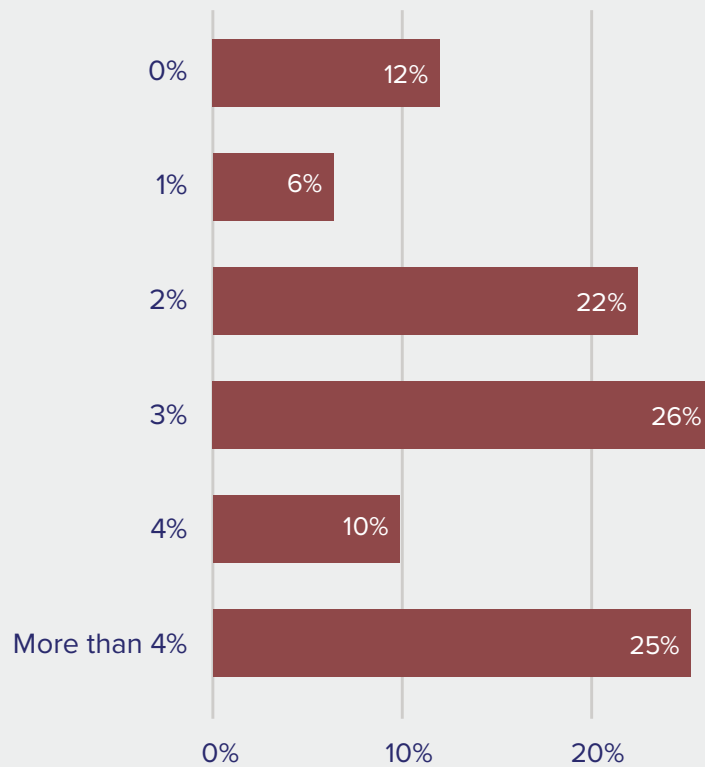
The largest group of respondents (**23%**) reported that their actual bonus has been in the **10-15%** range in the past few years.

Those at either the low end (**10-15%**) or the high end (**60-100%**) of the scale most commonly ended up with actual bonuses in line with their targets.

More than half of lawyers aiming for bonuses between **15% to 60%** of their base pay ended up close to their goal. The others more often came in below target than above.

The vast majority of respondents with zero bonus targets (**93%**) reported getting exactly that: zero. But a handful received something extra, including one lucky lawyer whose bonuses have been in the **60-100%** range.

WHAT IS THE AVERAGE RAISE YOU'VE RECEIVED OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS?

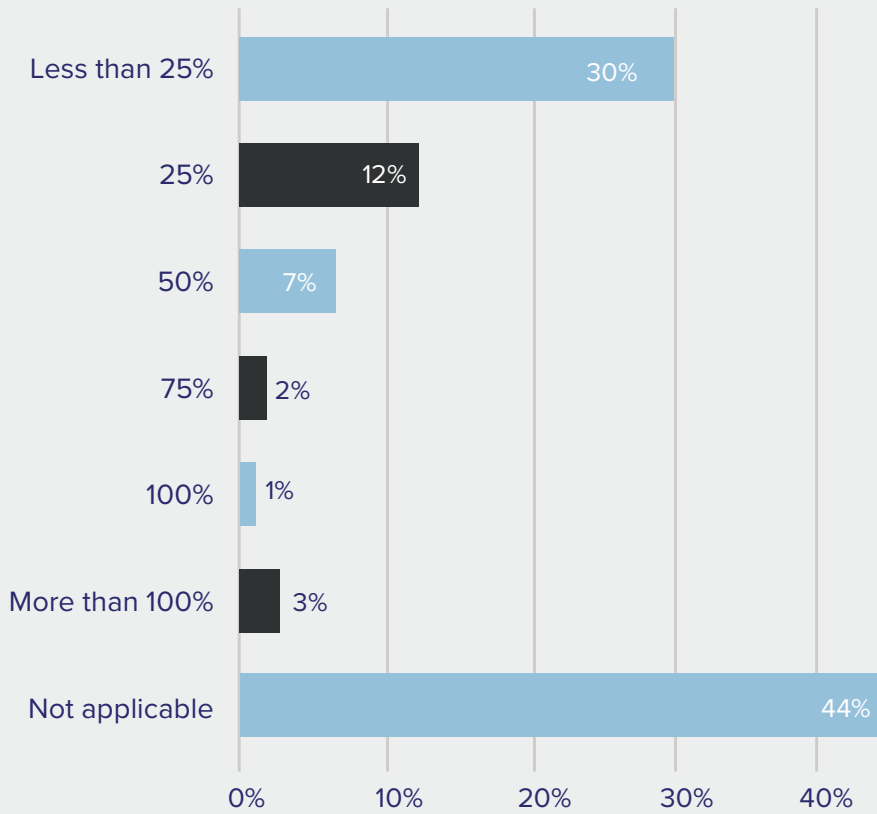


While raises run the gamut from zero to more than **4%**, the largest cohort of respondents (**26%**) reported that their raises have averaged 3% over the past few years.

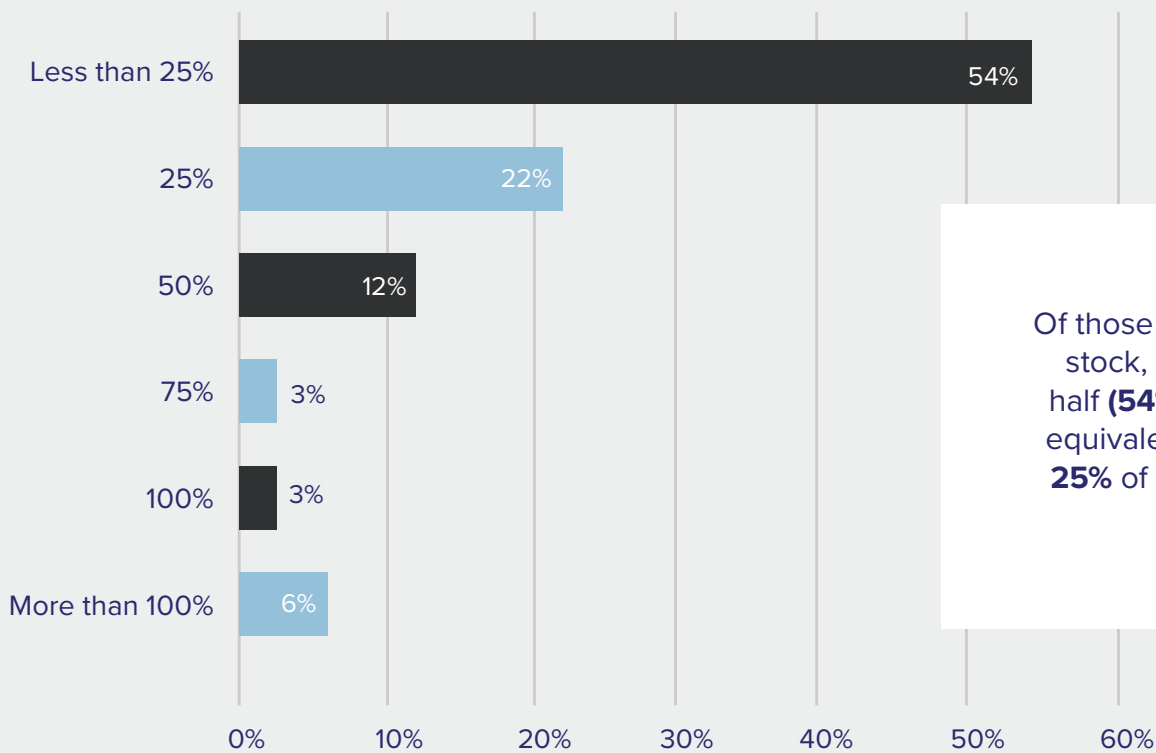
Approximately one-fourth (**25%**) of respondents received raises of more than **4%**—a significant increase from the **15%** reported four years ago.

Consistent with our findings in 2017, generous raises are slightly more common at private companies: **28%** of in-house counsel at private companies reported average raises above **4%**, whereas only **21%** of those at Fortune 250-1000 companies could say the same.

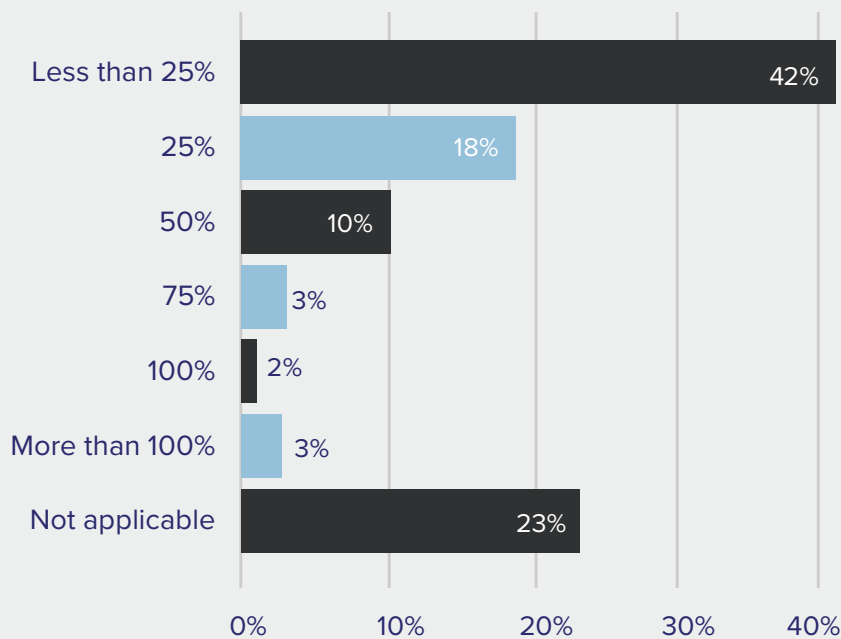
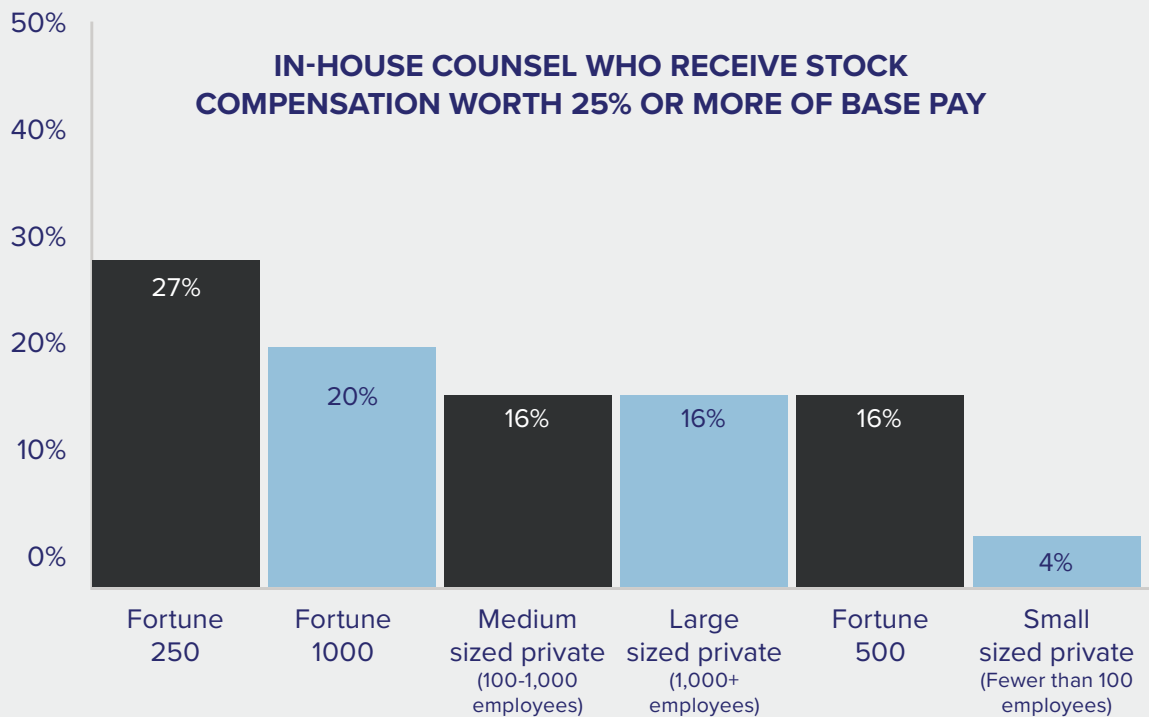
WHAT IS YOUR STOCK COMPENSATION AS A PERCENTAGE OF YOUR BASE PAY?



More than half (**56%**) of in-house counsel reported receiving some stock compensation as a percentage of base pay.



Of those who do receive stock, for more than half (**54%**), the stock is equivalent to **less than 25%** of their base pay.



Among the in-house counsel who receive stock worth at least **25%** of their base pay, more than a quarter (**27%**) work at Fortune 250 companies.

18% of in-house counsel at the largest corporations (Fortune 250 and larger) receive stock worth **50% or more** of their base pay.