

NYC Brick & Mortar: Smaller Partner, Associate Offices

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Law firms in New York have been shrinking the size of individual offices for both partners and associates over the past two years as part of a larger trend to take on smaller overall spaces. This is the third in a four-part series that looks at how law firms in New York are addressing the question of brick-and-mortar space.

Law360 (September 5, 2018, 10:48 AM EDT) -- Law firms in New York have been shrinking the size of individual offices for both partners and associates over the past two years as part of a larger trend to take on smaller overall spaces, and that change in lawyer office size has been more marked for partner offices, according to data recently compiled by Law360.



Average partner office size at [Nixon Peabody](#) fell from 220 to 160 square feet over the past two years, while the average associate office at the firm is now 160 square feet, down from 180 square feet two years ago. (Photo: Nixon Peabody)

The trend of law firms taking on new space with smaller lawyer offices comes as rents continue to rise in New York and attorneys spend more time working remotely. Annual office rents in Manhattan have remained above \$73 per square foot over the past year, and average rent in the first quarter of 2018 was right there at \$73.05 a square foot, according to a recent report from Colliers.

Law360 surveyed a range of law firms, both small firms and the largest firms in the country, for this series, and firms of all sizes participated.

According to responses from the 10 law firms that participated, average partner office size in New York fell from 193 square feet to 178 square feet between June 2016 and June 2018, while the average size of an associate's office ticked down slightly over the period, from 137 square feet to 133 square feet.

Partner Office Size Lower Than 2 Years Ago

Partner office size rose slightly from 2016 to 2017, hitting 197 square feet, before falling back to 178 square feet as of June 1, 2018.

That middle-year spike in partner office size, though, was due to [Abrams Fensterman Fensterman Eisman Formato Ferrara Wolf & Carone LLP](#) expanding its Brooklyn office from 1,500 square feet to a whopping 24,000 square feet over the year. With that new space, Abrams Fensterman pushed its average partner office size up from 120 square feet to 150 square feet. That outlier movement will be discussed in a subsequent article in this series.

As of June 1, 2018, the range of partner office sizes was between 150 square feet at Abrams Fensterman and 225 square feet at [Steptoe & Johnson LLP](#), according to the law firms that participated in Law360's survey.

[Arent Fox LLP](#) and Nixon Peabody LLP were part of the trend toward smaller partner offices. Arent Fox's average partner office was 248 square feet as of June 1, 2017, and that mark fell to 190 square feet as of June 1, 2018. In the case of Nixon Peabody, the figure fell from 220 square feet to 160 square feet over the period.

"The whole idea is, in the past, many attorneys, especially partners, would entertain clients in their

office. That's not the case anymore," said Joe Lynch of Nixon Peabody, who suggested that lawyers are doing more client meetings in common spaces. "The office space doesn't have to be as large."

[Saul Ewing Arnstein & Lehr LLP](#), on the other hand, entered the New York market recently, setting up a 6,569-square-foot office that has average partner offices of 160 square feet, and that new office space contributed to the overall downward movement of partner office sizes.

Of course, changes in partner office size largely occur when firms move to new spaces, and many law firms were in the same space over the course of the last two years, and thus their partner office sizes didn't change.

And two of the firms that participated in the survey had setups that don't square with the method Law360 used for tracking partner office size.

[Culhane Meadows PLLC](#) does not have individual offices for its lawyers. Attorneys at that firm, which has a presence in New York as well as a handful of other U.S. markets, either work from home or find other office space, on their own dime.

And while [Fenwick & West LLP](#) did not have an office in New York as of June 1, 2016, and later took 18,000 square feet of space, the firm's offices are reconfigurable, so it's difficult to track average lawyer office size, a representative told Law360.

Associate Office Size Ticks Down Slightly

The change in associate offices, in contrast to partner offices, has been constant over the past two years, falling from 137 to 136 to 133 square feet year by year during the period, according to the law firms that participated in the survey.

Nixon Peabody's new space came with smaller associate offices: 160 square feet as of June 1, 2018 versus 180 square feet a year earlier.

And despite the massive growth in overall office space on the part of Abrams Fensterman, average associate office size there actually fell, from 100 square feet two years ago to 90 square feet this year.

That firm has invested heavily in growing its footprint over the past two years, but still has had to

play a delicate balancing act as far as managing costs.

"Trying to accomplish [building] a comfortable environment ... and keeping your costs down is, was, and always will be a challenge," said Frank Carone of Abrams Fensterman.

Arent Fox LLP bucked the trend, though. When the firm took a smaller office at 1301 Avenue of the Americas, the new space actually had larger average offices for associates: 150 square feet versus 130 square feet at the former location at 1675 Broadway.

Meanwhile, Saul Ewing's new office in New York has average associate offices of 115 square feet, which contributed to the overall trend of smaller offices for associates.

"We wanted to get as many offices as we could," said Saul Ewing's Barry Levin, noting that not all lawyers in New York are in the office on a full-time basis. "It works very well in New York. We have lots of glass and lots of light."

This is the third in a four-part series of stories that looks at how law firms in New York are addressing the question of brick-and-mortar space. The [prior article](#) in the series looked at how law firms are taking less square footage per attorney.

--Editing by Pamela Wilkinson and Rebecca Flanagan.