

What are My Chances of Getting a Job in California If I Have Not Yet Taken the California Bar Exam but Plan to Soon?

Question: What are my chances of getting a job in California if I have not yet taken the California Bar exam but plan to soon?

Answer: While I cover the entire West Coast as a recruiter, and have specific expertise in the Pacific Northwest from having grown up in Portland and the Seattle area, the majority of my work is focused on markets in California simply because California is, by far, the largest legal market in this half of the country. Most major national and international firms have at least one California office in Los Angeles, San Francisco, the Silicon Valley, San Diego, Sacramento, or a combination thereof, in addition to the myriad boutique, small, and mid-sized local and regional firms that may be attractive options for attorneys seeking a California-based job. In other words, [there are a lot of potential legal employers, but the consequence of this is that there will be a lot of competition for every open position.](#)

[Due to the highly competitive nature of the California market, any discussion of a job search in California will have to deal with the California Bar exam.](#) Almost universally, any California firm or local office will prefer a candidate licensed to practice in California, and a substantial number of the firms here will not even consider a candidate for prospective employment until they have passed the California Bar.

Candidates cannot always choose the timing of their search or the reasons for making a move, whether it is because of family, the loss of a current job, etc., and it can be difficult to find time to study for and take the California bar (I studied for the California Bar on nights and weekends while working full-time as an Illinois-licensed attorney at a major international firm, and I certainly would not want to relive those couple months!). The California Bar is only given twice a year (February and July), and it can take a couple months for the results to be released, so long-term planning is essential if you are at all considering a move to California, or think it might be in the cards at some point within the next year or two.

As a candidate, [there are multiple potential stages you might be in regarding the California Bar exam](#), and as always, it is best to think of them from the perspective of a potential employer who is seeking to fill an immediate hiring need with an attorney who can handle the work from day one:

1) Planning to take the California Bar - if you are still planning to take the next available bar, you are months, if not a full year or more away, from being licensed to practice locally in California. Even if you have otherwise stellar credentials, you can see why this would make for a less-attractive candidate for a current hiring need.

2) Have taken the most recent California Bar with pass results pending - this is a better position to be in, especially if you are a decent test taker and are reasonably confident in your results. I typically mention to my candidates that California's pass rate is deceptively low, because California is much more lax in their standards regarding who may sit for the bar, and so for the purposes of a job search we can operate on the anticipation they will pass. From the hiring perspective, this shows you are serious about making a move to California and have not only planned, but taken a very concrete step towards becoming licensed. If a candidate's credentials are otherwise strong, this status can often suffice for a firm that requires its candidates to be California licensed, although we have seen many instances where a firm will hold off on extending a formal offer until the official bar results are in.

3) Have passed the California Bar, with admission pending - unless there is some potential issue that would

delay the normal character and fitness consideration, I will typically treat a candidate who has passed the California Bar exam the same for job search purposes as someone who is already licensed, and all but a very few law firms will too.

4) [California licensed](#) - the best possible position, although you will still obviously be competing against a field of other California-licensed attorneys who will likely have strong credentials.

See [Guidelines on Reciprocity](#) or "[Admission On Motion](#)" among the States as per American Bar Association for more information.

Put simply, if you are thinking of seeking employment in California, it is absolutely in your best interest to [register for, take, and pass the California Bar Exam as soon as you can](#). Doing so is no guarantee you will find a job, but it will significantly increase your chances.

Best of luck in your search!

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