

# How Important is it To Have Local Ties to an Area When You Are an Attorney Applying There?

**Summary:** I'm considering moving to a smaller market like Portland or Seattle. Do I need to have local ties to get into firms in these areas?

**Question:** *I have heard that for certain markets, firms won't even consider me if I don't have "local ties" - is this actually true?*

**Answer:** As any practicing attorney knows, the real answer is "it depends." Which it does. But the answer for particular markets has markedly changed within the past decade. Specifically, two of the major markets that I cover, and a region where I grew up and went to college (Portland and Seattle), used to be very, very difficult to break into if you weren't a long time local or had local family ties.

It wasn't anything against you as a candidate particularly. It was just that they were smaller markets that paid quite a bit less than their major market counterparts (even today, the Seattle market top salaries are, on average, about 20-30% lower than the other major West Coast markets like San Francisco, Silicon Valley, Los Angeles, Orange County, and San Diego, and Portland is typically about 10-15% below Seattle). Many candidates state at the outset that they are willing to take a lower salary to be in these locations, and then change their mind a year or two down the road and headed back to the major markets, leaving firms with a new hiring need all over again.

It wasn't anything against you as a candidate particularly. It was just that certain smaller markets where the weather eventually took a toll (my first year of college in the greater Seattle area, there were over 100 days of precipitation in a row), firms would find otherwise "committed" candidates looking to relocate back to bigger cities and/or warmer climes.

It has long been the case that smaller markets are a little bit wary, or have a little bit of a proverbial chip on their shoulder, when it comes to candidates relocating from larger markets, or candidates with top law school credentials that might get future interest from large firms in other markets. It's because they used to get burned, and any kind of turnover incurs no small amount of time, money, and effort in finding a replacement attorney to fill the role that the firm's clients require.

All of that being said, there has been a fairly dramatic shift in many markets within the past couple years, and I have personally seen a fairly dramatic shift in the Pacific Northwest markets to the extent that personal and family ties can be a deal breaker for interview and hiring decisions. Firms do still care about whether candidates have personal and/or family ties to the region, or at least whether candidates have familiarity and experience with the weather in the "tough" parts of the year. But compared to when Seattle and Portland were not as trendy and popular as they are now, it used to be the case that you would really have to sell your connections to and desire to live in those cities due to firms worrying about long-term retention. Now, Seattle and Portland have joined the ranks of other West Coast cities where the desirability of living there is generally assumed.

Seattle has seen its housing prices increase faster than any other city in the country for a near-record number of consecutive months, in the entire history of tracking U.S. housing prices. Portland also continues to grow and expand at a rapid pace. Firms are still concerned with whether a particular candidate is likely to stick around (that's simply business, and something all firms do as a part of their interview and screening process), but that is more specific to the candidate's personality and ability to sell their own commitment, and less of a blanket screening mechanism based on a candidate's ability to demonstrate long time local or family ties.

So the answer is generally still "it depends," but it is nice to be able to somewhat retire the myth that you won't get any consideration in smaller West Coast markets if you do not have local ties, or a very solid argument as to why you want to be in a particular city for the long term. If you are a candidate with strong credentials who has always thought about the possibility of relocating to the Pacific Northwest, or to any West Coast destination, please feel free to [reach out to me](#) to discuss.

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[Why Relocating to a Different Market Is the Greatest \(But Little Known\) Way for a Law Firm Attorney to Get Ahead in the Legal Profession](#)

[Why Every Attorney Should Look at Multiple Legal Markets When Doing a Job Search](#)

[What's the Best Way to Convince a Firm That I Am Serious about My Geographic Move?](#)

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