2019 CPA Firm Gender Survey
Mission of the AICPA® Women’s Initiatives Executive Committee

Promote and support the success of women to advance the profession together.

#AICPAWomenLead

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Executive summary

Smaller firms continue to have higher percentages of women leaders than average.

A total of 94% of CPA firms surveyed offered some type of modified work arrangement (MWA). Fifty percent of firms had partners using MWAs and 62% of these partners used MWAs before becoming a partner.

The results show that MWAs can offer significant staffing advantages to the firms that use them, especially when it comes to retention.

Formal advancement programs, such as mentoring and sponsorship, also offer substantial benefits to the firms that use them in terms of attraction, retention and advancement.

A total of 39% of firms monitor pay parity between gender, and a total of 85% of those that monitored pay parity acted to close any gaps.

Fewer than half of all firms had formal succession plans (typically practice continuation agreements for sole practitioners), although all the percentages had increased since 2017. Only 6% had a formal gender component embedded in their succession plans.
Signs of progress

Firms are embracing formal initiatives and confirming the substantial benefits those offer to help enhance their ability to attract, retain and advance women. Those are some of the conclusions that can be drawn from the 2019 AICPA Women’s Initiatives Executive Committee CPA Firm Gender Survey.

The results show clear signs of progress in creating inclusive firms in which CPAs of both genders can achieve their professional goals. They illustrate the state of gender diversity in firms today and can provide valuable insights into areas that should be addressed to enable firms to benefit from the contributions of talented professionals.

The 2019 WIEC CPA Firm Gender Survey is based on responses from 1,129 CPA firms across the United States. Responses were gathered between August and September 2019.
Women partners in CPA firms

Women represented 23% of partners in CPA firms, according to the AICPA Trends survey.

Demographics of partners in accounting/finance functions of U.S. CPA firms

Gender distribution on executive committees

Source: 2019 AICPA Trends Report
The pipeline to advancement

The next four graphics show the percentages of women at various levels at firms of different sizes. Women have achieved parity or better at most levels, but at all firms with greater than 10 CPAs, they are not seen in equal levels at the director/non-equity partner level. At the largest firms, there are fewer women at all levels above senior associate.

**Percentage of females at firms with 2–10 CPAs**

- Directors/non-equity partners: 51%
- Senior managers: 71%
- Managers: 66%
- Senior associates: 67%
- Associates: 66%
- New professionals: 58%
- Interns: 53%

**Percentage of females at firms with 11–20 CPAs**

- Directors/non-equity partners: 40%
- Senior managers: 58%
- Managers: 59%
- Senior associates: 54%
- Associates: 60%
- New professionals: 59%
- Interns: 54%
Percentage of females at firms with 21–99 CPAs

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Directors/non-equity partners</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior managers</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior associates</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New professionals</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interns</td>
<td>47%</td>
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Percentage of females at firms with 100+ CPAs

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<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Directors/non-equity partners</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior managers</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior associates</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New professionals</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interns</td>
<td>47%</td>
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Many women — and men — are seeking better work/life balance benefit from arrangements that allow them greater control over where and when they work. Firms with modified work arrangements (MWAs) create a more inclusive environment that allows team members the chance to integrate their personal and professional lives.

They are extremely popular with CPA firms: A total of 94% of those surveyed offered some type of MWA and the rankings based on popularity were the same as in 2017.

The survey also found that 50% of firms had partners using MWAs and 62% of these partners used MWAs before becoming partner. Among firms that offered MWAs, the chart below shows that women partners were more likely to use them in smaller firms and less likely to use them in larger firms. We also see a higher percentage of women income partners in larger firms on MWAs than equity partners (below graphic).

**Among equity and non-equity partners using MWAs, what are the percentages by gender?**
MWAs have great value.

The survey found that MWAs can offer significant staffing advantages to the firms that use them, especially when it comes to retention. As the graphic below shows, among the firms that used each MWA, at least half thought that they helped to hold on to team members, for example, and many also thought they were valuable attraction tools. Few firms said that they believed that any of the MWAs had no positive impact.

With staffing top of mind for firms, the survey results reinforce the fact that modified schedules can and do provide tangible benefits. They are typically an important option for women balancing work and personal responsibilities, but more and more men are also taking advantage of them, as the data on male and female use of MWAs shows. The survey shows that providing MWAs is a worthwhile policy that benefits the firm and its people.
Grooming new leaders

Formal advancement programs can help spot, groom and retain promising future leaders. They are valuable initiatives for every professional, but they can also help organizations spot and promote talented women and minorities. The charts on this page show that mentoring is the most popular choice at firms of all sizes, and that larger firms are exploring the use of other programs, as well.

Survey definitions

- **Mentoring programs** — Match an employee with a peer or supervisor who can provide emotional support, advice and focus on personal and professional development.

- **Sponsorship programs** — Match an employee with a senior manager or superior with influence, who can help you get exposure, opportunities and promotions.

- **Formal combined Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) initiatives** — Include, gender, ethnic and other under-represented groups.
As the graphic below shows, the survey found that, like MWAs, these programs can offer substantial benefits to the firms that use them in terms of attraction, retention and advancement.

What percentage of firms said formal programs helped with staffing concerns?

- Mentoring programs — Match an employee with a peer or supervisor who can provide emotional support, advice and focus on personal and professional development.

- Sponsorship programs — Match an employee with a senior manager or superior with influence, who can help you get exposure, opportunities and promotions.

- Formal combined Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) initiatives — Include, gender, ethnic and other under-represented groups.

Survey definitions
This year was the first time that the survey asked firms about steps they were taking to tackle pay disparity and bias. The survey found that 39% of firms monitor pay parity between gender, and a total of 85% of those that monitored pay parity acted to close any gaps. Firms that have these programs are clearly acting on their findings to address any inequities.

Training in unconscious bias can also be valuable in helping firm members identify and address unintended stereotypes and assumptions, as can programs aimed at enhancing understanding of diversity and inclusion concerns. The survey found that 20% of firms overall are providing this training, including 59% of the largest firms (100+ CPAs).
CPA firms’ long-term sustainability

All firms benefit from having a formal succession planning process that allows them to chart a course for a successful future and build a strong leadership pipeline. However, consistent with the overall results in the last survey, fewer than half of all firms had formal succession plans (typically practice continuation agreements for sole practitioners), although the percentages had generally increased since 2017. This year, 44% overall had them, with smaller firms least likely to have one.

In 2017, only 2% of firms overall had a formal gender component in their succession planning. This year, 6% had one. Since women represent one-half of the entry-level talent pool, it’s encouraging that firms are beginning to adopt this consideration into their planning for future leadership succession, although more work needs to be done.
For more information about the resources created by the AICPA Women’s Initiatives Executive Committee, go to aicpa.org/career/womenintheprofession.