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leadership positions overwhelmingly view them as effective tools in recruiting and retaining talent, according to new research by the American Institute of CPAs.

Isaac M. O'Bannon • Dec. 18, 2017

Women Mentorship Programs Help Firms Realize Greater Success

By Isaac M. O'Bannon, Managing Editor

U.S. accounting firms that use advancement programs for promoting women to leadership positions overwhelmingly view them as effective tools in recruiting and retaining talent, according to new research by the American Institute of CPAs.

Mentorship is by far the most popular advancement program, with 45 percent of firms using it, the [2017 CPA Firm Gender Survey](#) found. Sponsorship, in which influential firm leaders take a more formal role in guiding promising employees to career opportunities, professional development and promotions, is used by 12 percent of firms.

“There are two important takeaways here: 1) firms that use these programs have seen a beneficial impact on attracting and retaining talent,” said Melissa K. Hooley, CPA, CGMA, chair of the AICPA Women’s Initiatives Executive Committee. “And 2) firms that are taking active steps to promote women and minorities likely will have a competitive advantage when it comes to securing talent.”

Advancement Program	Percentage of Firms Using It	Of That Group, Those Who Say It Has an
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Combined Diversity & Inclusion 6% 90%

Women comprise nearly half of all accounting graduates entering the profession, but remain underrepresented at the partnership level and other leadership positions. The survey shows little change in this area from studies done in years past, which have typically found less than one-quarter of the partnership ranks made up of women. As was the case two years ago – the last time the CPA Firm Gender Survey was conducted – the percentage of women partners was found to be highest at smaller firms.

Firm Size	Percentage of Women Partners
Two to 10 CPAs	42% (43%*)
11 to 20 CPAs	30% (39%)
21 to 99 CPAs	26% (27%)
100+ CPAs	21% (20%)

*Results in parentheses from 2015 CPA Firm Gender Survey

Among other findings of the survey:

- An analysis of job titles found that women maintained parity or better with men in CPA firms through the senior manager level, after which the ratio declines
- The larger the firm, the greater the gender gap in equity ownership

- Only 47 percent of firms have a succession plan and only two percent have a

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Vision, Values and Strategy: 3 Firms Share Their Insights. Bryan Cytron, Firm of the Future blog.

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always a good rule of thumb when promoting your business. In certain circles, promoting yourself as a “thought leader” may cause more people to roll their eyes than anything else.

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