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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 • Feb. 28, 2018



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

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Advancement Program	Percentage of Firms Using It	Who Say It Has an Impact on Attracting or Retaining Talent
Mentoring	45%	87%
Sponsorship	12%	97%
Gender Initiative	11%	85%
Minority Initiative	2%	90%
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%)

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- Inside Public Accounting:
 - Under \$3M – 22%.
 - Firms over \$3M – 15-19% female partners.

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 formal gender component in those plans
- Some 89 percent of firms say they have instituted some form of modified work arrangements, with flextime and reduced hours being the most prevalent

The CPA Firm Gender Survey was conducted online by MKTG Incorporated for the AICPA's Women's Initiatives Executive Committee from Aug. 3 to Sept. 11, 2017. Some 492 qualified respondents, drawn from CPA firms of varying sizes and regions within the United States, participated.

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