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HUMAN RESOURCES & PAYROLL

Flexible Work Arrangements are Key to Recruiting & Retaining Female Accounting Staff

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Isaac M. O'Bannon • Mar. 16, 2020



American CPA firms that offer modified work arrangements have significant advantages in terms of recruiting and retaining female employees, according to new research by the [American Institute of CPAs \(AICPA\)](#).

Approximately half of firms [surveyed](#) reported that flexible schedules (56%), reduced hours (50%), compressed work schedules (49%) or telecommuting options (56%) helped attract employees, while about 80 percent of firms said those arrangements helped retain employees.

“While perspectives are changing, women are still more likely to handle duties involving child care and managing households. At the same time, many younger workers expect employers to offer them some flexibility as to where and when their work is done,” said Jacquelyn Tracy, CPA, chair of the [AICPA’s Women’s Initiatives Executive Committee](#) and partner with Mandel & Tracy, LLC. “Modified work arrangements allow women to more successfully manage their careers as CPAs and the priorities in their personal lives.”

A Pew Research Center study found mothers spend more than 31% of their day on child care and housework, compared to about 17% for fathers.

The AICPA's biennial [CPA Firm Gender Survey](#) seeks to understand how firms are working to address gender disparities and advance women in the profession. More than 1,100 firms, ranging from those with fewer than 10 CPAs to those with more than 100, responded to the survey, which was conducted in 2019.

In addition to asking about working arrangements, the survey also questioned firms about gender distribution on executive committees, formal programs to advance women and succession planning.

The survey found that 39% of firms monitor pay parity between genders and 85% of those who monitor disparities took action to close gaps.

Additionally, one in five firms offered unconscious bias training, with 59% of the firms with more than 100 CPAs offering it. Implementing and expanding education around preconceived notions, biases and stereotypes pertaining to various groups is one of the main goals of the CEO Action For Diversity & Inclusion pledge, an effort by business leaders to increase diversity and inclusion throughout their workforce and leadership. The Association of International Certified Public Accountants, combining the strengths of the AICPA and CIMA, has signed the pledge and encourages others in the profession to do so as well.

Among other findings of the survey:

- The larger the firm, the more likely it is to have formal mentor and sponsorship programs to help advance women and minorities.
- Women in small firms (2-10 CPAs) comprise 53% of executive committees but only 16% of firms with more than 100 CPAs.
- An analysis of job titles found that women were nearly equally represented or outnumbered men in CPA firms through the senior manager level, after which the ratio declines.
- Only 44 percent of firms have a succession plan, down from 47% in 2017. But 6% included a gender component in their plan, up from 2%.

The firm gender survey is one of many things the AICPA is doing to promote gender equality within the profession. The AICPA also hosts the annual [Global Women's Leadership Summit](#), co-sponsors the [Most Powerful Women in Accounting](#) award and in coordination with Women's History Month, is hosting the webinar [Creating New Possibilities through a Coaching Culture](#), being held March 24.

Survey methodology: The CPA Firm Gender Survey was conducted via email by the AICPA for the AICPA's Women's Initiatives Executive Committee in August 2019. Some 1,129 qualified respondents, drawn from CPA firms of varying sizes and regions within the United States, participated.

For more information about gender initiatives and other resources, visit www.aicpa.org/womenlead.

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