

# 2017 Best Public Accounting Firms for Women

ISAAC M. O'BANNON, MANAGING EDITOR ON JUN 6, 2017



More women are getting further at the 12 accounting firms that comprise the Accounting MOVE Project's 2017 Best Public Accounting Firms for Women list. Women comprise 28% of partners and principals at these firms, compared to 24% in aggregate for the 49 firms that participated in the 2017 benchmarking survey. The MOVE Project is the profession's only annual benchmark of the status of women in the leadership pipeline.

"Innovative firms are finding that they win new clients when they clear the way for senior women to open new offices and new lines of business designed around workplace flexibility and collaborative growth strategies," said Joanne Cleaver, president of Wilson-Taylor Associates, Inc., the content strategy firm that designed and manages the annual MOVE Project.

"I'm proud of the role the MOVE project has played in the progress and momentum across our industry. I look forward to it continuing to be a meaningful forum to share ideas, challenges and successes," said Jen Wyne, executive director of human resources at Moss Adams (founding sponsor of the MOVE Project).

"AWSCPA is proud to support the MOVE Project. The work to increase the women in the pipeline and at the partner levels is very important to the future of our profession," said Danielle Supkis Cheek, administrator of [American Woman's Society of Certified Public Accountants](#) (AWSCPA).

## Top Trends From the 2017 Accounting MOVE Project

- Transparent career paths enable women to anticipate work-life conflicts and proactively propose solutions.
- Firms whose leaders continually communicate with rising women make many small course adjustments to retain women in the partnership pipeline and to ensure that they are offered key growth opportunities.
- A few firms, including Moss Adams, are breaking down firmwide measurements for advancing women to to practice areas and offices. That injects immediacy to the overarching initiative and equips office and practice leaders with context for creating fresh ways to retain and advance women.

## Best Accounting Firms for Women

The 12 firms named to the Best Accounting Firms for Women list demonstrate three characteristics:

- Consistent, measurable progress in advancing women to leadership.
- Proven and continually evolving programs that retain and advance women.
- Clear and compelling integration of the business case for advancing women with business results.

### BeachFleischman (Tucson, AZ)

Digital business development through content marketing has emerged as a powerful magnet for new clients – and it aligns perfectly with the ambitions of telecommuting women. The firm tracks wins and credits individuals for their successes. It's one of many reasons why women comprise 37.5% of its partners and principals.

### The Bonadio Group (Pittsford, NY)

Due to a combination of strategic growth and impending partner retirements, the firm expanded its partnership career paths by adding a limited equity partnership track that allows for alternative career paths, including part-time partnership. The firm also continues to focus on promoting women with

women making up 22% of partners and 57% of principals, which is especially impressive within a 700-person firm.

#### **Brown Smith Wallace (St. Louis, MO)**

A firm-wide initiative includes young women from the start of their careers, seeding expectations that they will bring in new business and backing that up with training on social skills and networking as part of the firm's commitment to professional growth.

#### **BPM LLP (formerly Burr Pilger Mayer) (San Francisco, CA)**

Proactive pay equity policies ensure that partners are examining pay decisions from all angles... and that women know exactly how the firm is holding itself accountable for fair compensation practices.

#### **Clark Nuber (Bellevue, WA)**

Reframing business development as an exercise in collaboration, not raw competition, is not only driving consistent growth but has also propelled women to 40% of the firm's shareholders.

#### **CohnReznick (New York City, NY)**

Consistent measurement of the status of women at each point in this firm's pipeline ensures that candidates for promotion and sponsorship aren't overlooked. CohnReznick also invests in developing current partners as executive sponsors through coaching and training, so they can demonstrate top-notch sponsorship skills.

#### **Frazier & Deeter (Atlanta, GA)**

Here's the evidence that a holistic overhaul of firm culture, to focus on mutual accountability and shared wins, especially benefits women: 32% of the firm's partners and principals are women. Development – of people and of business – is a core, measured competency for every leader.

#### **MCM CPAs and Advisors (Louisville, KY)**

External work-life coaches help women get ahead of emerging work-life conflicts and forge a path forward. That's one reason why women make up 38.3% of the partners and principals at this five-office firm, which has continued to develop its women's initiative.

#### **Moss Adams (Seattle, WA)**

Moss Adams makes metrics meaningful by translating firm-wide trends into scorecards for each office. The firm is accelerating towards its 2022 goal to have women comprise 30% of its partners and principals. Six years ago, 22% of the firm's top leaders were women; now, that figure is 26%.

#### **Plante Moran (Southfield, MI)**

Top managers lead by example, mentoring and sponsoring midlevel women. In the process, they seek insight into how the firm's vaunted culture is playing out for the next generation of leaders – and how to evolve work-life and advancement programs accordingly.

#### **Novogradac (San Francisco, CA)**

Instead of expecting women to organize their lives around business development, Novogradac gives them the chance to design new practice areas and offices around their lives. The result: women comprise 32.6% of partners and principals and the firm is among the best at retaining women from senior level managers to partner.

#### **Rehmann (Troy, MI)**

Rehmann ensures a balanced slate for diverse candidates for its two leadership development programs and firm leaders review the progress of candidates regularly. Emerging leaders are paired with sponsors who have different backgrounds, amplifying the importance of cultivating a diverse perspective. The programs retain 77.3% of the women participating and drive the firm's continual growth of women principals and owners, currently at 28%.

## **2017 Accounting MOVE Project Equity Leadership Firms**

The Accounting MOVE Project also recognizes firms with at least 50 employees, where women comprise at least 30% of partners and principals.

#### **DZH Phillips (San Francisco): 70%**

This collaborative firm views talent development as part of its two-prong growth strategy, along with organic and acquisitive client expansion. Firm leaders offer appropriately challenging client engagements, training, mentoring support, and flexible work schedules to build sustainable career paths.

#### **Kerkering, Barberio & Co. (Sarasota, FL): 64%**

Part-time partners have been part of the firm, long before it was a trendy business practice or a hot topic in the industry. For over 20 years, the firm has

worked with employees to design both alternative career paths and flexible work arrangements. Their efforts pay off with 64% woman partners, while 72% of all employees are women. To help overcome the challenge of identifying experienced candidates, the firm recently hired a full-time recruiter.

#### **KWC Certified Public Accountants (Alexandria, VA): 60%**

One of the most impressive aspects of KWC is not simply the fact that they have 60 percent women partners, but that they have a high percentage of women at all levels, with women making up 80% of managers and 78% of senior managers. The firm also recently promoted a woman with young children to partner, and she is currently working three days a week. This arrangement sends a clear message to other woman in the firm that making partner on an alternative career track is both possible and supported by the firm.

#### **CS&L (Bradenton, FL): 50%**

With women comprising over half the partners and 100% of managers, CS&L has future leaders ready in the pipeline. The firm creatively uses technology to connect the firm's three offices as well as for employees looking for flexible work options. The firm is committed to staying a locally-owned independent firm and firm leaders attribute this ingrained family environment to the firm's high percentage of women in leadership positions.

#### **Johanson & Yau (San Jose, CA): 50%**

To continue attracting and retaining top talent, this firm is completing a full-scale rebranding effort, as well as modernizing its office space. The firm works closely with employees to design individual career paths, including flexible work schedules for new parents reentering the workplace. In competition for accounting professionals with nearby Silicon Valley tech companies, the firm continuously evaluates leading edge benefits and other programs to increase value to its employees.

#### **HBE Becker Meyer Love (Lincoln, NE): 44.4%**

The firm has undergone significant growth over the past five years, and leadership continues to focus on advancing women. The firm now has 44.4% women partners and a pipeline of directors that is 64% women. The firm achieved this level through a variety of efforts, including family friendly benefits, such as unlimited PTO time for eligible employees, and technology to make telecommuting easier.

#### **Hood & Strong (San Francisco, CA): 42.9%**

The path to partnership isn't a straight line here, with several interim positions that allow candidates time to solidify their technical and business development skills.

#### **Lurie (Minneapolis, MN): 33.3%**

Just because women occupy the two top spots at Lurie doesn't mean they take the retention of women for granted. One recent, successful experiment involved recruiting a high-potential midlevel women to build out a new line of business, even though she was also managing a young family.

#### **Jones & Roth (Eugene, OR): 33%**

Jones & Roth recently added several alternative career tracks at partner level: full-equity partner, no equity partner, and a director position at partner level. This structure allows women to see a path for themselves at the firm without being stuck in a traditional model. With 33% women partners already, creating a culture with flexible options will enable the strong pipeline of women at all levels to find a path that fits their needs, both professionally and personally.

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