

# What are the Top Firms for Women in 2018?



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**T**oday, expectations have never been higher for women’s advancement in the workplace and the 2018 Accounting MOVE Project will undoubtedly serve as a blueprint for anyone hoping to advance women at their firm.

For nine years, the Accounting MOVE Project has served as the CPA profession’s only annual benchmark of the status of women in the leadership pipeline. The 2018 Accounting MOVE Project, released June 7, showcases innovations that propel women to success and that inform firm leaders about related strategies for overall diversity initiatives.

Approaches outlined in the report ensure that the profession’s much-needed emphasis on diversity and inclusion also furthers momentum for women.

“There is no question that #MeToo, pay equity, and other issues about workplace equity are shifting the conversation from the prior default of policies and practices to women’s daily reality,” said Joanne Cleaver, President of Wilson-Taylor

Associates, Inc., the content strategy firm that manages the MOVE Project. “The national conversation about diversity is taking many of its cues from what is proven to work to advance women. The Accounting MOVE Project equips

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accounting firms with proven strategies that deliver what everybody wants: more opportunities for women and more growth for firms.”

In conjunction with the MOVE Project release, the Accounting and Financial Women’s Alliance (AFWA) has also released the 2018 Best CPA Firms for Women list and the 2018 Best Firms for Equity Leadership lists. Firms featured on these lists can also serve as paradigms for anyone hoping to move the needle for women at their firm.

According to the 2018 Accounting MOVE Project Report, women comprise 25 percent of the management committees at participating firms—a huge advance from the 19 percent reported in the 2014 report. Still, progress is incremental overall, with women remaining at 24 percent of partners and principals at CPA firms.

“This year’s MOVE theme highlights how complex it can be for women to advance to the highest levels within an organization,” said Jennifer Wyne, executive director of human resources for Moss Adams, founding sponsor of the Accounting MOVE Project. “Many factors influence the trajectory of a woman’s career. To be successful and to see continued progress, we need to be intentional and systematic on our approach to developing and advancing women.”

This year, there are 12 firms named to the AFWA’s 2018 Best Public Accounting Firms for Women list. The annual list is based on results from Accounting MOVE Project research.

According to the AFWA, these 12 firms embrace the same three characteristics when it comes to the advancement of women:

- 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.

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## The 2018 Best Public Accounting Firms for Women are:

**BPM** (San Francisco, Calif.) The firm's diverse women partners realize and capitalize on their abilities to bring in new clients, which has resulted in a burst of revenue from its recently promoted women.

**Brown Smith Wallace** (St. Louis, Mo.) The firm assigns performance managers to work with younger employees to craft personalized career advancement strategies that provide guidance during early career decisions and their ramifications.

**Clark Nuber PS** (Bellevue, Wash.) With 47.5 percent women shareholders as proof of its success, the firm's monthly feedback meetings emphasize accomplishments in real time, not just annually, so employees see immediate results of and from their actions.

**CohnReznick LLP** (New York, N.Y.) The established success of the firm's WomenCAN efforts are being leveraged to mentor leaders of its new diversity and inclusion councils.

**Kerkering, Barberio & Co.** (Sarasota, Fla.) Flexibility is a core part of the firm's culture with 23 percent of employees on a flexible work arrangement, ranging from reduced hours, flexible hours, or remote work.

**Lurie LLP** (Minneapolis, Minn.) Even as the firm builds on programs that help millennials envision themselves as firm owners, Lurie is continually examining drivers of success so it can define advancement in terms broader than titles.

**MCM CPAs and Advisors** (Louisville, K.Y.) The firm's upcoming all-firm women's conference adds to its commitment to women's growth within the firm by creating opportunities to network, learn, and spend time with one another. MCM is also

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focused on allying with other women's business groups as part of its new-market strategy as it expands regionally.  
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**Moss Adams** (Seattle, Wash.) Detecting and resolving small barriers to women's advancement adds up to accelerated retention and promotions, and delivers on this firm's "long game" vision for advancing women internally and in its community.

**Novogradac & Company LLP** (San Francisco, Calif.) Success here is driven by metrics...and metrics are driven by experiments with career paths, flexibility, and business development. Novogradac doesn't shy away from setting precedents with alternative career paths.

**Plante Moran** (Southfield, Mich.) Persistence is paying off as the firm's long-established Women In Leadership (WIL) program is raising its profile with major events as well as integrating learnings and concepts into the firm's core training programs.

**Rehmann** (Troy, Mich.) Business development is about more than golf and other traditionally male-focused activities, and the women's initiative catalyzes conversations that directly drive new approaches by women for business development.

**The Bonadio Group** (Pittsford, N.Y.) With 38 percent female partners and principals and 50 percent of the new 2018 partners female, the firm continues to focus on a strong pipeline by including senior level employees in its leadership development training program.

The Accounting MOVE Project also recognizes firms with at least 50 employees, where women comprise at least 31 percent of partners and principals. The Best CPA Firms for Equity Leadership list is also based on MOVE survey results and recognizes firms with at least 31 percent women partners and principals, which is close to the 33 percent widely recognized as the tipping point for members of any identity group to have individual impact.

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**The Equity Leadership list recognizes firms that have achieved that milestone**

through any combination of culture, programs or initiatives. Risa Lavine, principal

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and chief of staff at CohnReznick, national sponsor of the Accounting MOVE Project says this year's Accounting MOVE Project Report identifies "how we can expand 'success' to truly include all, within our firms and within our communities."

"The challenge for firms," Lavine says, "lies outside our comfort zone of the spreadsheet. It's really in how we define success—past success and future success."

To that end, the 2018 Accounting MOVE Project has identified five top trends at firms with a proven track record of advancing women to top leadership positions.

These top five trends include:

1. A philosophy that aligning wins for women with wins for leaders and for firms overall creates common ground for shared wins. Rehmann, for example, scales business development training with alternative work schedules so women do not sacrifice essential skills for work-life balance.
2. Firm aspirations are set by top leaders but middle managers actually convert to culture change. MBAF rotates responsibilities for its women's initiative, creating a variety of opportunities for learning new leadership skills – and for meeting top firm leaders.
3. Men add invaluable insight as women's initiatives sharpen their focus on barriers unique to women. MCM uses its women's initiative and women's events to break in to new markets.
4. When men ask that programs designed for women be opened to them, too, firms have a chance to reinforce the unique value of women's programs. This allows everyone to explore what the women's programs are doing that overall training programs are not.
5. Women's initiatives inform umbrella diversity and inclusion initiatives with

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proven logistical models and by illustrating the lasting importance of personal stories that inspire and inform rising women. Burr Pilger Mayer's leadership is redefining 'success' as it finds that women with untraditional styles forge new ways to build practices.

These practices have been successful in helping MOVE firms shatter the 50 percent barrier—the CPA profession still loses 50 percent of women accounting grads on the way to partnership—and they have been successful, Cleaver says, because they have done more than simply place a skeletal women's "policy" on the books. They have taken measurable, accountable steps to change the culture of their firms.

Today, more than ever, that culture shift is no longer an option, it's an expectation. "No employer in any industry can count on formal policies as a shield when it is clear that culture is what makes the difference between an affirming or affronting workplace for women," Cleaver says.

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## About Deanna Arteaga



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Deanna Arteaga is a professional freelance writer and public relations specialist who for the past six years has covered CPA industry trends for AccountingWEB. She also writes about CPA firm marketing, higher education and professional development for CPAs, and workplace trends in the accounting profession. She has more than 20 years of journalism and public relations experience, including her tenure as a former newspaper reporter in suburban Chicago where she covered breaking news, municipal politics, and state legislative issues.

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