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## **Women Thrive at CPA Firms Despite Pandemic Turmoil**

*2021 Accounting MOVE Project report reveals that flexible work programs designed mainly for women propelled firm growth throughout the pandemic. Reenergized and new programs align diversity, equity and inclusion with sustained firm growth. AFWA releases 2021 Best CPA Firms for Women and 2021 Best CPA Firms for Equity Leadership lists*

Lexington, Ky., October XX --

Firms that entered the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic with established modes of remote work intended primarily to benefit women had a compelling advantage in the abrupt shift to remote work, according to the 2021 Accounting MOVE Project report. With women leading many aspects of virtual business development, firms continued to promote women to senior leadership: this year, women comprise 32% of partners and principals at the firms that participate in the Accounting MOVE Project, up from 29% in 2020. Women continue to be just over half of total firm employees, at 55%.

“Women’s traditional strengths – communication, collaboration and consensus – carried firms through the turmoil and distress of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, women are positioned to lead profound transitions to fully remote career tracks, greater accountability for pay and power equity,” said Joanne Cleaver, President of Wilson-Taylor Associates, Inc., the content strategy firm that manages the Accounting MOVE Project.

*“The pandemic and the demand for racial justice accelerated inclusion and diversity efforts and tested the effectiveness of strategies that were previously put in place. Firms that have made a long-standing commitment were able to build on proven strategies to take faster action,”* said Tricia Benich, inclusion & social responsibility associate director for Moss Adams, Founding Sponsor of the Accounting MOVE Project.

The 2021 Accounting MOVE Project is available at the [Accounting & Financial Women’s Alliance](https://www.afwa.org/move-project/) website. <https://www.afwa.org/move-project/>

“The findings of this year’s report reveals that in spite of overwhelming uncertainty and change in the workforce that collaboration, diverse perspectives, and the ability to embrace change has given women leverage in creating new opportunities in a challenging professional landscape,” said Cindy Stanley, executive director for the Accounting & Financial Women’s Alliance (AFWA), the association partner for the Accounting MOVE Project. “Firms realized that by providing the opportunity for women to work in a remote and hybrid work environment that they were able to cultivate a diverse and expanding pool of talented professionals.”

## **The Best CPA Firms for Women**

(In alphabetical order)

### **BPM**

Success with its women's initiative frames the firm's rapid expansion to employee groups for Asians and Pacific Islanders; LGBTQIA; and Black employees. Custom business development strategies for each potential partner center around the unique opportunities they can tap, often drawing on their diverse communities.

### **BeachFleischman**

Pandemic lockdowns didn't rattle already-virtual professionals at this firm, which had momentum with advancing telecommuting workers. One webinar-savvy professional immediately became the in-house expert for both coaching peers through their learning curves about facilitating virtual events and orchestrating dozens of presentations about fast-breaking pandemic aid programs.

### **The Bonadio Group**

A renewed commitment to relationship building and career development fueled enthusiasm and participation in the firm's mentoring program, resulting in faster, more focused advancement of rising women who were paired with partner mentors.

### **Clark Nuber**

Clark Nuber's online, 360-degree career guidance platform equips women with the tools and training for self-propelled career growth – uninterrupted by the pandemic economy.

## **Frazier & Deeter**

Fast, focused connections among the firm's ever-increasing women and minority employees opened mentoring and advocacy conversations that likely would not have occurred but for forced remote work. The new relationships both defined and expanded the firm's new generation of structured diversity initiatives.

## **MCM CPAs & Advisors**

Senior leaders rose to the challenges of remote and amplified flexible work schedules with training and coaching of their own, the better to extend the firm's long-established family-friendly culture consistently to every team.

## **Lurie**

When Minneapolis business owners were hurting, Lurie was quick to respond to help rebuild. The firm empowered a director to work alongside the business development nonprofit that took the lead to repair, replace and revive small businesses nearly destroyed by civil unrest in the summer of 2020.

## **Moss Adams**

Radical transparency infuses the firm's approach to inclusion and diversity. The latest advance is increasing Partner accountability by including inclusion & diversity goals as a part of their performance review that shows how they are actively engaging to achieve firmwide I&D goals. Soon, employees, too, will have I&D goals and competencies as part of their evaluations.

## **Novogradac**

In it to win it: once Novogradac decided it was time to launch a diversity initiative, it poured time, resources and commitment to propel its programs to top status right out of the gate. The firm's approach blends its already-winning strategy to equip new women partners with tools for success with incisive strategies and goals.

## **Rehmann**

A reliable leader in breaking new ground for midcareer women, Rehmann found itself leading clients by example, when, in 2020, they asked the firm for guidance on family-first best practices and related topics, including HR and government aid programs. The firm continues to convert culture to a compelling market differentiator.

## **BEST CPA FIRMS FOR EQUITY LEADERSHIP**

(In descending order of percentage of women partners & principals. To qualify, women must comprise at least 32% of a firm's partners and principals.)

### **100% Kaiser Consulting**

Woman-founded and woman-led, Kaiser takes the long view in recruiting talent, nurturing relationships with working mothers as they ramp back into their careers or make adjustments to schedules based on family needs. Centering engagements around the professional and personal goals of employees, Kaiser ensures that the right employees have the right work at the right time.

### **63% KWC**

Virtual work was a chance for women to connect across practices and specialties, sparking a burst of peer mentoring that boosted retention in the past 18 months.

### **58% James Moore & Co.**

James Moore & Company partners with Historically Black Colleges and Universities to cultivate student interest in accounting careers.

**56% Clark Nuber \***

**56% Kerkering Barberio & Co.**

At Kerkering Barberio Co. employee well-being was a top focus during the pandemic. The firm assured that family needs were being met during the pandemic, extending maximum flexibility for working caregivers.

**50% RoseRyan**

Work emerging from unexpected directions was a chance for RoseRyan to accelerate leadership for rising women ...and, unexpectedly accessible mentoring via virtual platforms was key to equipping those newly minted leaders with strategies for success.

**50% Johanson & Yau**

Improving diversity firm-wide is a key priority for Johanson & Yau. The firm's response to national events resulted in a new diversity, inclusion, and belonging initiative, which is intended to build relationships with Black community and professional organizations, as well as a local university endowment to support underserved students of color entering the profession.

**50% Bader Martin**

The firm concentrates support for rising women on critical career transitions, furnishing career coaching both for alternative partnership paths and for the often-tricky step up from the mid to top level of leadership.

**46% Abbott Stringham & Lynch**

Hybrid careers are accelerating now at ASL, refreshing its already proven culture for women to greater relevance and potential for working mothers.

### **46% Jones & Roth**

In 2020, Jones and Roth created a diversity, equity and inclusion committee partially in response to national events. The committee facilitates educational sessions that provide context for ongoing issues and reinforce the firm's commitment to DEI.

### **46% The MFA Companies**

MFA finds talent that breaks the typical mold – to craft teams with innovative approaches to client success. Varied life experiences, offbeat educational backgrounds and creative takes on problem solving underscore this firm's culture.

### **44% Councilor, Buchanan & Mitchell**

Consumer-oriented webinars, keyed to potential clients' covid-driven financial concerns, proved especially fruitful when led by gender-balanced teams. That was a revelatory moment for CBM, which now centers advisory client outreach with audience equally in mind as expertise.

### **44% Beach Fleischman \***

### **42% BerryDunn**

CEO Sarah Belliveau is determined to convert the firm's homegrown gender equity to a purposeful strategy...and to apply its organic strengths to redoubled efforts to win racially and culturally diverse recruits.

### **40% Bland & Associates**

Bland & Associates' inaugural diversity, equity and inclusion initiative was prompted by the events of 2020 as well as evolving firm goals. One

key mission of the new group: developing an applying diversity-infused recruiting practices.

**40% HBE, LLP**

An 'all hands on deck' experience in 2020 inspired firm leaders to quickly retool expectations and experiences for brand-new accountants, opening new ways to design internships.

**39% The Bonadio Group \***

**38% OUM LLP**

OUM & Co. continued with one of its historic strengths: proactively crafting programs that engage Asian employees in career and professional development.

**37% MCM CPAs & Advisors \***

**37% Rehmann\***

**35% Frazier & Deeter\***

**34% Novogradac\***

**32% Lurie \***

***About the Accounting MOVE Project***

The Accounting MOVE Project is based on the MOVE methodology, developed by research partner Wilson-Taylor Associates, Inc., which investigates the factors proven to be essential to women's career success:

M – Money: fair pay practices;

O – Opportunity: advancement and leadership development;

V – Vital supports: work-life programs that remove barriers;

E – Entrepreneurship: operating experience for managing or business ownership



## ***Methodology***

Since 2010, the Accounting MOVE Project has measured and supported the advancement of women at accounting and consulting firms. MOVE is the only annual benchmarking project that both counts and advocates for women in the profession.

The MOVE Project advisory board includes leaders from association partner the Accounting and Financial Women's Alliance; founding sponsor Moss Adams; and national sponsor CohnReznick.

MOVE is made possible by support from its sponsors and by administrative fees paid by participating firms. Firms receive benchmarking reports based on the MOVE Project.

The Best CPA Firms for Women list, sponsored by the AFWA, is based on each year's MOVE results. To earn a spot on the list, an employer must have *both* a proportionate number of women at most or all levels of management *and* proven success with the MOVE factors. An employer cannot win by having a rich array of programs but few women in leadership. We believe that if a firm's MOVE factors are effective, it will have a healthy and growing proportion of women in its leadership pipeline.

The Best CPA Firms for Equity Leadership list is also based on MOVE survey results and recognizes firms with at least 30% women partners and principals, as roughly a third is the widely recognized 'tipping point' or members of any identity group to have individual impact. The Equity Leadership list recognizes firms that have achieved that milestone through any combination of culture, programs, initiatives, and growth.

## ***About the Accounting/MOVE Project Partners***



**Moss Adams** brings more West to business. More than a location, it's a way of doing business in which innovation thrives and optimism abounds. At Moss Adams, we're excited by the greatness of possibility and the extraordinary potential for companies and individuals to prosper. With more than 3,200 professionals across 25-plus locations in the West and beyond, we provide the world's most innovative companies with specialized accounting, consulting, and wealth management services to help them embrace emerging opportunity. Visit [www.mossadams.com](http://www.mossadams.com) to discover how Moss Adams is bringing more West to business. For more information, visit [www.mossadams.com](http://www.mossadams.com).



## Accounting & Financial Women's Alliance

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The Accounting & Financial Women's Alliance promotes the professional growth of women in accounting and finance. Members of the association benefit from opportunities to connect with colleagues, advance their careers, and become industry leaders. For 80 years, the organization has proudly upheld its mission to enable women in all accounting and related fields to achieve their full potential and to contribute to their profession. Visit [www.afwa.org](http://www.afwa.org) for more information.



Strategic communication firm Wilson-Taylor Associates, Inc., has been designing and managing national research projects that measure the progress of women in the workplace since 1998. Its methodology pivots on factors proven to remove barriers so that women can fully participate in driving business results. Led by veteran business journalist Joanne Cleaver, its current and past clients include Women in Cable Telecommunications, the Women's Transportation Seminar, the Alliance for Workplace Excellence, SitterCity, and many others. Please see Wilson-Taylor's portfolio of work at [www.wilson-taylorassoc.com](http://www.wilson-taylorassoc.com)

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