

2018 CPA and Advisory Firm Diversity Demographics

Women of Color by Job Position (%)

	2018
Women on Management Committee	10
Women Partners and Principals	9
Women Directors	15
Women Senior Managers	17
Women Managers	18
Women Supervisors/Senior Staff	26
Women Associates	28
Women New Hires	33
Women Full-Time U.S. Employees	23

Note: Total employees: 33,370. Accounting MOVE Project survey data collected December 2017–March 2018 with additional firm data added November 2018.

skills as instrumental, compared to 69% of male advisers.

A survey of African Americans in accounting released in 2018 by the Howard University School of Business found that the top three skills for career success are self-confidence, soft-skills training, and competence. When the school asked the same questions 12 years ago, it found that competence was the most important factor, followed by self-confidence, and soft-skills training.

What has not changed since 2006 is that African-American accountants still feel that they must work twice as hard to receive the same recognition as their white counterparts. African-American women face an additional barrier: their am-

bition is often misunderstood by colleagues and managers. Managers and colleagues who are aware of their own gut reactions can learn to take a moment to level-set their responses and thus become effective advocates, sponsors, and mentors.

Advocate for advocates

Many of these dynamics converged as Pat Drolet built her Washington, D.C., firm in 1995. The firm of 13 employees almost perfectly mirrored the diverse demographics of the area when Drolet was approached by Peter Reilly, managing partner of Councilor, Buchanan & Mitchell, PC, based in Bethesda, Md. He was on a mission to both grow and diversify by acquisition. Adding Drolet’s firm would propel both goals.

“We were too pale, stale, and male,” says Reilly. Drolet’s success in building a firm of diverse professionals automatically made her an authority on a topic that clearly had evaded CBM’s senior leaders. “Pat was part of how we realigned the culture at the top to show we bought into the personal investment of mentoring and sponsorship,” says Reilly.

Drolet wasn’t an easy sell. “When I came to this firm four years ago, it was mostly male, mostly white. It threw me off. Did I want to merge my firm into a firm where the leadership was all-white, all male?” she recalls. “But I could see that Pete thought that was a problem. They weren’t able to home-grow diversity.”

The CBM partners took it to heart when Drolet pointed out that they already were making judgment calls about talent. Their responsibility was to apply their judgment in a different way, to recognize a greater spectrum of emerging talent—not to apply an additional layer of

supposedly bloodless metrics to justify promoting nontraditional candidates. "You have to be open-minded to let talent bloom, and sometimes you have to push it along a little," says Drolet.

Virtuous cycle

Firms that invest in a nucleus of diversity quickly find that diversity can fuel itself to build momentum. At CBM, professionals plot their career moves via Project ClearPath, a career planning tool that outlines next steps and matches associates with mentors. Because women comprise 45% of its senior leadership, and with a healthy proportion of minority leaders, rising leaders are matched with diverse mentors and sponsors by default. Diverse succession planning pivots on strong relationships across gender, racial, and identity lines, says Reilly.

"The best part is, when you find diverse talent, their networks often lead to more diverse talent," says Lisa Preston, Grant Thornton's senior director of people and culture for the firm's advisory service line. The combination of diverse perspectives with cultural fit quickly becomes the standard for evaluating candidates. "Supporting the culture becomes part of the incentive for referrals and recruiting," she says. "We are finding people who embody our values because every person at Grant Thornton becomes an advocate for our culture."

All Together

Employee affinity groups create centers of gravity for growth

Where will the talent come from?

Three years ago, as senior leaders at Milwaukee, Wis.-based Wipfli LLP analyzed the talent implications of its fastest-growing lines of business and locations, it became clear that they had diverse talent but needed more. "The business case for diversity and inclusion is even more in the forefront," says Maureen Pistone, chief human officer.

The firm created a national council of partners and talent leaders in October 2018 to guide the overall effort. It decided to focus on employee resource groups, measures and metrics, education and strategic recruitment and retention. The goal is to consciously cultivate a firmwide culture of inclusion.

Meanwhile, Wipfli is examining what diversity metrics are most meaningful for its expected growth and how affinity groups can add to the "gravitational pull" that attracts and keeps a wide range of professionals. Pistone says that the new council is exploring how it can drive results in each of its focus areas, and how those results shape daily culture.

Do affinity groups divide or unite employees?

As firms experiment with a variety of approaches, some consultants argue that "signature initiatives" launched by executives as legacy projects can sap time, attention and energy from the problems they intend to solve. But groups that focus their missions on projects and