



IowaCPA

November 2025

*Newsletter from the Iowa
Society of CPAs, your primary
source for profession-related
information*

NAVIGATING CHANGE

ISCPA CEO Carrie Steffen recounts important topics from fall meeting

Iowa Society of CPAs ... Advancing the professional success of our members

ISCPA Career Center: your can't-miss resource

Your career search is about to become a lot more efficient with the new and improved Career Center.

ISCPA's Career Center available on our website is full of great resources and opportunities. Since our spring launch of this important member benefit, more career tools have been added.

Sign into your account at **careers.iacpa.org**.

Job seekers will find the following benefits:

- Simple sign-on with ISCPA member credentials on desktop and mobile.
- Set up job alerts directly from the search page to receive email notifications when a posted position is a match.
- Post resumes, request references and build a job seeker profile to make it easy for employers to approach job seekers with relevant job opportunities.
- Maintain confidentiality by blocking your resume from specific organizations.
- Find articles, career advice, interview tips and offer analysis in the career resources.

Companies posting job openings now have more access to qualified candidates and can look forward to the following:

- Discount job package pricing for ISCPA members.
- Visibility boosts - feature company logo on the career center homepage, send job alerts directly to candidates, and more.
- Send job postings to all sites like ZipRecruiter and LinkedIn with Partner Network.

Whether you're a company searching for a highly skilled candidate, or a highly qualified professional looking for your next opportunity, the Career Center is your one-stop-shop for recruiting and job searches.

A message from your board

The ISCPA board of directors met on Sept. 26, 2025. Decisions and activities are listed below.

- Approved consent agenda items including minutes of the April 25, 2025 meeting of the board and the Aug. 26, 2025 meeting of the executive committee.
- Received a report from ISCPA legislative counsel, Brad Epperly.
- Approved a legislative advocacy agenda and counsel retainer for the 2026 legislative session.
- Received audit report and tax returns summary for the fiscal year ended April 30, 2025 from Jacob Ohnmacht, CPA, of Creative Planning.
- Marta Zaniewski, Managing Director of State Regulatory & Profession Matters, Deloitte and Iowa Liaison for The Accountant's Coalition (TAC) provided an update on mobility, alternative practice structure (APS), and other activities of importance.
- Received a report from Chair Rick Tiwald.
- Received a report on behalf of Jim Smith, the AICPA representative, providing a summary of the AICPA Council Meeting held in May.
- Next scheduled meeting is Dec. 5, 2025.

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Cover photo by Britt Fowler: Des Moines, Iowa

IDR provides updates on tax modernization, fraud prevention, filing challenges

By Grant Seuferer, ISCPA Taxation Committee

The ISCPA Taxation Committee held its annual liaison meeting with the Iowa Department of Revenue (IDR) on Aug. 28. This meeting is a chance for committee members to ask questions and hear updates from IDR representatives on various projects or concerns.

Taxation Committee Chair, Brandon Pratt, facilitated the discussion. The IDR was well represented by a four-person panel, consisting of Policy Director Ben Clough, Legislative Liaison Tyler Ackerman, Policy Director Kurt Konek, and Director Mary Mosiman.

Final phase of tax system modernization

IDR representatives announced that the final phase of Iowa's multi-year tax system modernization project is scheduled to go live in mid-November. This phase will primarily focus on streamlining processes related to alcohol and lottery licensing, tobacco taxes and electronic filing enhancements.

The first of four rollouts occurred in November 2021 and included sales and use, withholding, fuel and local option taxes. The second rollout occurred in November 2022 and concerned business income taxes including corporations, pass-through entities and franchise taxes. The third rollout occurred November 2023 and addressed individual taxation. The fourth rollout occurred in November 2024 and

impacted utility replacement tax, tobacco and alcohol excise tax and moneys and credits tax returns. The department expressed its appreciation for the ISCPA Taxation Committee's consistent feedback and collaboration throughout the modernization process.

Refund turnaround time success during 2024 tax season

Mary Mosiman shared impressive statistics from the 2024 tax season, during which over 1.5 million returns were processed and approximately 950,000 refunds were issued, totaling \$679M. The average refund turnaround time this season was 22 days which is a sizable decrease from the historical average of 30 days.

Software and filing challenges

The committee also addressed concerns with software vendors failing to correctly handle tax return attachments, particularly for franchise tax credits. Ben from IDR noted that while some software providers support necessary forms, others do not, creating filing complications. He encouraged practitioners to request filing exceptions when necessary, though these can result in penalties. The department is actively working with software vendors to resolve these issues.

Cybersecurity

In light of increasing cybersecurity threats, IDR highlighted the importance of strong security measures for

CPA firms, including firewalls, password requirements, and dual-factor authentication. From an IDR perspective, the department implemented several measures which helped prevent thousands of fraudulent filing and identity theft attempts. It is estimated these measures prevented disbursement of \$1.3M of fraudulent refund claims.

Retirement income exclusion

Department representatives answered committee members' questions regarding Iowa's retirement income exclusion. It was clarified that the exclusion is only eligible for individuals, not for trusts or estates. If the income is included on Schedule K-1 due to trust distributions, the income retains its character and the ultimate recipient would be eligible for the exclusion if that individual qualifies. On the tax year 2025 Iowa Schedule K-1, there will be a box to enter retirement income to ensure it is properly tracked. Finally, the department confirmed that anyone filing an Iowa tax return is eligible to claim the exclusion, including non-residents.

The Taxation Committee will hold its next IDR liaison meeting next summer.



Grant Seuferer is a CPA and tax senior manager at Deloitte Tax LLP in Des Moines. He has been an ISCPA member since 2016.

Navigating change

Insights and action from the AICPA Fall Council and CPA/SEA meeting

By Carrie Steffen, ISCPA CEO

If there is one theme that has reverberated throughout the CPA profession, it's that the pace of change will never be slower than it is today. Iowa's CPA practitioners, educators, students, advocates and champions of the profession are at the forefront of that transformation — from alternative licensure pathways to AI legislation and assuring economic sustainability. During October's AICPA Fall Council and CPA Society Executives Association meetings held in Denver, ISCPA leaders joined colleagues from across the country to discuss how state societies can lead through this evolution while protecting the CPA license and promoting the value of the profession.

AICPA President and CEO Mark Koziel noted that, "Positivity about the profession is up to us." And as a leader, I take that to heart. To be clear I'm not promoting that we turn a blind eye to challenges, but instead we take a solutions-oriented approach in talking about them. That idea carried throughout the discussions as state leaders shared what's working, what's worrying, and where collaboration is most critical. Here is a summary of major topics and how the ISCPA serves as a conduit in Iowa:

Shaping the future of licensure and mobility

As of October, 22 states have passed legislation creating alternative CPA licensure pathways. That number continues to grow. The key challenge now is ensuring these new routes promote accessibility while also preserving mobility. Now that states, including Iowa, are moving into the rules-making stage, it's imperative that we're attentive to protecting mobility as a practice privilege through

adherence to Uniform Accountancy Act (UAA) principles, substantial equivalency and including safe harbor language.

ISCPA is also closely monitoring NASBA's work on accreditation standards to ensure Iowa remains aligned and competitive.

Protecting against deregulation threats

Deregulation remains a growing concern, particularly as legislation questioning professional regulation frameworks and challenging states to justify them, surfaces. Over the next few months ISCPA will be working proactively to **strengthen relationships** with Iowa legislators and prepare for the 2026 session — including **Iowa CPA Day at the Capitol** on Jan. 21, 2026.

CPE, competency, and the value of lifelong learning

ISCPA is reinforcing the message that **CPE isn't just a box to check** — it's a public safeguard and a key component of mobility and reciprocity. We've worked diligently in the state of Iowa to ensure not only the efficacy of continuing education but also efficiency in both delivery and reporting. CPE remains the most reliable measure of professional competency and integrity and a critical tenet of the profession.

AI, regulation, and the future of assurance

Artificial intelligence continues to reshape how CPAs serve clients. It continues to create opportunities for efficiency and new possibilities in creating value for the people and organizations we serve. And yet, responsible AI use relies on us as humans to stay in the loop of technology. As was said on more than one occasion during Council, AI is a great starting

A promotional banner for "Iowa CPA Day at the Capitol" set against a dark blue background with a faint image of the Iowa State Capitol building. The text "Iowa CPA" is in orange script, "DAY AT THE" is in white bold sans-serif, and "CAPITOL" is in white bold sans-serif flanked by two orange stars. An orange box on the right contains the text "Save the date! JAN. 21" and "Engage in YOUR profession! Advocacy starts with you. www.iacpa.org/capitol". The ISCPA logo is in the top right corner.

Iowa CPA

DAY AT THE

★ **CAPITOL** ★

Save the date!
JAN. 21

Engage in YOUR profession!
Advocacy starts with you.
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point but still needs human review and verification. But we know that Pandora's Box has been opened. We'll never return to a world without AI, so it's up to us to learn it, collaborate with it and ultimately harness its power for good.

ISCPA offers continuing education, whitepapers, product guides and other resources in our **Knowledge Hub** to help guide you and will also be monitoring Iowa legislation to ensure that innovation can flourish responsibly.

Other notes: AICPA and national updates

- PTET wins are delivering major member value, saving firms and clients significantly.
- ESG and sustainability assurance are here to stay, though standards continue to evolve.
- Digital Audit Solutions (DAS) adoption is growing, with over 20,000 seats helping firms modernize and improve efficiency.
- The Talent Pipeline initiative is expanding into Workforce Development, a broader focus on attracting, retaining, and growing accounting talent.
- ISCPA continues to support adding accounting to STEM, helping build a stronger future workforce.

Moving forward together

ISCPA is focused on these and other priorities in the months ahead and I urge you to consider how you can support the CPA community in Iowa. Where do you see yourself making an impact?

- **Strengthening legislative relationships and advocacy readiness.**
- **Leading in technology and AI adoption.**
- **Championing professional learning and ethics.**
- **Engaging students through outreach, storytelling, and collaboration.**
- Lending financial support to our **education foundation** and our **PAC coffers**.
- Mentoring the next generation of CPA leaders whether in your organization or in another.



Catch a November ISCPA Community Connections

COME JOIN US IN A COMMUNITY NEAR YOU!

There's still a couple chances to join us for **Community Connections**, a town hall-style gathering open to CPAs, accounting students and accounting professionals across Iowa. Connect with peers, share your insights, and learn about ISCPA's key priorities for the coming year. ISCPA CEO Carrie Steffen will provide a Professional Opportunities Update before opening the floor for questions and discussion. Feel free to bring a friend or colleague with you. For planning purposes, we ask that you register yourself and any guests.

This is a great opportunity to gather with your peers and ISCPA leaders. Sign up for your preferred location at www.iacpa.org/cc25.



"I appreciate the ISCPA's commitment to host Community Connections. Engaging with other members is a great way to stay connected and informed about developments in the profession." ISCPA Board of Directors member Jenny McGarry, professor at University of Dubuque.

FREE FOR PARTICIPANTS

Nov. 18 | Decorah | 8:30-10 a.m.

Nov. 19 | Davenport | 8:30-10 a.m.

Health insurance solutions for ISCPA members

It's open enrollment time for this new member benefit!

The Iowa Society of CPAs has partnered with Apollo Health Insurance to provide you with tailored coverage for every stage of your accounting career. This new member benefit offers reliable, flexible, and affordable health coverage designed specifically for the diverse needs of Iowa's accounting professionals.

Discover how you might use Apollo through the following examples.

Small-firm CPA owner “Sarah the Solo Practitioner”

Runs a 1–5 person CPA firm and manages everything from tax prep to business operations. Sarah needs predictable costs and simple benefits administration.

How Sarah uses Apollo Health Insurance:

- *Affordable group coverage:* Offers plans to compete with larger firms during hiring season.
- *Streamlined admin:* Apollo's simplified enrollment and billing reduces back-office burden.
- *Cost stability:* Access to pooled-risk plans helps avoid volatile year-to-year premium jumps.
- *Recruitment advantage:* Health benefits help attract part-time or seasonal tax staff.

Mid-career corporate accountant “Mark the Controller”

Works for a mid-sized Iowa business and handles budgeting, compliance and benefits evaluations. Mark influences employer insurance decisions.

How Mark uses Apollo Health Insurance:

- *Evaluates plan fit:* Compares Apollo's employer coverage options to current offerings for cost savings.
- *Advises leadership:* Provides financial modeling showing Apollo's impact on retention and employee satisfaction.
- *Hybrid/remote workforce:* Identifies plans that accommodate employees living in multiple locations.
- *Compliance confidence:* Appreciates Apollo's transparency for ACA, ERISA, and reporting needs.

Public accounting senior manager or partner “Dana the Practice Leader”

Leads a team within a large Iowa accounting firm. Dana is partially responsible for firm benefits decisions and is often consulted on employee well-being and retention.

How Dana uses Apollo Health Insurance:

- *Improved staff retention:* Offers additional or enhanced coverage to reduce turnover, especially during busy season.
- *Mental health access:* Uses Apollo plans with strong behavioral health benefits for burnout prevention.
- *Competitive compensation:* Positions the firm as “people-first” in recruiting campaigns for new CPAs.
- *Data insights:* Leverages analytics to track benefit utilization and improve employee engagement.

Young CPA/new professional “Alex the Emerging CPA”

Recently certified or is early in their accounting career and prioritizes wellness and financial planning. Alex is salary-conscious and interested in flexible, modern benefits.

How Alex uses Apollo Health Insurance:

- *Affordable premiums:* Chooses budget-friendly plans with good preventative care coverage.
- *Telehealth options:* Relies on remote access for convenience around exam study or travel.
- *Financial security:* Appreciates predictable out-of-pocket costs and HSA-compatible plans.
- *Wellness programs:* Uses incentives like fitness reimbursements or digital wellness resources.

Student or CPA candidate “Mia the Future CPA”

College student, intern, or exam candidate who often has part-time or seasonal accounting roles. Mia might not have reliable coverage from school or family.

How Mia uses Apollo Health Insurance:

- *Affordable individual coverage:* Offers lower-cost options compared to campus plans.
- *Short-term coverage:* Helpful during internship periods or between life transitions.
- *Telehealth:* Ideal for students balancing work, school and travel.
- *Prevention focus:* Access to preventative services without high deductibles.

Retired or near-retirement CPA “Tom the Legacy Member”

Long-time ISCPA member who works part-time or is fully retired. Tom prioritizes stability, predictable costs and supplemental Medicare needs.

How Tom uses Apollo Health Insurance:

- *Medicare supplement options:* Helps fill coverage gaps not included in traditional Medicare.
- *Prescription support:* Access to plans with strong Rx coverage and transparent costs.
- *Ease of use:* Appreciates simple claims support and enrollment guidance.
- *Financial protection:* Values plans that minimize unexpected medical bills on a fixed income.

Nontraditional CPA role “Rachel the Consultant/Fractional CFO”

Works independently with multiple clients. Rachel has fluctuating income and variable workload and needs flexible, portable benefits.

How Rachel uses Apollo Health Insurance:

- *Individual marketplace options:* Gains high-quality coverage without needing a W-2 employer.
- *HSA-eligible plans:* Ideal for tax-savvy professionals managing self-employment income.
- *Telehealth and nationwide networks:* Supports her travel-heavy consulting lifestyle.
- *Business expense optimization:* Deductions for premiums and HSAs improve her tax strategy.

Rural practitioner “Ben the Community CPA”

Serves a tight-knit rural community in Iowa, often the

only CPA for miles. His clients trust him not only for their financial health but for guidance across many aspects of life — from taxes and retirement to healthcare planning.

How Ben uses Apollo Health Insurance:

- *Trusted partnership:* As one of the few professionals his clients rely on for major life decisions, Ben trusts Apollo to deliver the same integrity and expertise he strives to provide in his own work.
- *Client advocacy:* Recommends Apollo to clients struggling with rising healthcare costs, affordability gaps, or confusion around the ACA — ensuring they have a true expert in their corner.
- *Comprehensive support:* Relies on Apollo for both his firm’s benefits and for his clients’ individual and family coverage, knowing that health

insurance now ranks among the top three expenses in most household budgets.

- *Community impact:* By partnering with Apollo, Ben helps his community access quality care options that keep families healthy, businesses stable and local economies strong.

Connect with Apollo

Open enrollment runs through Jan. 15. Now is the time to secure coverage for 2026. Start the conversation today. Call our dedicated Apollo and ISCPA line: (515) 608-5442 or visit the **website link**.



Open Enrollment is here!
Discover **exclusive**
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professionals!

Get insured today!

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Apollo
Health Insurance

Perfect season to invest in future CPAs

Invest in tomorrow's accounting leaders today



Each year, the **Iowa CPA Education Foundation** awards scholarships to Iowa college accounting students who have committed to taking the CPA exam in Iowa. These scholarships provide vital encouragement and financial support to

students who aspire to join the accounting profession and make a difference in their communities.

As the giving season approaches, now is the perfect time to include the Iowa CPA Education Foundation in your year-end charitable plans. Your gift supports students who are working hard to meet the rigorous requirements of the CPA exam while balancing academic and personal responsibilities. These scholarships often mean the difference between delaying or advancing their professional goals.

Every gift counts

There is no minimum contribution required when giving to the Iowa CPA Education Foundation. Whether it's \$25 or \$2,500, every donation helps the foundation grow. Larger contributions and benchmark donor levels are recognized by the Iowa Society of CPAs, but every contribution,

regardless of size, makes a real difference.

Administered by the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines, the Iowa CPA Education Foundation offers an opportunity for everyone in the profession to make a lasting impact.

Giving back

By donating to the Iowa CPA Education Foundation, you are helping to ensure that today's students become tomorrow's successful CPAs. To make a contribution or to learn more about donor recognition levels, tax benefits and available deductions, visit www.iacpa.org/foundation.

Now is the time to act. Join your fellow CPAs in giving back to a profession that continues to serve you well and is a cornerstone of Iowa's economic success. Support the Iowa CPA Education Foundation today and help support a strong future for the CPA profession.



CLASSIFIEDS

IOWA PRACTICES FOR SALE: Gross revenues shown.

- NW Central Iowa EA Tax & Accounting Practice-\$718,000
- Des Moines, IA Tax & Accounting Practice-\$700,000
- Lee County IA Tax & Accounting Practice-\$416,000
- Suburb of Des Moines EA Tax & Accounting Practice-\$823,000

- Sioux City, IA Tax Practice-\$220,000
- Quad Cities Area CPA Practice-\$780,000
- Southeastern Iowa CPA Practice-\$1,000,000
- Cedar Rapids/Waterloo Area CPA Practice-\$944,000

For more information call Trent Holmes 1 (800) 397-0249 or visit www.APS.net.

Advocacy win for the profession

In May and June, in partnership with AICPA and other state societies, ISCPA encouraged members to contact Congressional representatives in Washington to voice opposition to the targeting of PTET SALT deductions for specified service trades and businesses including accounting firms.

The final version of H.R. 1, the tax law commonly referred to as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act or OBBBA, delivered a powerful message: Pass-through entities (PTEs) matter, and they deserve fair treatment under the tax code.

While there's been a lot of attention to what made it into the bill, the most consequential change may be what was left out. Proposals from both the House and Senate sought to limit or eliminate the ability of PTEs to deduct state and local taxes (SALT). Thanks to relentless advocacy from the AICPA and CPA state societies across 53 states and jurisdictions, those proposals were ultimately excluded - saving PTEs and their owners an estimated \$928 billion over 10 years.

The cost of what could have been

Breaking down the numbers:

	HOUSE SALT PROPOSAL	SENATE SALT PROPOSAL	FINAL BILL
Individual SALT limit	\$30K/\$15K	\$10K/\$5K	\$40K/\$20K (indexed for inflation)
PTE SALT treatment	Eligible only if 75% of income derived from qualified trade or business	Limited to greater of \$40K or 50% of PTET	No limitation
Impact	All Specified Service Trade or Business providers (SSTBs) excluded	All PTEs limited	No change
Estimated costs to taxpayers over 10 years	\$786B	\$37B	-\$142B

The difference between the House proposal and the final bill is a staggering \$928 billion in savings for PTEs and their owners.

Why this matters for CPAs

This outcome isn't just a win for tax fairness. It's a win for the profession, and here's why:

- Averted SSTB expansion - Service providers, which include, but are not limited to, CPAs, attorneys, physicians, veterinarians, pharmacists, etc., have been unfairly targeted by the SSTB distinction, and the final bill prevented the expansion of SSTBs in the Code preserving parity for these professionals.
- Less complexity in the Tax Code - The final bill discarded new concepts, including specified taxes, excepted taxes and substitute payments.
- Eliminated tax unfairness - Denying PTEs the same SALT deduction afforded to corporations lacks justification and undermines tax fairness.
- Time savings for CPAs - With fewer new SALT rules to interpret and implement, CPAs can focus more on strategic client engagement.
- Tax certainty - Although allowance of the PTET SALT deduction remained questionable after the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA), the various drafts of H.R. 1 validate Congress's intent in allowing PTEs to claim the SALT deduction.
- Higher individual SALT limits - The individual SALT cap has been raised to \$40K, indexed for inflation through 2030.

This outcome is a powerful reminder of the impact our profession can have when we speak with one voice. Advocacy efforts not only protected PTEs but also reinforced the value CPAs bring to the tax system and the economy.

Source: AICPA-CIMA.com

MEET OUR MEMBERS

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

YOHALI SARAH ILUNGA

SCHOOL: Drake University, double major in accounting and finance

EXPECTED GRADUATION DATE: December 2026

HOMETOWN: Born in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and raised in Cape Town, South Africa; West Des Moines is now home.



What I wanted to be when I grew up: A medical doctor.

My inspiration to become a CPA comes from: My curiosity about how businesses operate. Being able to understand and interpret financial statements is a skill that requires an advanced level of thinking.

If I weren't (becoming) a CPA, you might find me:

As a radio personality. When I was growing up, there'd be days when the radio presenter would say things that would have me bursting out in laughter. I'm a person who laughs a lot, and I love to make others laugh, too.

How has being a member of ISCPA helped you?

Being a member of the ISCPA, and especially being guided by Director of Membership Lindsey Haley, has taught me that there is so much more to this profession than I could have ever fathomed. I'm presented with many opportunities to engage with individuals at different levels in the field, and I get to hear about their experiences firsthand.

What are some of the biggest changes you expect for the profession? I'm expecting an integration of technology with the skills that we have as accountants. I personally don't see CPAs being replaced by AI; however, it could be utilized to make our work more efficient.

What is your favorite thing about your educational experience? I'm presented with the opportunity to collaborate and learn with students from various backgrounds.

People don't know this about me, but: I am a Sunday school teacher at St. Theresa Catholic Church.

Your message for students considering a career as a CPA: You get out what you put in. You can receive advice from the best CPA you've ever come across, however, if you don't implement what is being taught/advised to you, you won't reap the rewards.

Tell us some of your philosophies toward work and life. If you die today, you'll be replaced at work before you're buried; so, take good care of your health.

What influences you in life and in work? Knowing that it's pointless competing with the person next to me, because we're running a different marathon in life.

Have you had mentors help you along the way?

My family - who are my biggest supporters, my priests Fr. Rapheal Assamah and Fr. Daniel Adjei - who ensure that I stay true to my faith and myself, Professor Jimmy Senteza, Professor Kelley Ellis, Professor Nina Roussow, Professor Joyce Njoroge, Professor Claire Muselman, Professor Nana Coleman, and Ardis Kelley.

Special talent: I speak four languages: English, Afrikaans, Swahili and Lingala.

Favorite quote: Psalm 20:4, "For the Lord will give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed."

Best advice I've received: To be assertive and go after the things I'd like to achieve, because they won't be handed to me on a silver platter (from the headmaster of Trafalgar High School, Mrs. Southgate).

Three words that describe me best: Intentional, elegant, determined

Favorite season: Fall

I never leave home without: A bottle of water, a pocket mirror and lip balm

Favorite food: Hawaiian sweet potato and lettuce

Book I'm currently reading: "How Successful People Think" by John C. Maxwell

Building a future-ready workplace

Attracting, engaging and retaining younger talent

By Alexandria A. Romero, CPA, MPAcc, Galasso Learning Solutions

As the accounting profession continues to evolve amid changing expectations, emerging technologies and shifting demographics, one priority stands at the forefront: building a workplace that not only attracts younger talent but also keeps them engaged and inspired for the long haul.

Firms and finance departments alike are realizing that traditional pathways, rigid expectations and outdated workplace norms are no longer sustainable in an environment where younger professionals are seeking meaningful work, transparent leadership and flexible structures. Creating a future-ready workplace requires more than just adjusting policies, it demands a deliberate cultural shift rooted in respect, development and adaptability.

Understand what younger talent values

Younger professionals bring with them a strong desire for purpose, connection and progress. They are driven not only by professional success, but by the ability to contribute meaningfully to their teams, communities and the broader mission of their organizations.

This generation is asking for clarity, flexibility and growth. That means organizations must reframe the conversation from “How can they fit into our model?” to “How can we evolve our model to better support their potential?”

It all starts with listening, genuinely and consistently. When younger team members raise concerns about being overworked, underpaid or unappreciated, these sentiments should not be viewed as complaints but as early indicators

of disengagement. These are signals that something must shift.

Create a culture of belonging

One of the most powerful tools for retention is fostering a true sense of belonging. This goes beyond social connection; it’s about building a workplace where individuals feel safe to share ideas, challenge and grow. It’s about honoring differences in backgrounds, lived experiences and communication styles. It’s also about employees seeing themselves reflected in the company’s values and leadership practices.



Ways to strengthen belonging in the workplace include the following:

- *Empathetic leadership:* Invite feedback and engage in active listening. Be aware of nonverbal signals and listen without immediately offering solutions. Validate lived experiences without defensiveness.
- *Cultural awareness:* Learn about and celebrate team members’ diverse backgrounds, work styles and traditions. Avoid assumptions; ask respectful questions.
- *Strong onboarding programs:* First impressions matter. A thorough and welcoming onboarding process that explains the “why” behind procedures helps build early connection and confidence.

Lead with emotional intelligence

Technical expertise alone is no longer enough. Successful leaders must be emotionally intelligent mentors and communicators. Younger professionals thrive under leaders who are self-aware, transparent and people focused.

Key elements of emotional intelligence that foster retention and engagement include the following:

- *Self-awareness:* Understand your own emotional triggers, strengths and communication tendencies.
- *Adaptability:* Recognize when the environment has changed and respond appropriately rather than rigidly.
- *Empathy:* Demonstrate genuine concern for others’ experiences. Respond with understanding, not judgment.
- *Relational communication:* Foster strong interpersonal skills by providing meaningful feedback, celebrating successes and resolving conflict with integrity.

In today’s hybrid and high-paced work environments, boundaries are equally important. The best leaders are those who respect time off, promote work-life integration and demonstrate through actions that checking in on employees’ wellbeing is not optional, it is expected.

Enhance the employee experience

Younger professionals are drawn to organizations that tell a clear and motivating story, one that reflects vision, values and opportunity.

To build an employee experience that retains and energizes, use

Continued on page 12

the following tactics:

- *Provide flexibility.* Allow team members to have input in when and where they work, with clear hybrid policies that reduce ambiguity and build trust.

Manage workload thoughtfully.

Avoid burnout by smoothing peaks in the workload and distributing engaging, skill-building assignments throughout the year.

Clarify growth paths. Implement role-specific competency frameworks so individuals know what is needed to advance and how success will be measured. Define both technical and leadership growth tracks.

Invest in mentorship. Pair

newer team members with experienced professionals to transfer institutional knowledge, strengthen your talent pipeline and bridge generational perspectives.

Embed career development into your organization's framework

Younger professionals want to feel that they are moving toward something meaningful. A clear and personalized development framework can be a deciding factor in whether someone stays or leaves.

Start with a structured onboarding plan that outlines expectations for the first 30, 60 and 90 days. From there, design professional growth plans that align individual goals with organizational needs. These plans might include stretch assignments, cross-training or projects to lead.

Celebrate progress often. Milestone achievements, whether big or small, deserve recognition. Whether it is a team announcement, a handwritten note or a meaningful one-on-one conversation, these moments affirm that growth matters.

Leadership development should also be an intentional offering. Consider building internal leadership programs that prepare individuals for future roles, clearly explain what is needed to become a manager, partner or director, and provide feedback loops along the way. Transparency around advancement is key to retaining high performers.

Measure progress and impact

Building a future-ready workplace is an ongoing journey, not a checklist. To evaluate progress, organizations should implement performance indicators that reflect not only operational efficiency, but cultural health.

Consider the following metrics:

- Retention rates among employees with zero to five

years of tenure

- Engagement and satisfaction surveys with actionable follow-ups
- Promotion and development data segmented by level and role
- Mentorship program participation and effectiveness ratings
- Onboarding success indicators, such as time to confidence or autonomy

These data points tell a broader story about how well your culture is supporting talent and where gaps may exist. The goal is not to be perfect but to be intentional. When you treat your workplace culture as a strategic asset, you invest in something that compounds over time.

Final thoughts

Attracting, engaging and retaining younger professionals is not just a staffing strategy, it's a leadership imperative. The next generation of CPAs are asking important questions about purpose, balance and clarity around how they can make a meaningful impact.

As leaders, decision-makers and mentors, we are uniquely positioned to shape a future where people feel seen, supported and motivated to stay. Let's meet this moment with open minds and thoughtful action, not only adapt to what is ahead, but to help define it.

Alexandria A. Romero, CPA, MPAcc, is the government and leadership training facilitator at Galasso Learning Solutions and can be reached at alex@galassolearningsolutions.com.

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High-impact automation opportunities for modern accounting firms

By Thomas G. Stephens, Jr., CPA, CITP, CGMA

Accounting firms are facing increasing pressure to streamline their operations, reduce manual workloads, and enhance client service. What are your high-impact automation opportunities? With a focus on professional education and technical training for financial professionals, your firm will be well-positioned to leverage automation to improve efficiency and scalability. Here are three key automation opportunities that can transform internal processes.

Opportunity area: automating client onboarding and document collection

The challenge: Client onboarding is often time-consuming, requiring manual follow-ups for missing documents, data entry, and verification. Many firms encounter delays in gathering tax forms, financial statements, and other essential client data, resulting in workflow bottlenecks. Above all, it wastes time to start an engagement without all needed supporting PBC (Prepared by Client) documentation.

The automation solution: AI-powered client portals with automated reminders and Optical Character Recognition (OCR) can streamline document intake. Clients upload files directly, while automated validation ensures accuracy. Machine learning categorizes and routes documents to the correct workflow without manual intervention. Examples include **Truss**, **Liscio**, **Kipsi**, and **Soraban**.

Why it matters for you: By reducing the time spent chasing documents, there are many advantages. Your firm can accelerate onboarding, improve client satisfaction, and free staff for higher-value advisory work. Automated validation has advantages, also. Validation minimizes errors, ensuring compliance and reducing the need for rework.

Opportunity area: AI-powered financial reporting and analysis

The challenge: Generating financial reports, such as profit and loss statements, balance sheets, and cash flow forecasts, requires the manual consolidation of data from multiple sources. This process is prone to errors and is time-consuming, particularly for firms managing multiple clients with diverse reporting requirements.

The automation solution: AI-driven reporting tools automatically pull data from accounting software, reconcile transactions, and generate standardized reports. Natural Language Processing (NLP) can summarize key financial insights for quick client reviews. There are around 100

reporting tools for QuickBooks alone. Above all, we recommend reporting tools that support more than one platform. Examples include **4ImpactData**, **Clockwork.ai**, **Digits**, and **Jirav**.

Why it matters for you: Automated reporting reduces human error, enabling your firm to deliver faster and more accurate financial insights. This positions the firm as tech-forward, enabling it to provide real-time financial intelligence.

Opportunity area: intelligent workflow automation for training and compliance

The challenge: Your firm needs CPE training for accounting professionals. But managing course registrations, attendance tracking, and certification compliance manually is inefficient. Missed deadlines or incomplete records can create compliance risks. Above all, much free CPE is simply sales pitches for products or services with little strategic value.

The automation solution: AI-driven learning management systems (LMS) automate enrollment, track attendance, and issue certificates upon completion. Chatbots manage FAQs, while predictive analytics flag at-risk participants who may need additional support.

Why it matters for you: Automating training workflows ensures seamless compliance, reduces administrative overhead, and enhances the learning experience for attendees. This allows your firm to scale training programs without increasing staff workload.

Conclusion

For accounting firms, automation is not just about cutting costs. It unlocks efficiency, reduces errors, and delivers better client experiences. In addition to the suggestions above, what other high-impact automation opportunities are there for your firm? By focusing on document intake, financial reporting, and training workflows, firms can position themselves as leaders in the next wave of accounting innovation. The question is not whether to automate, but where to start.

Tommy is a shareholder of K2 Enterprises. At K2, Tommy focuses on creating and delivering content and is responsible for many Firm management and marketing functions. You can reach him at tommy@k2e.com or learn more about K2 Enterprises at www.k2e.com.

Don't miss K2's Excel Conference

Take your Excel skills from good to great! **K2's Excel Conference** is a full day of power-packed training designed specifically for accounting and finance professionals looking to sharpen their Excel skills. This virtual conference on Dec. 3 is an engaging, hands-on learning experience that will help you maximize one of your most valuable tools.

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From Excel enthusiasts to advanced users, this conference delivers techniques to streamline workflows, save time, and enhance reporting and analytics. **Register** by Nov. 19 to secure early-bird pricing.

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NOV. 20-21	Fall Federal Tax Summit (Cedar Rapids)
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DEC. 12	Tax Forms Boot Camp: LLCs, Partnerships and S Corporations
DEC. 15	Fiduciary Income Tax Returns-Form 1041 Workshop with Filled-in Forms
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JAN. 13, 2026	Federal Tax Update: Individual and Business Current Developments

As potential future tax updates are released, ISCPA will be your go-to source for the latest news and developments. Visit our **online CPE catalog** often for the latest learning opportunities.

Get ready: the One Big Beautiful Bill Act brings big changes

Signed into law on July 4, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), also known as H.R. 1, is sweeping tax legislation that permanently extends many provisions of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act while introducing new tax breaks and reporting requirements across both individual and business tax law.

The OBBBA brings a wave of compliance-driven changes and strategic planning opportunities that tax professionals must be ready to navigate. This landmark legislation represents one of the most significant overhauls to tax policy in recent years, impacting tax planning compliance and advisory services across the profession.

Professionals who gain an early understanding of the new rules will be best positioned to guide their clients confidently through the 2025 tax year and beyond.

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The countdown is on for the new Quality Management (QM) Standards becoming effective Dec.15, 2025.

These changes usher in a shift for CPA firms nationwide, replacing traditional quality control systems with a proactive, risk-based approach - tailored to each firm's unique services and operations.

This isn't just another compliance update. The new framework requires firms to identify and respond to their specific quality risks, implement ongoing monitoring and remediation, and ensure leadership actively drives a culture of quality throughout the organization.

With the effective date fast approaching, firms should be finalizing their plans now by:

- Determining how the QM standards affect your firm's engagements.
- Building a system that fits your firm's risks and size.
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Taking action today helps ensure compliance and strengthens your firm's integrity and reputation.

For detailed guidance and resources, visit www.iacpa.org/qms

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Members in the news

Congratulations to our members who are reaching new milestones in their careers! We're thrilled to celebrate your recent promotions, new positions, and well-deserved recognitions.

Lauren Bever has been hired by American Equity, Des Moines, as senior manager of investment accounting.

Payton Brecht, Forvis Mazars, West Des Moines, has been promoted to senior audit manager.

Chitunga Crandall has been hired by American Equity Investment, Des Moines, as financial reporting and accounting, STAT.

Emily DeBoer, Forvis Mazars, West Des Moines, has been promoted to senior audit manager.

Lauren Dostal, Creative Planning LLC, Waterloo, has been promoted to audit senior.

Michelle Hutson, BCC Advisers, Des Moines, has been promoted to manager.

Michael Kern, KPMG LLP, Des Moines, has been promoted to managing director, audit.

Jay Korf, Forvis Mazars, West Des Moines, has been promoted to senior audit associate II.

Joe Lynn, Forvis Mazars, West Des Moines, has been promoted to director.

Tom Mangan, Sukup Manufacturing Co, Sheffield, has been promoted to president and CEO.

Jessica Olson has been hired by Laird Law Firm, Clear Lake, as CPA.

Connor Robson, KPMG LLP, Des Moines, has been promoted to manager, audit.

Rachel Ruplinger, KPMG LLP, Des Moines, has been promoted to managing director, audit.

Jenna Siberz, KPMG LLP, Des Moines, has been promoted to partner, audit.

Amber Thomas has been hired by UFG Insurance, Cedar Rapids, as vice president of internal audit.

Sydney Wilwert, KPMG LLP, Des Moines, has been promoted to senior manager, audit.

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