

The Top People in Accounting – 2020

Each year as part of the Top 100 Most Influential People in Accounting list, *Accounting Today* asks candidates for the list to name who they think are the most influential people in the field, and here they are, ranked by the number of votes they received from the 137 candidates.

No. 13: Charles Grassley (tie)



The Republican senator and president pro tempore was named influential for his role in driving the tax legislation and regulatory changes that impact CPAs and their clients.

No. 13: William Duhnke (tie)



With the audit landscape rapidly evolving, the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board chair is instrumental in overseeing this "revolutionary change in how we view audits and how they are performed," as one T100 candidate noted. Additionally, as he took leadership during a period of challenging transition within the board itself in 2018, "since then, he has done much to set the organization back on course," according to another candidate.

No. 12: Jim Bourke



Bourke was praised for his thoughtful leadership, and for energetically setting an example of the kind of tech-forward practitioner the profession requires. Simply put, as one T100 candidate did, the Withum managing director is one of "the most visible thought leader helping firms transform the way they view and execute technology strategies."

No. 10: President-elect Joe Biden (tie)



Drew Angerer/Getty Images

While the presidential race had yet to be decided at the time of collecting T100 responses, many candidates named the eventual president-elect as one of the profession's most influential because of his role in overseeing tax policy, regulation, and other economic drivers like the response to and treatment for the coronavirus pandemic. "Whoever is president for the next four years will have a big impact on whether the country follows the same course or charts a new one," as one candidate concluded.

No. 10: Ron Baker (tie)



As the guru for value pricing, Baker's wisdom was even more pertinent in a year firms felt more pressure to offer more advisory-level services. As one candidate noted: "The man [is] single-handedly driving accountants to stop billing by the hour; what else can you say."

No. 8: Richard Jones (tie)



The timing of Jones assuming the role of Financial Accounting Standards Board chair earlier this year was noted many times over by T100 candidates who mentioned his influence at a critical juncture for financial reporting standards and stakeholder engagement. They also endorsed him as being more than up for the task, though that won't stop Jones' fellow influencers from closely following his tenure. According to one, "I am keenly looking forward to how he guides FASB, from the topics he puts on FASB's agenda to how FASB improves and simplifies financial reporting standards for both public and private companies."

No. 8: Sue Coffey (tie)



Coffey was oft-mentioned for her role in leading the new CPA Evolution model for CPA licensure and the Dynamic Audit Solutions project that promises to revolutionize audits. In addition to these AICPA initiatives, she also continues to lead the way in professional standards, audit and assurance reporting, professional ethics, practice monitoring and audit quality standards, ever widening her sphere of impact, according to one candidate: "Her influence on the profession is just huge and it extends globally."

No. 7: Jennifer Wilson



Wilson is, according to one candidate, "a brilliant, talented, beacon of light who is never afraid to say exactly what needs to be said in every situation." Her advice is so dependable, according to another candidate, firms "expect Jennifer to have answers to today's most pressing concerns" as she helps them "strategically and tactically move to the future."

No. 6: Charles Rettig



Andrew Harrer/Bloomberg

As Rettig continues to modernize and reform the Internal Revenue Service through initiatives like the Taxpayer First Act, he also "has an obligation to navigate the IRS through the pandemic-related challenges, including the significant service and technology challenges, that impact CPAs every day," according to one T100 candidate.

No. 5: Allan Koltin



Deemed a "world-class management consultant and market-maker" by a fellow T100 candidate, it's more specifically his prolific work in accounting mergers and acquisitions that earned him so many mentions. According to another candidate, "he has done more than anyone related to influencing the M&A space."

No. 4: Erik Asgeirsson



Asgeirsson was named for not only his wide platform in leading CPA.com but how he uses it, leading the need for transformation in embracing technology and his regular updates during the pandemic. His role in developing the Dynamic Audit Solution platform alongside Coffey was also noted, along with his role, as one candidate put it, "bringing great minds together to shape the industry."

No. 3: Kimberly Ellison-Taylor



Many candidates named Kimberly Ellison-Taylor as influential for her work as a “tireless advocate” to promote diversity, inclusion and needed change in the profession, even after her tenure as AICPA chair, and as a continued representative for the industry side of the profession in her role as an Oracle executive.

No. 2: Tom Hood



Tom Hood, retained his position of influence, again getting the second-most votes for his role as “the flagbearer of accountants’ well-being, success, and progress,” according to one T100 voter. Innovation was the word most used in describing the MACPA leader’s impact on the profession, while one fellow influencer mentioned the fact that Maryland’s governor tapped Hood to serve on his COVID-19 task force as yet another reason he is an “unstoppable force.”

No. 1: Barry Melancon



Melancon once again was voted far and away the most influential person in the profession by this year’s T100 candidates, and for reasons beyond his 25-year role at the helm of the AICPA. Many cited his vision in naming him the person of greatest influence, particularly his eye toward the future for the profession as a whole, while many also hailed his pragmatism, advocacy and genuine caring for the community he presides over. His guidance in the pandemic, driving for PPP and providing other resources, was also lauded. “When Barry speaks, people listen,” as one T100 candidate put it. “They better listen because almost every time he speaks, it’s about a critically important issue that will impact firms’ survival.” In fact, his warnings of disruption over the years have been so prophetic, especially pertaining to 2020, according to another candidate, “He should be saying ‘I told you so.’”