













































**Table 2: Differences in Women Entrepreneurs by Growth Strategies<sup>17</sup>**

	<b>High-Growth Strategy</b>	<b>Moderate-Growth Strategy</b>
<b>Growth motivations</b>	Desire to be rich, challenge, prove self, happiness, satisfaction, more profits	Sustainable income, family financial security
<b>Characteristics of growth aspirations</b>	Motivated by the challenge, competitive, goal-oriented	Control growth at levels consistent with life styles and family needs
<b>Personal implications</b>	Satisfaction of work in their life, strongly identify business as extension of one's self-concept	A tool for income substitution, financial security, and accommodating other life priorities
<b>Attitude toward debt</b>	Tool to achieving their end goal	Avoid external funding to grow the business, assume debt only when necessary
<b>Long-term goals/ expectations</b>	Strategically grow business to a good financial point for the purpose of selling for an appreciable capital gain	Growth to culminate with the sale of the business, handing the business over to family, or retaining ownership with passive growth
<b>Obstacles to strategy</b>	Gaining access to "old boys' club," difficult business environment, competitors, personal managerial skills, inability to hire qualified employees	Personal background and training, family responsibilities, access to bank financing

Women entrepreneurs with a high-growth strategy had higher expectations for business performance and were also more likely to aspire to create wealth through their businesses (e.g., grow and sell their businesses for capital gain, realize more profits, etc.). Women with moderate-growth firms had less ambitious expectations for business performance; for instance, the business was serving to replicate an owner's income received through outside employment.

According to another study of women entrepreneurs, high-growth oriented entrepreneurs were more likely to take risks in order to pursue growth of their business.<sup>18</sup> For example, the high-growth oriented entrepreneurs:

---

<sup>17</sup> Adapted from the National Center for Women & Information Technology's summary of Morris et al., *The Dilemma of Growth: Understanding Venture Size Choices of Women Entrepreneurs*, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Lisa K. Gundry and Harold P. Welch, "The Ambitious Entrepreneur: High Growth Strategies of Women-owned Enterprises," *The Journal of Business Venturing* (2001): 453-470.

- Opted to own and grow their business despite earning less than they could have elsewhere.
- More readily gave up a promising career for business ownership.
- Put aside some of their other personal or family goals and incurred sacrifices or penalties in order to grow their business.

Based on this research, PPA formed the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1	<i>Higher tolerance for risk will be correlated with motivations for wealth creation.</i>	<i>Not supported</i>
Hypothesis 2	<i>Women entrepreneurs who are more comfortable with taking risk have higher expectations for business performance.</i>	<i>Supported</i>
Hypothesis 3	<i>Women who have high-growth firms are more likely to have higher expectations for business performance.</i>	<i>Indeterminate</i>

In order to answer Research Question 1, women in each of the four segments were asked to describe what risks they would be taking to achieve their growth goals. Based on their responses to this question, the women’s tolerance for and comfort with risk was determined.

- Women who demonstrated that they either already had or planned to take risks to grow their business were identified as having a clear comfort with risk.
- Women who said that they would take some risks, but not others (e.g., they opposed taking financial risks), were risk hesitant.
- Those who demonstrated risk avoidance or said that they were not risk takers were risk averse.

Once these risk groups were established, the expectations for business performance among the groups were compared. Examples of how expectations for business performance were categorized are described below:

- *High expectations:* Substantial increases in revenues and/or number of employees, opening offices in new locations, building the business in order to sell it, or expanding outside of the U.S.
  - *Response example:* “I would like to be at least tripling my income and have three times as many employees.”

- *Modest expectations:* Rebuilding/getting the business back to where it had been previously or slight increases in revenues and/or number of employees.
  - *Response example:* “I would want more people . . . but not too many. I don’t aspire to be some massive company.”
- *Low or unclear expectations:* Keeping the business stable, sustaining current clients/contracts, or no specific plans.
  - *Response example:* “I’m toward the end of my career. I want more stability now. We’ve focused on getting large clients and sustaining them.”

Using these categories, roughly half of the study participants had high expectations for their business performance. Women who demonstrated a clear comfort with risk generally also had high expectations for business performance. Interestingly, a number of women said that their expectations and goals were not formulated clearly until they gained more experience as a business owner. Only once they were established did they begin to think seriously about hiring additional staff, offering new services, or adding new locations.

The women who had a higher tolerance for risk in this study were, however, no more likely than the others to be motivated by wealth creation. In general, not many women were motivated to make their businesses more valuable in order to gain personal wealth. In some cases, women did say that they wanted to be able to save enough to retire comfortably, but that was not limited to those comfortable with taking risks.

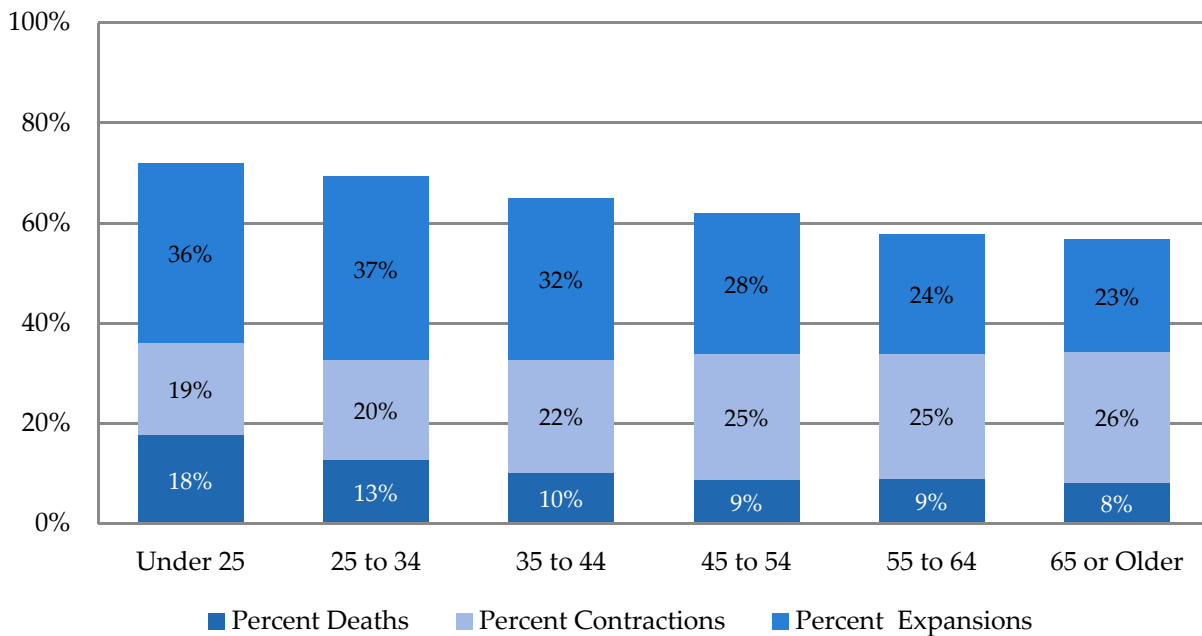
There was no clear pattern for business owners who were risk hesitant or risk averse; their expectations for business performance over the next five years varied.

The growth rates of the women’s businesses were not measured for this study; instead, the women were asked to share how many full-time equivalent employees they had added in the past five years. Looking across segments, women in the high-growth and moderate-growth expectations group did not differ from the other segments in the number of full-time equivalent employees added in the past five years. Since the U.S. economy suffered an economic recession during part of that period, it is not surprising that growth was not greater. It is also the case that one’s aspirations for growth are not always aligned with their actual experience.

### **Significance for the NWBC**

Business owners who already have high expectations and comfortable with risk are already on track to grow their businesses. For them, it may be simply a matter of timing and knowledge. For others with lower expectations or less comfort with taking risks, the strategy may be more complex.

As shown in the figure below, more businesses owned by younger women (those aged 34 or younger) both close and expand when compared to older business owners.<sup>19</sup> It is possible that this is because younger business owners were more risk tolerant. Also, a high percentage of start-up firms fail within the first few years.<sup>20</sup> Those businesses that survived that key phase likely showed some growth and approved they were able to remain in business. Thus, these businesses are best positioned to take on expansion plans. Combined with owner age, then, the age of the business are factors to consider in understanding growth patterns.



**Figure 7: Business Outcomes by Age of Women Business Owners, 2007-2008**

Additional research may provide an opportunity to identify when women business owners are most receptive to taking risks for their businesses, and thus, most open to messaging about business growth.

**Research Question 2**

*If women business owners are more risk averse than men business owners, why do women-owned businesses have a lower survival rate than men-owned businesses?*

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Business Owners.

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce Economic and Statistics Administration, *Women-Owned Businesses in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (2010). <http://www.esa.doc.gov/sites/default/files/reports/documents/women-owned-businesses.pdf>



Women-owned businesses generally have a lower survival rate than men-owned businesses; a 2007 Census survey revealed survival rates for women-owned business of 66 percent while men-owned businesses were around 72 percent after four years.<sup>21</sup>

In three sectors with high percentages of women-owned businesses (health care and social assistance; professional, scientific, and technical services; and other services), women-owned firms with less than \$50,000 in receipts were most likely to close; while those with \$1 million or more in receipts were the most likely to expand.<sup>22</sup> Given that expansion and contractions are measured in terms of hiring or losing employees, it makes sense that firms with larger receipts were the most likely to hire more employees.

However, since women business owners tend to be more risk averse than men business owners,<sup>23</sup> one might expect that those business owners who take fewer risks would have smaller, more stable, firms.

#### Hypothesis 4

*Firms that have owners who are averse to risk are likely to have lower growth or to be more stable.*

*Indeterminate*

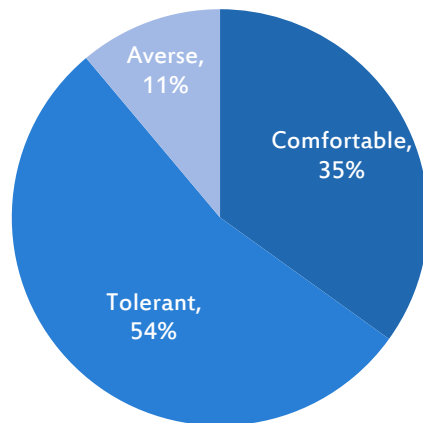
While the primary research did not address survival rates, the participants provided valuable insights about the inherent risks that come with business ownership. Roughly half of the study participants were categorized as risk hesitant. The risks mentioned most often by the owners in the children-at-home segment were related to their reputations, personal finances, and personal time availability. In the other three segments, the risks discussed were more often related to business development investments and business finances.

---

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Census, Business Owners Survey, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Rieva Lesonsky, "Is Risk the Key to Giving Female Business Owners a Competitive Edge?" Accessed January 11, 2013. April 2012. <http://www.openforum.com/articles/is-risk-the-key-to-giving-female-business-owners-a-competitive-edge/>. See also: PNC, "Women Business Owners Outlook," Summer 2011.



**Figure 8: Participants' Risk Tolerance Levels (n=63)**

Overall, only a small proportion of the owners were risk averse (that is, they were opposed to taking any risks to grow their business), making it difficult to draw any conclusions about their growth expectations on the whole. A couple of the women said that they were just financially conservative by nature, and one said that she was not willing to take risks because she was concerned about the state of the economy. However, the inherent instability of micro-businesses, as discussed above, may be more important than the avoidance of risk. The riskiest strategy may, in fact, be the unwillingness to take necessary risks.

---

*“Business does come with risk....  
You just kind of have to gauge [it]  
on a case-by-case basis. It’s a  
balance between logic and  
intuition.”*

---

### **Significance for the NWBC**

Business development was often mentioned as a risk with many of the women hesitant to spend time and resources without reasonable assurance that those investments would pay off, which certainly could be limiting growth. There are no guarantees in business, but perhaps there are messages or resources that could increase women business owners' general acceptance of risk. The NWBC should shift the discussion of risk; instead of encouraging “risk-taking,” the council might focus on risk management. It may be that owners who appear to be willing to take big risks are in fact just better at

seeing how to manage or mitigate the risks required for successful business ownership (this would require further research). Nonetheless, owners with children at home may still be less responsive given the other risks they identified.

### Research Question 3

*What role do financial literacy and use of external resources like training and market research play, and are there relationships between access to and utilization of resources and a higher tolerance for risk and greater expectations for business performance?*

---

Secondary research demonstrating a linkage between financial literacy and risk aversion for small businesses or small business owners was not found. However, prior research by PPA showed that many business owners use outside resources, particularly for managing finances. A PPA survey of 1,800 business owners found that virtually all respondents were using outside advisors for some purposes. The top three outside services sought were a CPA or accountant (90 percent), banker (77 percent), and a lawyer (75 percent).<sup>24</sup>

In addition, there is some evidence that seeking outside guidance does, in fact, help to strengthen a business. For example, in one study, small firms who used outside advisors (financial, legal, etc.) saw a 76 percent gain in revenue over three years, as compared to those who did not have advisors.<sup>25</sup> Thus, it could be argued that by seeking out these resources, women business owners might ease their concerns about risk.

### Hypothesis 5

*Women business owners with strong financial literacy will be able to employ more resources to minimize or manage risk to strengthen their business. Similarly, women that employ more outside business development resources will be less risk averse than those who do not.*

*Indeterminate*

---

To determine whether or not the study participants had strong financial literacy, their educational background and the nature of their business was considered, along with any other comments regarding their level of financial knowledge. For example, a woman who had a financial planning or accounting company or who had business training (e.g., master's in business administration, associate degree in business management, etc.) was considered to have strong financial literacy. Very few women were determined to have strong financial literacy based on the information that they

---

<sup>24</sup> Public Policy Associates, "Michigan Small Business Needs Assessment," second edition, October 1991.

<sup>25</sup> CIBC World Markets, "Secrets to Small Business Success," 2004, 3.

revealed in a focus group or interview. Therefore, this aspect of the hypothesis can neither be supported nor refuted.

---

*“I hired an attorney, CPA, and bookkeeper on a part time or as-needed basis because I knew that was a pretty big knowledge deficit for me.... I interviewed to find the right fit that would work for me. I knew where my gaps were... I was able to supplement [the gaps] with the knowledge experts to help guide me through the business processes.”*

---

As found in other studies, many study participants said that they used one or more outside business resources, and among all study participants outside resources were seen as tools that could help mitigate risk at the startup phase of a business in particular. Some common concerns when starting a business included managing the financial and administrative aspects, finding qualified staff, and marketing the business. Women in all of the segments agreed that a CPA, bookkeeper, and a lawyer were all essential resources for starting their businesses.

---

*“I would love to have a woman role model in my line of work... who has run and managed it successfully two to three tiers above where I am... to [help me] think about all of the issues...”*

---

In addition to legal and accounting providers, some participants mentioned seeking advice from banks, Small Business Development Centers, chambers of commerce, SCORE, and industry-specific associations at various points during their business ownership. Professional development and networking events such as trainings, conferences, and association meetings were often reported as other resources that the

women used to expand their knowledge and stay up to date on industry issues. These were also seen opportunities to connect with potential clients or partners. Notably, however, a few of the women remarked that, in their experience, some owners only attend networking events or association meetings in order to gather information on their competitors, rather than to share their knowledge and experience. This deterred them from participating in such events. Some saw this as akin to similar difficulties with establishing mentoring relationships, commenting that competition also affects women-to-women business owner mentoring.

In order to determine if the use of outside advisors could be related to comfort with risk, PPA compared the risk preferences of women who provided specific examples of the multiple business resources they used to those who made no mention of using outside resources to date or who had only used one or two resources. No evidence was found that owners who used more business resources were more comfortable with risk than those who did not.

### **Significance for the NWBC**

On the whole, the owners in the study were readily able and willing to seek outside advisors when necessary to complement their skill sets and knowledge, or those of their staff. However, they less frequently sought help to make business development plans or otherwise support business growth. Thus, it may be that awareness of such offerings could be increased through marketing the services of Women Business Centers (WBCs), SCORE, or Small Business Development Centers. Particularly valuable may be second-stage business assessment, expansion planning training, or similar resources for those women business owners who are beyond the startup stage, but are not confident about how to pursue growth on their own.

In addition, peer groups where women and men business owners (perhaps at similar stages of business) would be beneficial as women consider growth opportunities. Messaging could emphasize that women business owners are not alone, and that there are local, regional, state, and national resources available. Additional research might identify the specifics of what women business owners would like to gain from peer interactions and resource providers.

## **Motivations**

Foundational to business ownership is the choice made by an individual or group of individuals to become an entrepreneur. The motives behind the choice can be varied, and while equally legitimate, they then affect the goals set for a business, and more specifically, begin to differentiate the growth plans of one business from another's. The

original personal motivations for becoming a business owner may well drive the subsequent path that a business takes.

#### Research Question 4

*What motivates women entrepreneurs, and are different groups of entrepreneurs motivated by the same or different things? What accounts for the similarities or differences, and are there patterns or relationships?*

---

There is an abundance of existing research on women's motivation for starting businesses. It is well-documented that women tend to be motivated to start a business for increased flexibility, work-family balance, and financial stability.<sup>26</sup> Going beyond those factors, a 2008-2009 Kauffman Firm Survey (KFS) specifically explored financial and psychological factors that motivated successful women entrepreneurs. The following five factors were among the most commonly cited by the survey respondents as to their motivations:<sup>27</sup>

- The desire to build wealth
- The wish to capitalize on business ideas that they had
- The appeal of a startup culture
- A long-standing desire to own their own company
- Working for someone else did not appeal to them

Seventy-three percent of the women entrepreneurs surveyed who founded a successful firm in a high-growth industry indicated that at least part of the reason for becoming an entrepreneur was to build personal wealth. Of men entrepreneurs surveyed on this question, 76 percent indicated that at least part of the reason for becoming an entrepreneur was to build personal wealth.<sup>28</sup>

#### Hypothesis 6

*Women are often motivated to start a business in order to have more flexibility, work-family balance, and financial stability.*

*Supported*

---

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Small Business Administration, *Are Male and Female Entrepreneurs...*, 2007. See also: Richard DeMartino and Robert Barbato. "Research Note: Difference between women and men MBA entrepreneurs: exploring family flexibility and wealth creation as career motivators," *Journal of Business Venturing* 18 (2003): 816, accessed January 11, 2012/

<sup>27</sup> Cohoon, J. McGrath, Vivek Wadhwa, and Lesa Mitchell, "The Anatomy of an Entrepreneur: Are Successful Women Entrepreneurs Different From Men?" The Kauffman Foundation, May 2010. [http://www.kauffman.org/uploadedfiles/successful\\_women\\_entrepreneurs\\_5-10.pdf](http://www.kauffman.org/uploadedfiles/successful_women_entrepreneurs_5-10.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Cohoon, J. McGrath, Vivek Wadhwa, and Lesa Mitchell, "The Anatomy of an Entrepreneur: Are Successful Women Entrepreneurs Different From Men?" (The Kauffman Foundation, May 2010), [http://www.kauffman.org/uploadedfiles/successful\\_women\\_entrepreneurs\\_5-10.pdf](http://www.kauffman.org/uploadedfiles/successful_women_entrepreneurs_5-10.pdf)

Among study participants, the most frequently cited reason for starting a business was to have greater independence; a lot of the women aspired to be their own boss and to do things their own way. This was true for each of the four segments. While somewhat related, a desire for independence is different than wanting more flexibility and work-life balance. Increased flexibility and work-life balance were lifestyle-oriented motivations (i.e., setting one's own hours) as opposed to independence, which seemed to reflect a desire to be the one making decisions and influencing their own career course and the outcomes of their work efforts. This seems to reflect the findings of the Kauffman findings.

---

*"It is [about] being independent. I don't want to, in a sense, be under someone else's control. I like doing what I think is important... just being your own boss and being able to create something that you feel is important is valuable."*

---

Owning a business afforded many of the women more control and a certain amount of flexibility, but it was clear that it did not mean that they were working any less. Women often pointed out that they were putting in a tremendous amount of work, sometimes working late at night after children were put to bed, but that they preferred to directly benefit from their labor, as opposed seeing their employers reap the benefits of their labor.

Even so, flexibility and work-life balance were also frequently cited by women in each of the segments. Many of the participants noted that they were not able to spend as much time with family as they would have liked when they were working for someone else. Having the ability to set their own hours or to work varying hours was seen as a huge advantage of starting their own businesses. Wanting to contribute to the community or help others was also a common response, for which the women desired increased flexibility as well as the ability to hire employees.

Very few women said that they started a business in order to have more financial stability. However, a handful of participants did report starting their businesses after being laid off.



---

*"I have two boys and that's [the main] reason why I started the business — the need to have some flexibility in [my] day and being able to participate in family life."*

---

While less frequently cited, a small, but notable number of women said that they had a family history of entrepreneurship. They attributed exposure to business ownership through family members with instilling in them an entrepreneurial spirit.

### **Significance for the NWBC**

The reasons women go into business ownership are well-documented, although the emphasis on independence and personal gratification were more prominent in this research than might have been expected. Messaging to women business owners should acknowledge their diverse, but aligned motivations. As with risk, an owner that holds tightly to all major decisions and administrative functions may be compromising her ability to grow her business. Women who sought independence or flexibility through business ownership may feel that expanding staff or locations—common business growth strategies—undermine their original motivations. Helping women to find ways of approaching growth while also maintaining what they value most about business ownership would be a critical service.

#### **Hypothesis 7**

*Women entrepreneurs who enter high-growth industries or who have high-growth expectations are motivated by wealth creation.*

*Not supported*

Wealth creation did not make the top of the list of reasons that women in this study were motivated to start their businesses, even in the high-growth and moderate-growth strategy segments. It may be that the women in the study differed in some way from those of the 2008-2009 Kauffman Firm Survey that has resulted in a different finding on this point. All of the women in the study were in high-growth industries, and only a few expressed that their industry's performance motivated their business ownership decision. Based on the information shared during the study, industry choice was most often made according to the women's own professional experience or that of a spouse or partner.

One distinction among the segments was that more women in the high-growth expectations segment said that they started their businesses in order to capitalize on an opportunity or to fill a gap in the market than women in any of the other segments. In



some cases, the timing was just right to take over from someone else, while in others the women saw a new niche opportunity in their industry. This is consistent with the Kauffman findings that successful women were motivated by the desire to capitalize on business ideas that they had. Starting a business under these circumstances may also influence the women's expectations for growth; taking control of an existing business or feeling confident that a service or product fills a void likely bodes well for their growth potential.

---

*" To serve the clients... and to be able to fill a need that was there in the industry [is why I started]. I am almost one-of-a-kind. The need was not serviced before; it really worked. I'm amazed at how much we are needed."*

---

### **Significance for the NWBC**

Recognizing the opportunities for business expansion and positioning themselves to take advantage of opportunities—as some of the high-expectations segment participants had done—would seem to be a fruitful possibility for increasing business growth by women. Most likely this would take the form of services or informational resources directed to women.

Although wealth creation was not mentioned by the study participants as a motivator for starting a business, secondary research suggests that it is a reason that some women want to own a business. Based on the study findings, messaging prominently highlighting wealth creation would not be appealing since this is not a primary motivator. However, messaging that recognizes that business ownership is a viable path to generate wealth, including adequate retirement savings, and that provides strategies to help owners get to that point, would likely be valuable to women business owners of all ages. In general, the value of business growth in connection with other goals, like helping one's community or family, may resonate better.

### **Expectations**

Not many entrepreneurs would say they expect to fail. They can, however, differ radically on what constitutes success, resulting in varied sets of expectations for that success. Of course, expectations might shift over time given factors such as market conditions and personal knowledge and experience. The extent to which an owner

aligns expectations and acts to fulfill those goals is another consideration in understanding business patterns over time. Understanding the intersection of expectations and business growth are important inputs into the U.S. economic picture.

### Research Question 5

*Do different groups of women entrepreneurs have similar or different expectations for their business performance and potential? What accounts for any similarities or differences, and are there patterns or relationships?*

As discussed under Risk, Hypothesis 5, there is the question of how access to and utilization of resources influences expectations of performance. While there is not much research on the effect of expectations surrounding the utilization of outside resources and counseling of women business owners in particular, a study for the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) examined the effectiveness of face-to-face counseling and training provided by various entities within the SBA. That study found that, of those who participated in counseling at Women’s Business Centers,<sup>29</sup> about a third reported that increased profit margins were directly related to the counseling received. Additionally, about one-fifth of participants reported hiring new staff as a direct result of the counseling that they received.<sup>30</sup> These findings suggest that utilizing outside resources helps women improve the performance of their businesses. For those women business owners who intend to grow their businesses, it may be that seeking out and utilizing additional resources may go hand-in-hand with having higher expectations for their businesses.

### Hypothesis 8

*Women entrepreneurs who access and utilize resources have higher expectations for business performance.*

*Not supported*

There was no evidence that women who used more business resources had higher expectations for business performance than those who used fewer resources. Even some women who had not used any outside business resources had very high expectations for business performance. However, it seemed that having outside guidance provided a certain amount of assurance that the owners were making informed decisions; this could in turn influence a woman’s expectations for business performance.

<sup>29</sup> Both women and men sought counseling at WBCs.

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Small Business Administration, “Impact Study of Entrepreneurial Development Resources: Face-to-Face Counseling,” November 2011. <http://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/SBA%20ED%20Resources%20Impact%20Study%20Nov%202011%20Final%20Report.pdf>

One woman spoke of setting up an internal board of advisors when she started her business. She recruited five business people with different backgrounds to serve on the board; she noted that this approach was much more valuable to her than ad hoc advisors would have been. The board advised her for the first ten years that she was in business. They vetted ideas, provided advice, and established an accountability structure that she reported was crucial in helping to secure outside funding.

---

*“I’m sure I could use some small business services and marketing services. The problem is the money to pay for it.”*

---

### Significance for the NWBC

While no connection between resource use and expectations was found in this study, other research suggests that such resources do make a difference in business success, and the two logically should be related if such services are effective. Future research might focus on what resources, cost levels, and messages appeal to women business owners and increase their use of such supports to business growth.

#### Research Question 6

*How do women business owners characterize their growth aspirations? How do growth aspirations vary among women business owners?*

There are many ways that experts measure the growth of small businesses. However, the way that a small business owner views their growth may depend on that individual. Women business owners may characterize their growth aspirations in regards to growth in revenue or number of employees, firm stability, income to the owner, increased market share, or other ways. Ultimately, how growth is defined may serve as a proxy for the type of business growth that a women business owner seeks to attain.

#### Hypothesis 9

*Women business owners characterize growth aspirations in a number of ways.*

*Supported*

Growth aspirations were, in fact, described in a variety of ways by the study participants. The women were asked to talk about the ideal size of their business in five years. Across all segments, growth was most often characterized as an increase in revenues. Also, frequently mentioned were growth in terms of number of employees, number of locations, and number of clients/contracts. Not surprisingly, many women

noted more than one area in which they aspired to grow (i.e., increase revenues and hire more employees). Other growth aspirations mentioned included offering different services to better assist clients, franchising, moving into a larger space, and increasing their own income. There were no systematic differences among the segments.

For many women, business growth was tied to their perceptions of success; growing the business meant that they would attain personal or professional success. These women said that they were motivated to grow in order to stand out, to prove that they can be successful, or to have a personal sense of accomplishment.

---

*“Success makes me happy.  
Putting a stamp on something that  
you’ve worked on, the satisfaction  
that all those 20-hour days meant  
something.”*

---

### **Significance for the NWBC**

When messaging to women business owners, descriptions of business growth can take multiple forms and will be recognized by owners as familiar to their own ideas about what constitutes success for their business. However, this should also tie in with personal and professional recognition for the owner, again with an acknowledgement of common motivations for business ownership by women.

#### **Research Question 7**

*To what degree do women business owners undertake activities aligned with their intent to grow?*

---

“Intent to grow” differs from a desire to grow in that it implies commitment and action. Steps to support growth might include careful business planning, vigorous implementation of the business plan, the creation of an infrastructure that can support growth, the use of outside advisors to help identify and overcome barriers to growth, and an adaptation to changing conditions.

There is existing research that indicates high-growth oriented women entrepreneurs were significantly more likely than their more moderate-growth oriented peers to pursue the following:<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Gundry, *The Ambitious Entrepreneur*, 2001.

- Market expansion
- Technological change (e.g., acquiring new equipment or service and computerizing current operations)
- Financing (e.g., seeking professional advice and applying for loans)
- Operations planning
- Organizational development

These results suggest that women entrepreneurs with high-growth intent are, in fact, making strategic decisions that best positioned them for growth.

### Hypothesis 10

*Women entrepreneurs who are highly motivated to grow their firms take tangible, consistent steps toward that end.*

*Supported*

The high-growth and moderate-growth expectations segments were compared to test this hypothesis. Most of the women in both of these segments reported taking tangible steps to meet their growth goals. These steps included hiring additional staff to assist with outreach efforts, purchasing new equipment or leasing new offices, seeking grants or applying for a line of credit, looking for opportunities to partner, and writing unsolicited proposals. One difference between the segments was that more women in the high-growth group specifically mentioned increasing marketing efforts than did woman in the moderate-growth group. Those women saw developing a concrete marketing plan as an important investment in reaching new customers, a key step in expansion.

---

*“In today’s market, if you’re not growing you will become obsolete or go out of business. I don’t think you can slide into neutral at any phase or at any age. You are either growing or you will no longer be competitive. We’re looking at where we can actually work in collaboration with competitors. That one reason we’ve grown to this level.”*

---

Hiring additional staff was mentioned equally by these two segments. The new employees allowed the women to have more capacity to undertake business development efforts such as pursuing new business markets or establishing or increasing their social-media presence. However, difficulty finding high-quality employees was frequently mentioned as a barrier to expanding the businesses. Numerous participants expressed concerns about not finding employees who had the drive, attitude, and professional disposition that they desired. A few of the women explicitly preferred to hire older, more experienced employees. These experienced workers were said to require less managing and were more capable when it came to establishing company reputation and getting new business.

---

*“As you grow, more regulations come into play... That’s a concern because after a while you can’t handle all of that paperwork.”*

---

Hiring only experienced workers also has implications for growth given higher associated costs for recruiting and compensation. Several women in the high-growth segment said that their path to growth would be easier if they were to hire junior staff, but that they did not want the responsibility that comes with having to spend more time managing those employees. For many of the smaller firms, the owners relied on subcontractors or ad hoc partnerships with other firms to get larger projects or clients. This seemed to be a means of lessening risk while also pursuing business growth.

Along a similar line, PPA noted that some of the owners felt strongly that they needed (wanted) to be involved in all aspects of the business management due to lack of trust in staff or consultants, high standards of performance, and/or a sense of personal responsibility tied to the business services and products. For example, a few of the women with sizable staffs were still handling payroll. For other participants, the costs, requirements, and organizational changes needed to make their growth plans possible were key concerns. For example, hiring a consultant to help with strategic planning or hiring someone just to do business development were, in many cases, not feasible due to the high cost.

### **Significance for the NWBC**

Once women business owners have a clear plan for business growth, they generally seem comfortable with taking most necessary steps. Understanding that hiring is a major concern, messaging and resources may include more emphasis on this

component of growth and provide guidance on organizational models and development strategies.

The trouble transitioning from a “hands-on” owner to one that employs others to help with business administration was a concerning theme. If these companies have good potential, this reluctance to trust others with control of vital operations may be hindering growth. It was not clear whether these women were aware of the implications of their style of management, but there may be value in encouraging these kinds of owners to harness the resources in their community (e.g., training on how to hire quality staff, financial checks-and-balances measures to put in place within their organization, etc.). These owners may respond best to retaining control in business-growth decisions.

## Cultural Influence

While culture in the United States is a complex concept, a pervasive, historically-rooted set of values, beliefs, and behaviors exist that affect individuals over their lifetimes. Gender is certainly one prominent manifestation of culture; the general culture influences how children are raised, what actions are considered acceptable for men and women, and how interactions in different social settings should be carried out. This cultural influence could, then, very well be expected to be expressed in the choices and experiences of women entrepreneurs.

### Research Question 8

*To what extent do the self-perceptions and business ownership results of women appear related to differences in U.S. cultural norms by gender?*

Gender roles in the U.S. persist in playing a role in the work-life balance of women. Secondary research shows that even while gender roles have become less rigid since the mid- to late-twentieth century, there remains a reality that, overall, women in the workplace continue to hold more responsibility than men when it comes to children, household tasks, and general household decision making.

A 2008 study by the Families and Work Institute took a close look of the division of duties between genders.<sup>32</sup> About two thirds of women with children reported that they took the most responsibility for child care, while only about half of working men said that they took primary responsibility for childcare. For working women and men, on

---

<sup>32</sup> Ellen Galinsky, Kerstin Aumann, and James T. Bond, “Times are Changing: Gender and Generation at Work and at Home,” study conducted for the Families and Work Institute, August, 2011. [http://familiesandwork.org/site/research/reports/Times\\_Are\\_Changing.pdf](http://familiesandwork.org/site/research/reports/Times_Are_Changing.pdf)



average, women spent more time with their children under 13; mothers spend an average of 4 hours per workday with children versus men who spend an average of 3.1 hours per workday with their children.

More working women also reported taking the most responsibility for cooking (67 percent of women versus 55 percent of men) and cleaning (71 percent of women versus 53 percent of men).<sup>33</sup> Overall, women who were married or living in a couple also reported making most of the household decisions (weekend plans, major purchases for the home, etc.); 43 percent of women surveyed reported that they made more of the household decisions than men.<sup>34</sup>

For both men and women, there are several factors that each group identifies as important predictors of feeling increased work-life conflict. Working men identify a greater number of factors that predict work-life conflict than women; however, women are more likely to identify a smaller group of factors as adversely affecting their work-life balance.<sup>35</sup> A passion for the business and personal satisfaction are also key motivators for women starting and staying in their own business.<sup>36</sup>

Given these factors, it is logical to conclude that cultural norms and expectations affect the amount of time and effort that women are able to devote to their business and also influence the choices that women make about business growth.

### Hypothesis 11

*The risk tolerance, expectations, and motivations of women business owners are affected by cultural norms and expectations.*

*Supported*

Across all segments, many women referenced cultural norms and expectations that have affected the ways in which they conceive, develop, and run their businesses. Beginning with business startup, taking on a larger share of the responsibilities for child care affected motivations and expectations for many women. As was noted for Hypothesis 6, numerous participants said that they started their business in order to have the flexibility to spend more time with their children. In a number of cases, the business was initially run from the woman's home. Several noted that this approach had some drawbacks; in particular, using the home as the business office had implications for relationships with clients. It was noted that a home was not perceived

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Pew Research, "Women Call the Shots at Home; Public Mixed on Gender Roles in Jobs," September 2008, Accessed 10 January 2013: <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2008/09/25/women-call-the-shots-at-home-public-mixed-on-gender-roles-in-jobs/>

<sup>35</sup> Galinsky, "Times are Changing," 2011.

<sup>36</sup> PNC, *Outlook*, 2011,



to be as a professional by clients as having a separate office, and that growth would not be feasible unless they moved outside of their home.

---

*“My husband can be working 18 hours a day and not seeing the kids... and he doesn’t feel guilty about [it]. For me, I just can’t do that. I have to make it all work. Even if that means I’m... up until 2 AM.... It’s easier for men to compartmentalize.”*

---

In addition, some women seemed reluctant to take risks when their children were younger; it was not uncommon for women to wait until their children were in high school or beyond to start their business or begin thinking more seriously about growth. These decisions were driven in a large part by concerns about maintaining financial stability for the sake of the family.

The women were very highly motivated to achieve personal and professional success; this was evident not only in how the women described their goals, but also in the high levels of education that they had achieved.

The participants seemed willing to put in the time and effort to meet the high standards that they had set, all while acknowledging that it was often difficult to juggle their family and work responsibilities. Overall, the work that they needed to put in was not a deterrent to business ownership or growth, but was certainly a factor in determining how and when to start and grow their businesses.

---

*“Before I started my business, I worked in [another] firm; it was very demanding time-wise and also [I was] taking care of two kids. I felt guilty on both sides. I couldn’t balance [both] very well.”*

---

Within all of the segments, the topic of providing good customer service and doing a good job for clients was emphasized as a means of achieving success. Customer service

was said to be a reflection of not only their company, but themselves as individuals. Given that women-owned businesses are largely concentrated in the services sector—which in itself is likely a reflection of cultural influence—this customer service orientation makes sense.

Culture also was visible in some of the barriers women reported encountering. Some owners mentioned discrimination by male vendors or clients, who did not recognize them as the company leader. Putting on a more assertive demeanor at work was also mentioned, particularly by the owners of businesses in industries with lower concentrations of female workers.

---

*“It’s hard to get them [clients] to believe that I have a brain and [I] have been the brain [behind the business]. I don’t want to be a whiner, but I’m looking at all the years I’ve been in business. Guys just want to talk to my husband, not me.”*

---

### **Significance for the NWBC**

Any messaging to women business owners should acknowledge that they identify as both business owners and women, and that they are attempting a delicate balance between what society expects of them and what they want for themselves. For some, perhaps many, the emphasis on obtaining independence in their work life is a necessary part of seeking to meet multiple demands and desires. At the same time, it would be important not to treat all women business owners as having the same motivations or struggles, as that is clearly not the case. Acknowledging broadly the importance of family would be one means of recognizing the values held by many women business owners without focusing on parenting responsibilities per se.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

---

The tolerance for risk, motivations, and expectations associated with business growth intertwine. These are then mixed in with culture and population heterogeneity, producing a complex, intriguing puzzle for those seeking to assist women-owned businesses to grow and prosper. Through the review of secondary research and the collection and analysis of primary data, some progress has been made in understanding the potential messaging that may help.

## Key Insights

- The segmentation of women business owners, to the extent tested here, did not result in many distinctions among the owners, except that:
  - There was an association between those with higher expectations for growth and comfort with risk-taking. Those in the higher-growth segment also mentioned marketing efforts as a growth strategy more often.
  - Women in the children-at-home segment mentioned more personal risks like available time and family finances.
- What defines “success” for business owners may well be impacted by life circumstances and cultural expectations. Women business owners may be setting success markers from the outset of business ownership differently than their male counterparts, with different results. If women are reaching what they feel are achievable successes, given other responsibilities and roles, then they may not push beyond that point given the trade-offs they feel they would need to make.
- Women business owners are taking a holistic view of work and personal life. Women business owners tend to be risk averse, and this is likely a result of cultural expectations that force women to balance social roles with business roles. In general, women are still expected to manage many of the household needs, including child care, which seems to result in less energy and time for business development. Women may also be bringing this perception to the workplace, where they attempt to manage the business as they would their private lives—balancing competing demands rather than expecting to find assistance from others. Characterizing a lack of business performance by women business owners as “self-limiting” does not capture the depth and extent of forces involved in the women business owner thought process.

- The financial literacy of an owner does not seem to be a prerequisite for business growth, associated with risk tolerance, or a factor in setting expectations. What matters more is the owner's knowledge that proper attention to finances are an important component of the business model, and that someone needs to fulfill that role in managing the company and its expansion. Similarly, encouraging women to recognize the need for outside advisors and trusted staff in meeting business development goals is a critical step in helping them to achieve greater economic influence.

## Implications for Messaging

- Highlight the benefits to women of business growth, but do not focus on wealth creation for the owner.
- Help women to see how to remain true to their motivations for business ownership while accomplishing business expansion.
- Acknowledge the multiple roles that women business owners play (work, home, community) and their desire to perform well in their roles. However, women may react negatively to intimation that they are failing to excel in any area.
- Speak about growth in terms that business owners use most: revenue, number of employees, number of locations, etc.
- Focus on risk management and positioning for opportunity as a part of business-growth planning and implementation.
- Emphasize problem solving to achieve goals and encourage the use of resources and tools. Common concerns were hiring quality staff, sharing management responsibilities and affording resources to support growth without debt.

## Suggestions for Future Research

- Further exploration about the times when women business owners are most open to risk would be valuable to understanding if there exist certain life stages or other defining points when resources and counsel for women business owners would be most effective in generating business growth activity.
- It may also be helpful to the NWBC to explore how women who have achieved business growth while raising children describe the steps they took, the supports they had, and any sacrifices they made.

- Determining what supports for business growth, cost levels, and messages appeal to women business owners would further assist in understanding how to encourage growth by these businesses.
- For those women who are most comfortable with risk taking, and, thus, tend to have higher expectations, it would be worthwhile to study further what means may exist to successfully move these businesses to growth more rapidly. And, perhaps, expand them even further than the owners originally planned.



# Appendix A: Methodology

---

This section of the final report for SBAHQ-12-M-0206 summarizes the methodology employed to conduct the research and is intended to be reviewed with the full report.

## Research Objective

The objective of this project was to identify the preliminary criteria for the segmentation of the market of women entrepreneurs. These criteria were used to define the groups of entrepreneurs, probe the issues of entrepreneurship risk, motivations, and expectations to inform the messaging about entrepreneurship to the different segments.

The NWBC intends to use data resulting from this exploratory research to augment existing knowledge in order to inform policy and program recommendations about messaging to women business owners about growth of their businesses, as well as to identify potential directions for additional, more targeted, and statistically-valid future research in pursuit of NWBC's statutory charge.

## Research Questions

### Risk

1. How do women entrepreneurs perceive risk, and do different groups of women entrepreneurs have different orientations to risk? Are there differences in how different groups of entrepreneurs handle risk?
2. If women business owners are more risk-averse than men business owners, why do women-owned businesses have a lower survival rate than men-owned businesses?
3. What role do financial literacy and use of external resources like training and market research play, and are there relationships between access to and utilization of resources and a higher tolerance for risk and greater expectations for business performance?

### Motivations

4. What motivates women entrepreneurs, and are different groups of entrepreneurs motivated by the same or different things? What accounts for the similarities or differences, and are there patterns or relationships?

## Expectations

5. Do different groups of women entrepreneurs have similar or different expectations for their business performance and potential? What accounts for any similarities or differences, and are there patterns or relationships?
6. How do women business owners characterize their growth aspirations? How do growth aspirations vary among women business owners?
7. To what degree do the women business owners undertake activities aligned with their intent to grow?
8. To what extent do the self-perceptions and business ownership results of women appear related to differences in U.S. cultural norms by gender?

The table below presents a summary of the research questions and hypotheses contained in this report. As shown, some research questions are aligned with multiple hypotheses.



**Table A-1: Research Question and Hypothesis Summary**

Category	Research Questions	Hypotheses
Risks	<p>RQ1: How do women entrepreneurs perceive risk, and do different groups of women entrepreneurs have different orientations to risk? Are there differences in how different groups of entrepreneurs handle risk?</p>	<p>H1: Higher tolerance for risk will be correlated with motivations for wealth creation.</p> <p>H2: Women entrepreneurs who are more comfortable with taking risk have higher expectations for business performance.</p> <p>H3: Women who own high-growth firms are more likely to have higher expectations for business performance.</p>
	<p>RQ2: If women business owners are more risk-averse than men business owners, why do women owned business have a lower survival rate than men-owned businesses?</p>	<p>H4: Firms that have owners who are averse to risk are likely to have lower growth or to be more stable.</p>
	<p>RQ3: What role do financial literacy and use of external resources like training and market research play, and are there relationships between access to and utilization of resources and a higher tolerance for risk and greater expectations for business performance?</p>	<p>H5: Women business owners with strong financial literacy will be able to employ more resources to minimize or manage risk to strengthen their business. Similarly, women that employ more outside business development resources will be less risk averse than those who do not.</p>
Motivation	<p>RQ4: What motivates women entrepreneurs, and are different groups of entrepreneurs motivated by the same or different things? What accounts for the similarities or differences, and are there patterns or relationships?</p>	<p>H6: Women are often motivated for starting a business in order to have more flexibility, work-family balance, and financial stability.</p> <p>H7: Women entrepreneurs who enter high-growth industries or who have high-growth expectations are motivated by wealth creation.</p>

**Table A-1: Research Question and Hypothesis Summary**

Category	Research Questions	Hypotheses
<b>Expectations</b>	RQ5: Do different groups of women entrepreneurs have similar or different expectations for their business performance and potential? What accounts for any similarities or differences, and are there patterns or relationships?	H8: Women entrepreneurs who access and utilize resources have higher expectations for business performance.
	RQ6: How do women business owners characterize their growth aspirations? How do growth aspirations vary among women business owners?	H9: Women business owners characterize growth aspirations in a number of ways.
	RQ7: To what degree do the women business owners undertake activities aligned with their intent to grow?	H10: Women entrepreneurs who are highly motivated to grow their firms take tangible, consistent steps toward that end.
	RQ8: To what extent do the self-perceptions and business ownership results of women appear related to differences in U.S. cultural norms by gender?	H11: The risk tolerance, expectations, and motivations of women business owners are affected by cultural norms and expectations.

## Data Collection

### Secondary Research

The secondary research included a review of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2007 Survey of Business Owners, Bureau of Labor Statistics data reports, reports to SBA and the NWBC, and other material publicly available online. These sources aided in framing the selection of the market segments by identifying differences between men and women business owners’ performance; characteristics of business owners with low, moderate, and high-growth ambitions; risk preferences, motivations, and expectations; effects of gender role norms on women’s career choices; and other similar lines of research.

## Segmentation

The NWBC's interest in targeting messaging to women business owners parallels a business's interest in identifying and best reaching a consumer market. What differs is that the "product" to be marketed by the NWBC is information. In both cases, the market must be segmented in such a fashion that messaging can be adjusted to resonate effectively with customers in each group.

Four standard segmentation categories are commonly used for understanding customer markets:

- Geographic (climate type, metropolitan statistical area, etc.)
- Demographic (age, gender, race, etc.)
- Psychographic (interests, opinions, etc.)
- Behavioralistic (brand loyalty, usage rate, etc.)<sup>37</sup>

These categories are applied in both consumer and business-to-business marketing. The segmentation of women business owners, then, could fall into any or all of the above categories. Any of a large number of discrete factors could have been used to segment women business owners, but not all of these factors were well-suited to accomplishing the objective of the study. The segmentation utilized placed an emphasis on those segments from which NWBC is most likely to gain insight about messaging to women business owners.

To set the parameters of the research, PPA began by selecting criteria for participation in the study:

- *Women business owners who are interested in growing their businesses (psychographic category).* The NWBC is interested in messaging to those women business owners who want to expand their businesses, and so it is necessary that all participants have this basic characteristic. Growth could be defined as increasing revenue, adding employees, or expanding market share.
- *Those with at least one employee (demographic category).* Three-quarters of firms are nonemployer firms; however, the economic contribution of the employer firms is greater in terms of both sales and jobs.<sup>38</sup> For example of the economic value, in the Houston metropolitan statistical area, the gross receipts per owner of nonemployer

---

<sup>37</sup> NetMBA: Business Knowledge Center. "Market Segmentation," 2010  
<http://www.netmba.com/marketing/market/segmentation/>.

<sup>38</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Statistics About Business Size (Including Small Businesses)," 2007, accessed January 14, 2013. <http://www.census.gov/econ/smallbus.html>

firms was \$28,000 in 2007; among the employer firms, the receipts averaged \$170,000 per employee.<sup>39</sup> In addition, more self-employed women (about half) than men are working only part-time.<sup>40</sup> These data suggested that it was more likely that economic value would be best realized by attending to those firms who have at least one employee, (that is, those that have already shown some proclivity for growth).

- *Those who operate in a high growth industry (demographic category).* These businesses, broadly speaking, are part of a more robust industry economically and could be contributors to that economic progress/gain. By targeting such businesses, the study sought to position NWBC to understand how or whether the performance of their industry shapes women business owners' motivations and expectations for the growth of their own businesses. For purposes of this study, PPA used the top high-growth industries nationally, identified by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, shown below.

<p><b>Health Care and Social Assistance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Home health care (NAICS 6216)</li> <li>● Individual and family services (NAICS 6241)</li> <li>● Outpatient, laboratory, and other ambulatory care services (NAICS 6214, 6215, 6219)</li> <li>● Offices of health practitioners (NAICS 6211, 6212, 6213)</li> <li>● Community and vocational rehabilitation services (NAICS 6242, 6243)</li> </ul> <p><b>Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Management, scientific, and technical consulting services (NAICS 5416)</li> <li>● Computer systems design and related services (NAICS 5415)</li> <li>● Facilities support services (NAICS 5612)</li> <li>● Other professional, scientific and technical services (NAICS 5419)</li> </ul> <p><b>Construction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Construction (NAICS 23)</li> </ul> <p><b>Information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Software publishers (NAICS 5112)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Manufacturing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Veneer, plywood, and engineered wood product manufacturing (NAICS 3212)</li> <li>● Cement and concrete product manufacturing (NAICS 3273)</li> <li>● Sawmills and wood preservation (NAICS 3211)</li> </ul> <p><b>Financial Activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Commercial and industrial machinery and equipment rental and leasing (NAICS 5324)</li> <li>● Lessors of nonfinancial intangible assets (except copyrighted works) (NAICS 533)</li> </ul> <p><b>Leisure and Hospitality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Automotive repair and maintenance (NAICS 8111)</li> </ul> <p><b>Educational Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Other educational services (NAICS 6114, 6115, 6116, 6117)</li> </ul> <p><b>Other Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Grantmaking and giving services and social advocacy organizations (NAICS 8132, 8133)</li> </ul>
---	---

<sup>39</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 Survey of Business Owners.

<sup>40</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "U.S. Self-Employment" *Monthly Labor Review*. September 2010, 17-32.

In addition to identifying basic criteria for the scope of the study, the PPA team used the literature review to determine segments of women business owners that would be most relevant to the needs of the NWBC. The segments identified were:<sup>41</sup>

### ***High-Growth Strategy/Expectations***

#### *Psychographic Category*

In order to better understand what is driving a high-growth strategy among some women business owners, it was valuable to explore how the owners in this group perceived barriers, resources, and potential gains and risks differently than those who fell into the moderate-growth segment.

### ***Moderate-Growth Strategy/Expectations***

#### *Psychographic Category*

In order to increase business growth and the impact of women-owned businesses on the economy, it would be beneficial to shift more business owners into a high-growth strategy. In order to do this, a greater understanding of the thinking behind a moderate set of growth expectations is needed. For instance, the research explored the linkage between expectations and concerns and an interest in the potential gains of higher growth.

### ***Frequent Users of Outside Advisors***

#### *Behavioralistic Category*

This segment was defined to determine how those women business owners who have used advisors extensively might offer insights about messaging to those who do not. For example, it was useful to understand what spurred them to seek outside advisors and whether outside help was used to manage risk, as well as how these resources affected the owners' motivations and expectations for growth.

### ***Owners With Children at Home***

#### *Demographic Category*

There is evidence that work-life balance considerations for women affect their choices in the workplace. The presence of children in the home is relevant for women business owners who are married or not, since it is the responsibility for children (motherhood) that appears to heighten the effect. This factor also is a reflection of differing cultural expectations for men and women. By looking at this segment of women business owners, the research could explore how such family considerations were influencing business decisions and connecting to risk tolerance, motivations, and growth expectations.

---

<sup>41</sup> A business owner could qualify for more than one segment.

## Region Selection

The locations for the research were selected to include representation from the western, southern, and eastern regions of the country. They were not intended to be representative of the population of women business owners. Although these regions are not how the NWBC would target messaging, the diversity allowed the study to account for variation across women business owners by region (geographic factor). As noted above, PPA selected three locations—Houston, Texas; Los Angeles, California; and Washington, D.C.—based on the research of the American Express OPEN, a report on women-owned business trends from 1997 to 2012. The selected cities were highly ranked in the report in terms of economic clout, defined by averaging “the number, revenue, and employment growth of women-owned firms.”<sup>42</sup> While some other cities were ranked higher in certain categories by American Express OPEN, these areas of the country presented the best overall opportunity for sufficient population, business growth potential, and representativeness.

## Primary Research

### Group Formation

For each region, women business owners were recruited from lists of companies with at least one employee and were operating in high-growth industries using a vendor. The focus group recruiter targeted specific North American Industry Classification System codes and Metropolitan Statistical Areas in order to narrow in on the desired women-owned businesses. Telephone lists were compiled through a combination of Dun & Bradstreet business data and other proprietary business-to-business sources available to the recruitment vendor.

The calls included screening the recruits for basic criteria, which were also based on the secondary research: (1) interest in growing their companies and (2) the current number of employees in their firms. From among those who intended to grow and had more than one employee, the groups were formed. Recruits were placed into a segment based on their answers to a short series of questions about their growth strategy and expectations, their use of outside advisors, and whether they have children at home. Groups were filled based on PPA’s assumptions about how difficult it would be to find qualifying women for each; the groups were filled, by location, in this order: high growth, moderate growth, use of advisors, and children at home. Recruits could qualify for more than one segment, but were assigned based on slot availability; for example, an owner who qualified as moderate growth but also had children at home went into the moderate growth segment if there were slots available there.

---

<sup>42</sup> American Express OPEN, “Businesses Report, 2012, 15.

Overall, there was difficulty recruiting for the study. The incident rate (6 to 10 percent) and the cooperation rate (7 to 26 percent) varied by location (7 to 26 percent), with Los Angeles proving the most difficult. This is likely due to a combination of factors that contributed to potential recruits declining to participate, including a low incentive and their limited availability during the study period. It was also difficult to reach business owners for screening, despite multiple calls. Potential recruits were told the research sponsor (NWBC) as one means of encouraging participation; it was anticipated that women business owners would be responsive to aiding in research that would potentially benefit themselves and other women business owners. For Los Angeles, the scope of recruitment was increased to a wider geographic area around the city core and the recruitment period lengthened by several weeks. Due to budget constraints, incentives (\$50 per person) could not be increased. As a result of recruitment difficulties overall, numbers were lower than anticipated entering the data collection; in total, 135 women were recruited to participate in the study.

### Study Participation

A total of eight focus groups were held, one for each segment in Houston and Washington, DC during August 2013. Although each recruit received multiple reminders before the groups were held, the turnout rate for these groups was low (about 50 percent), and so the focus groups did not prove to be effective in gathering sufficient data. As a result, independent telephone interviews were scheduled with recruits in September who did not attend the assigned focus group, or in the case of Los Angeles, with women recruited specifically for interviews. The incentive was the same, but the time burden on the participants was less (by about 1-2 hours), and interviews were conducted at times that best fit individual schedules, easing the ability of an owner to participate.

In total, PPA spoke with 81 women business owners during August and September.

**Table A-2: Women Business Owner Participation**

	Houston	Los Angeles	Washington, DC	Total
Focus Groups	15	0	17	32
Interviews	15	27	7	49
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>81</b>

While the total numbers were fewer than desired at the outset of the study, they were sufficient for gaining insights into perceptions and behaviors of women business owners given the qualitative nature of the study and its intentions.



## **Instruments**

All participants were asked to complete a profile during the focus groups or respond to the same questions verbally during the opening and closing of the interviews. The profile asked for the participants' age, race, highest level of education, and business history and growth pattern. For the focus group discussions, the moderator used a discussion guide containing questions about participants' expectations for growth, motivations and factors influencing those expectations, barriers experienced or perceived, and resources known and used to support business growth. The tolerance of risk in connection with business growth and its connections to behaviors and opinions of individual business owners were also explored. The interviewers used an online version of the focus group moderator guide as the interview instrument, directly entering answers as given. The result was a data set that held the same data fields for both methods of collection.

## **Analysis**

For data from the profile questions, hard copy forms and electronic data were merged and analyzed using SPSS and Excel. Data was cleaned and missing cases and bad data were removed. PPA then coded and categorized data as needed and ran frequencies and descriptive statistics. Where appropriate, segments and other variables were cross-tabulated with coded responses.

To analyze the qualitative data, the focus group and interview responses were combined into a single file, with the individual serving as the unit of analysis. Coding was performed to identify themes and patterns. Secondary research was used to inform coding as available; in other instances, PPA created categories. As needed, data were examined by segment or other variables to further understand patterns and address hypotheses.

## **Data Limitations**

Being a largely qualitative study involving a relatively small sample, the findings should not be assumed to be representative of all women business owners' perspectives and experiences. Also, the findings should be considered within the context of the study design (in other words, within the criteria and segmentation used).

## **Research Lessons**

Given the difficulties in recruiting and getting the business owners to complete their participation in the study, focus groups of entrepreneurs, at least with a similar level of



criteria required here, is not tenable. Telephone interviews were more productive, although allowing for data collection over several months may be necessary. Offering a much more generous incentive would likely also help to increase responsiveness.

That being said, the qualitative data generated by the study was highly valuable in understanding what is driving women business owners' business growth behaviors. Certainly, this work could be complemented nicely by further research, including survey research and market studies.

## Script for Outgoing Calls

### Women Entrepreneurs, Self-Limiting Perceptions, and Segmentation Focus Groups

ANSWERED PHONE: Hello, may I please speak to \_\_\_\_\_?

IF NO: I'm calling from SSI to ask her about participating in a focus group for the National Women's Business Council. She can reach me at [phone number].  
REPEAT CALL LATER.

IF YES: Hello, this is \_\_\_\_\_ from SSI. The National Women's Business Council, an advisory group to the president, Congress, and U.S. Small Business Administration, is conducting research concerning women business owners and their business growth. I'm calling to see if you would be interested in sharing your perspectives in a focus group about issues that affect women business owners like yourself. This call will take at most five minutes, and your participation is entirely voluntary. If you're eligible and participate, you will receive \$50. [IF AGREES TO CONTINUE] Let me ask you a few questions to see if you qualify. You do not have to respond to these questions unless they were approved by the federal Office of Management and Budget. The approval was received, and the control number is [OMB CONTROL NUMBER].

#### Screener Survey

1. Do you currently employ anybody other than yourself through your business, not including contractors?

IF ONE OR MORE: How many employees do you have? RECORD NUMBER. CONTINUE TO Q2.

IF MORE THAN 99: I'm sorry, but you are not eligible to participate in the focus group because your business is larger than what we are looking for. Thank you for your interest.

IF NONE: I'm sorry, but you are not eligible to participate in the focus group because you do not employ staff. Thank you for your interest.

2. Which sector do you work in?
  - a. Health care and social assistance
  - b. Professional and business services
  - c. Manufacturing
  - d. Information
  - e. Financial activities
  - f. Construction

- g. Leisure and hospitality
- h. Educational services
- i. Other services

RECORD AND CONTINUE TO Q3.

IF NONE OF ABOVE: I'm sorry, but you are not eligible to participate in the focus group because you are not in one of the targeted sectors. Thank you for your interest.

3. And within that group, what is your industry? IF NOT CLEAR MATCH BETWEEN LISTED INDUSTRY AND RESPONSE, READ OPTIONS: Does your business fall into one of the following industries/the following industry?

IF ANSWERED A TO Q2:

- a. Home health care (NAICS 6216) [INCLUDES NURSING SERVICES, COUNSELING, COMPANION, PERSONAL CARE, SPEECH THERAPY, DIETARY, AND SIMILAR SERVICES PROVIDED IN THE HOME.]
- b. Individual and family services (NAICS 6241) [INCLUDES SERVICES TO YOUTH AND FAMILIES, ELDERLY, OR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES.]
- c. Outpatient, laboratory, and other ambulatory care services (NAICS 6214, 6215, 6219) [INCLUDES FAMILY PLANNING CENTERS, OUTPATIENT MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE CENTERS, OTHER OUTPATIENT CARE CENTERS, ANY HEALTH-RELATED LABORATORY (ANALYTIC OR DIAGNOSTIC).]
- d. Offices of health practitioners (NAICS 6211, 6212, 6213)
- e. Community and vocational rehabilitation services (NAICS 6242, 6243) [INCLUDES COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RELIEF SERVICES, HOUSING SERVICES, AND FOOD SERVICES; PROVIDERS OF JOB TRAINING, JOB COUNSELING, WORK EXPERIENCE TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES OR WHO ARE UNEMPLOYED OR UNDEREMPLOYED.]
- f. Child day care services (NAICS 6244)

IF NONE OF ABOVE - I'm sorry, but you are not eligible to participate in the focus group because you are not in one of the targeted industries. Thank you for your interest.

ALL OTHERS, RECORD AND CONTINUE TO Q4.

IF ANSWERED B TO Q2:

- a. Management, scientific, and technical consulting services (NAICS 5416) [INCLUDES MANAGEMENT CONSULTING, ENVIRONMENTAL

CONSULTING, AND OTHER SCIENTIFIC/TECHNICAL CONSULTING SERVICES.]

- b. Computer systems design and related services (NAICS 5415) [INCLUDES THOSE PROVIDING SOFTWARE WRITING, MODIFICATION, TESTING; DESIGNING COMPUTER SYSTEMS; ON-SITE COMPUTER SYSTEM OR DATA-PROCESSING FACILITIES MANAGEMENT; AND OTHER PROFESSIONAL/TECHNICAL COMPUTER CONSULTING.]
- c. Facilities support services (NAICS 5612) [INCLUDES PROVIDING STAFF TO PERFORM SUPPORT SERVICES WITHIN FACILITIES (LAUNDRY, SECURITY, RECEPTION, JANITORIAL, ETC.) AND PRIVATE JAIL SERVICES OR OPERATORS OF CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES.]
- d. Other professional, scientific and technical services (NAICS 5419) [INCLUDES PROFESSIONAL, SCIENTIFIC, TECHNICAL CONSULTING *OTHER THAN* ARCHITECTURE OR ENGINEERING, LEGAL, ACCOUNTING, SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT OR CONSULTING, COMPUTER DESIGN, SPECIALIZED DESIGN SERVICES, ADVERTISING, OR PUBLIC RELATIONS.]

IF NONE OF ABOVE - I'm sorry, but you are not eligible to participate in the focus group because you are not in one of the targeted industries. Thank you for your interest.

ALL OTHERS, RECORD AND CONTINUE TO Q4.

IF ANSWERED C TO Q2:

- a. Veneer, plywood, and engineered wood product manufacturing (NAICS 3212)
- b. Cement and concrete product manufacturing (NAICS 3273)
- c. Sawmills and wood preservation (NAICS 3211) [INCLUDES PRODUCING BOARDS, BEAMS, WOOD CHIPS, ETC. AND TREATING WOOD WITH CREOSOTE OR OTHER CHEMICAL COMPOUNDS.]

IF NONE OF ABOVE - I'm sorry, but you are not eligible to participate in the focus group because you are not in one of the targeted industries. Thank you for your interest.

ALL OTHERS, RECORD AND CONTINUE TO Q4.

IF ANSWERED D TO Q2:

- a. Software publishers (NAICS 5112) [INCLUDES SOFTWARE DESIGN, REPRODUCTION, PUBLISHING, AND DISTRIBUTION.]















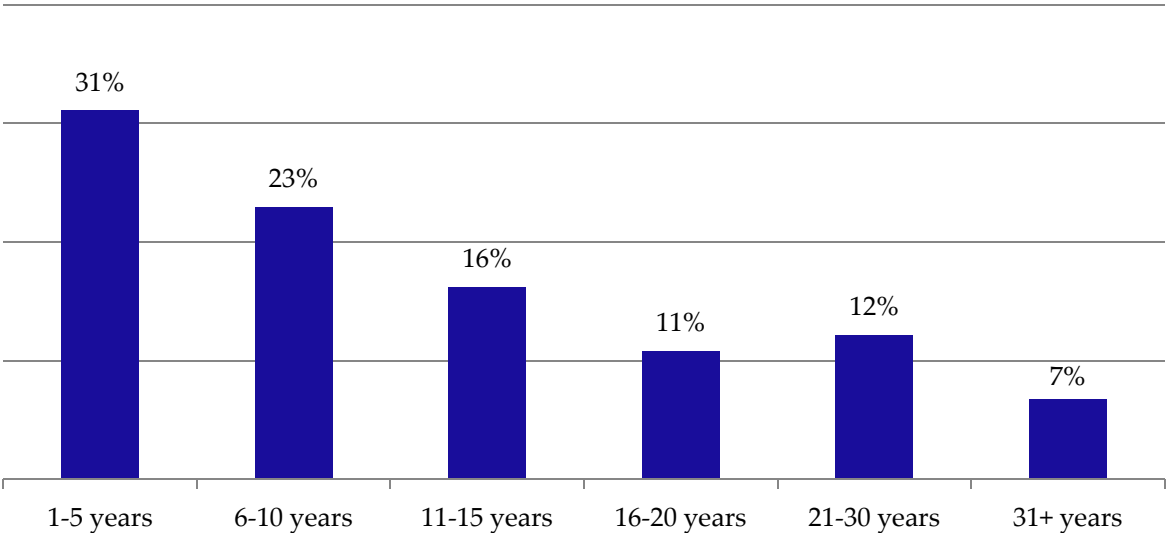




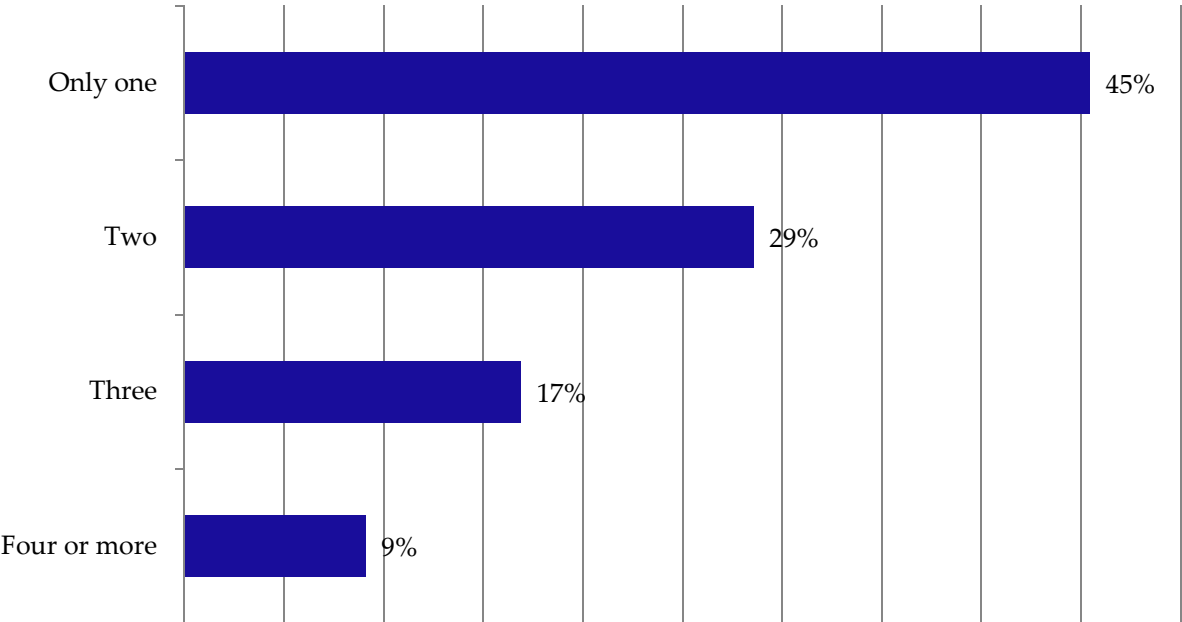




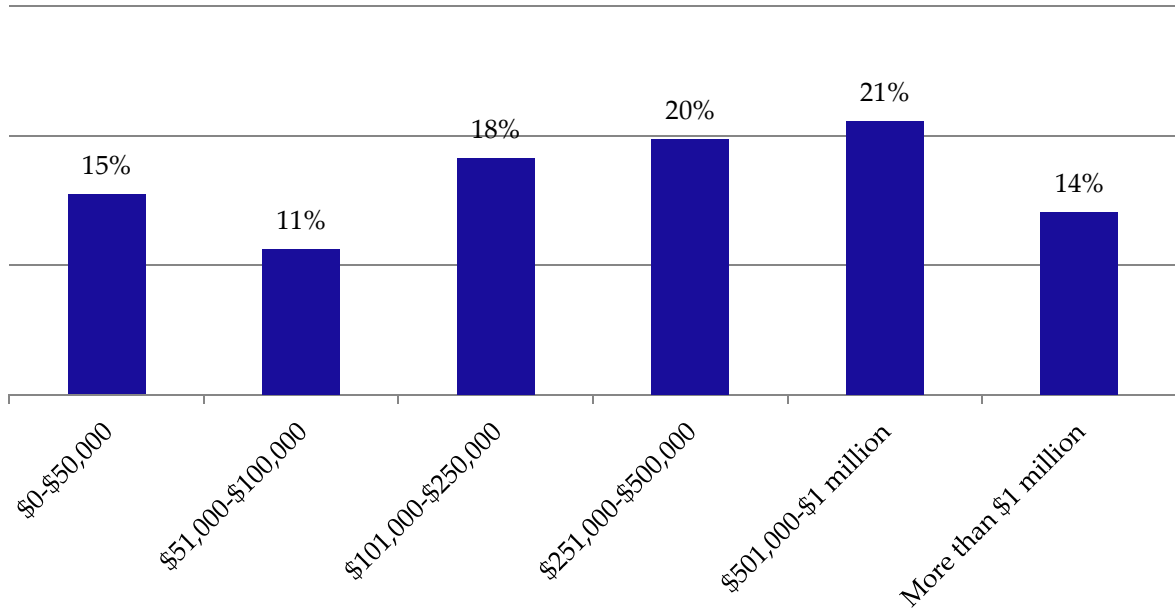
# Appendix B: Additional Data Charts



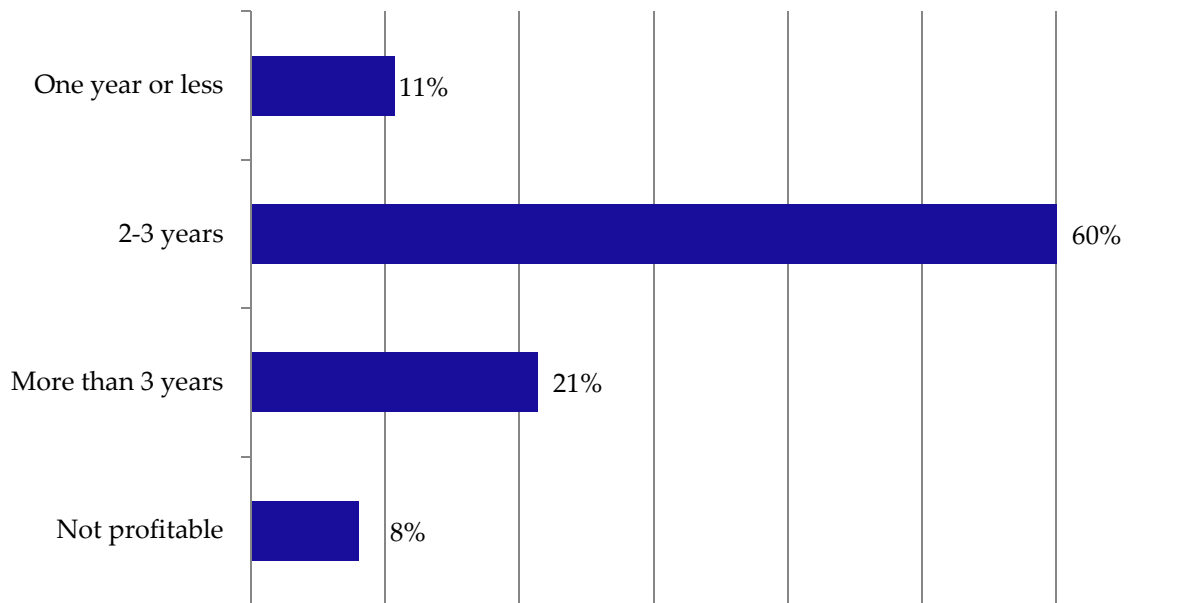
**Figure B-1: Length of Business Ownership, n=74**



**Figure B-2: Number of Businesses Owned (Current or Previous), n=77**

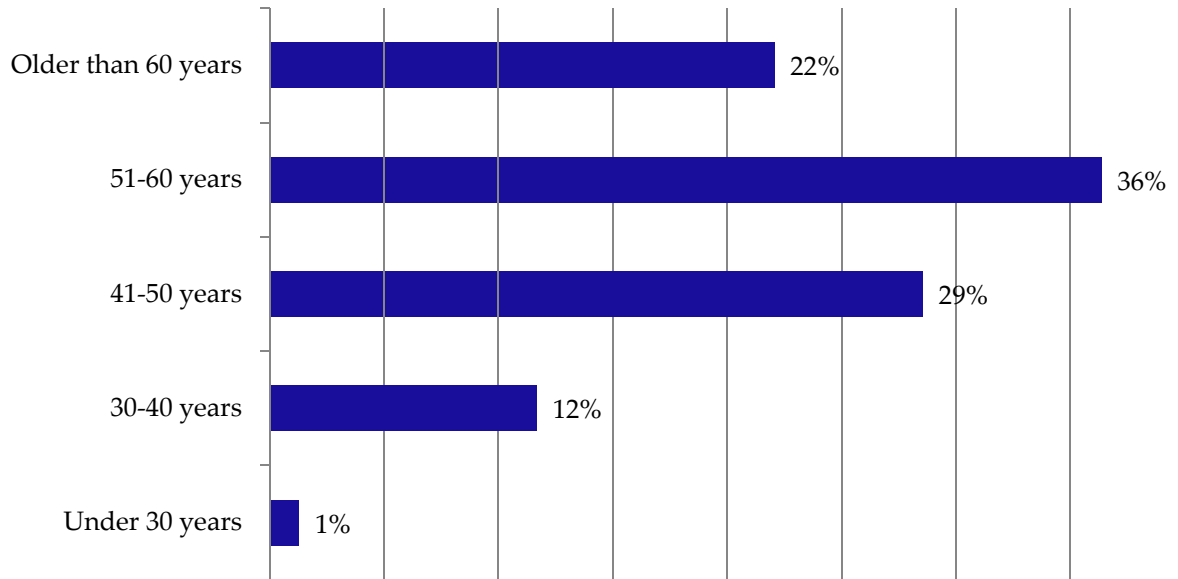


**Figure B-3: Gross Receipts of Business in 2012, n=71**

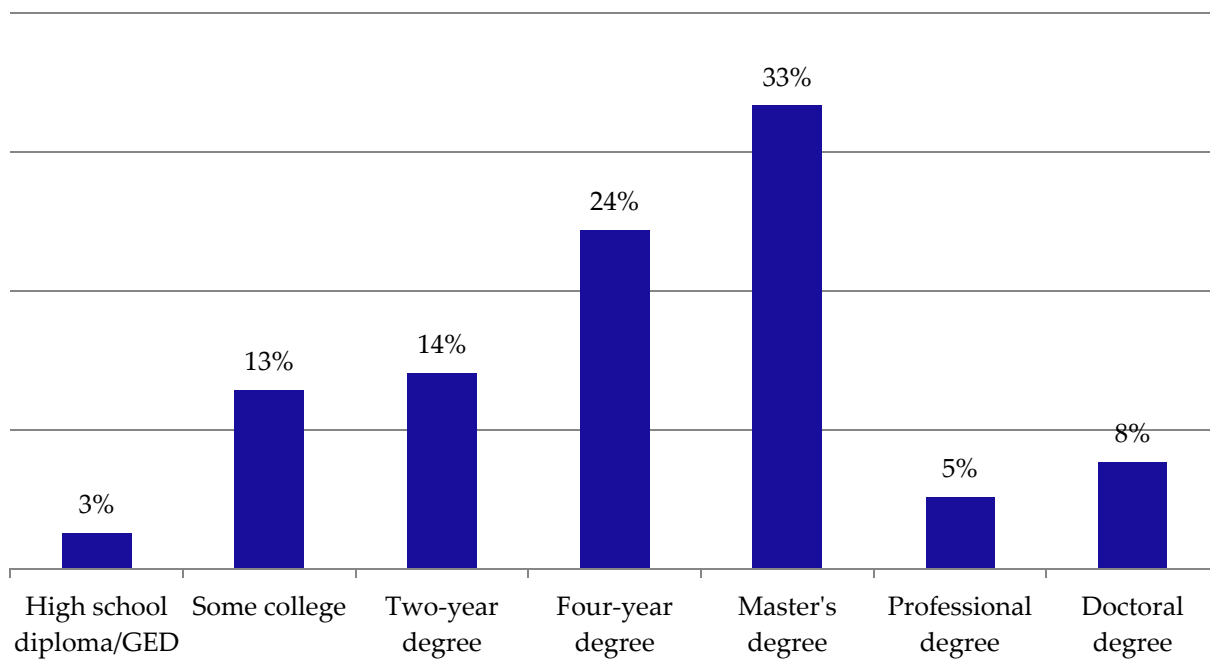


**Figure B-4: Length of Time After Ownership Became Profitable, n=75**





**Figure B-5: Age of Owner, n=77**



**Figure B-6: Highest Level of Education, n=78**