



# BEST PLACES TO WORK FOR FINANCIAL ADVISERS

COUNTING DOWN THE TOP WORKPLACES PAGE 8



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An analysis of Best Places winners reveals how workplaces are a constellation of home offices.

Let's get digital!



IN celebrates this year's Best Places winners online at [bestplacesforadvisers.com](http://bestplacesforadvisers.com) and in our digital edition.

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CHARLES SCHARF

## PE firms buy Wells' asset management biz for \$2.1B

BY JEFF BENJAMIN

IN ONE OF THE largest asset management deals in a decade, the \$603 billion Wells Fargo Asset Management business is being acquired by two private equity firms for \$2.1 billion.

The asset management business had been viewed as up for sale for several months as part of Chief Executive Charles Scharf's efforts to move the bank past a series of scandals.

The deal, which was announced last Tuesday and is expected to close in the second half, transfers ownership of the global asset management business, which employs more than 450 investment professionals, from Wells Fargo & Co. to GTCR and Reverence Capital Partners.

According to the terms of the deal, Wells Fargo & Co. will retain a 9.9% equity interest and will continue to serve as an "important client and distribution partner."

"Operating as an independent firm as a portfolio company of GTCR and Reverence Capital will provide numerous benefits to WFAM's clients, employees, and strategic partners, including Wells Fargo," Barry Sommers, chief executive of Wells Fargo's Wealth & Investment Management division, said in a prepared statement.

"At the same time, this transaction reflects Wells Fargo's strategy to focus on businesses that serve our core consumer and corporate clients and will allow us to focus even more on growing our wealth and brokerage businesses," Sommers said.

Nico Marais, WFAM's CEO since June 2019, will remain CEO; he and his leadership team will continue to oversee the business.

Joseph Sullivan, former chairman and CEO of Legg Mason, will be appointed as executive chairman of the board of the new company following the closing of the transaction.

"This transaction represents a significant milestone in the growth and evolution of our firm," Marais said. "Through this new partnership, our business will be even better positioned to execute our strategy and provide our clients with innovative products and solutions to help them reach their investment goals."

Marais cited the 9.9% ownership stake by Wells Fargo & Co. as evidence of the confidence in the asset management business as a separate and private entity.

"I'm really excited about this," he said, adding that the PE owners "believe in our strategy and are impressed with the culture we've created."

### FOCUS ON 'SOLUTIONS'

The future of the asset management unit, which will be renamed once the deal is finalized, will focus on "solutions, as opposed to products," Marais said.

The solutions-driven focus will include "aggressive investments in separately managed accounts," as well as the defined-contribution space for both

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## LPL, Cetera gird for fight over Voya advisers



BY BRUCE KELLY

THE INDEPENDENT broker-dealer marketplace is settling in to watch two of its leading networks, Cetera Financial Group and LPL Financial, duke it out for the assets of 900 wealth management registered reps and financial advisers at Voya Financial Advisors, which Cetera said last month it was buying the rights to.

When Cetera announced the Voya transaction on Feb. 8, its CEO, Adam Antoniades, told *InvestmentNews* that Cetera intended to offer transition assistance to those advisers. Such assistance is commonly referred to as a "stay bonus" for advisers in the retail securities industry, and advisers have to stay with the acquiring firm a period of years to collect the entire bonus.

Broker-dealer acquisitions present recruiting opportunities for rivals, and it sounds as if Cetera will face stiff competition from LPL for at least some of those Voya advisers, according to several market sources.

### LPL FLEXES ITS MUSCLE

Cetera is offering what some executives and advisers characterized as a standard range or package of transition money to the Voya advisers, while LPL, the largest independent broker-dealer, is continuing to flex its muscle.

Cetera's offer is based on an adviser's prior 12 months of fees and commissions, known as gross dealer concession, or GDC, while LPL's transition package is based on a combination of assets and

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# Nick Schorsch is back — with a SPAC

BY BRUCE KELLY

**NICHOLAS SCHORSCH**, the former nontraded REIT czar who's both loved and hated by financial advisers who sold his products, is reentering the securities business after several years on the sidelines and heading up a brand-new SPAC, or special purpose acquisition company, that will buy leisure-focused businesses.

Last month G&P Acquisition Corp. registered a \$200 million securities offering with the Securities and Exchange Commission, planning to sell 20 million shares at \$10 each. Schorsch is chairman of the G&P SPAC, which intends to invest in leisure-oriented businesses and the craft brewing, automotive and distribution sectors.

From 2010 to 2015, Schorsch was one of the most visible faces of the retail securities industry, as his partnership, American Realty Capital, raised close to \$20 billion from retail investors who bought shares of a variety of ARC-branded nontraded real estate investment trusts and alternative investments.

Nontraded REITs buy commercial real estate and raise money from investors seeking yield. Brokers were paid handsomely to sell the products. At the time, ARC REITs and their



competitors were among the most expensive products for clients and commonly paid brokers and advisers a 7% commission along with a 1% fee to the broker-dealer.

The good times for ARC and Schorsch stopped in late 2014, when his flagship REIT, American Realty Capital Properties Inc., reported a \$23 million accounting error that mushroomed into a disaster for Schorsch.

## SECURITIES FRAUD

ARC REIT sales tanked, the board of American Realty Capital Properties showed Schorsch the door, and that REIT's chief financial officer, longtime Schorsch partner Brian Block, was convicted of securities fraud in federal court in New York in June 2017 and sentenced to 18 months in prison.

The federal charges against Block related to his fraudulent preparation in 2014 of financial statements for the REIT, which changed its name to Vereit Inc. after Schorsch left. A year earlier, Schorsch's retail brokerage empire, Cetera Financial, burdened with debt, slid into bankruptcy.

Schorsch retreated from public view in New York to a more private life in Newport, Rhode Island, where

he invested in local businesses, according to news reports. In 2019, he reached a \$7 million personal settlement with the SEC stemming from charges that ARC, Schorsch and Block wrongfully obtained millions of dollars in connection with REIT mergers that were managed by ARC, also known as AR Capital.

In total, ARC, Schorsch and Block paid \$60 million in settlements with the SEC.

With that history in tow, Schorsch is moving to reenter the mainstream securities industry. Investors in the new SPAC, which plans to list on the NYSE, also receive half a warrant, exercisable at \$11.50. BMO Capital Markets is the sole book manager for the offering.

## A FAMILY AFFAIR

Schorsch did not return a phone message seeking comment by the time this article went to press. Four industry executives who either worked for or competed against Schorsch and ARC also declined to comment.

G&P Acquisition, the new blank check company, appears to be a family affair for Schorsch.

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# Apex Clearing goes public in blank-check deal



BY NICOLE CASPERSON

**DIGITAL CUSTODIAN APEX** Clearing is going public through a merger with Northern Star Investment Corp. II, a publicly traded special purpose acquisition company, in a deal that puts the combined company's value at \$4.7 billion.

Apex is expected to become a publicly listed company on the New York Stock Exchange under the ticker symbol APX, according to the announcement last Monday. The proposed merger is expected to be completed in the second quarter.

Special purpose acquisition companies, known as blank-check companies, like Northern Star raise money through an initial public offering to acquire a private company, which then becomes public as a result of the merger.

Apex Clearing launched in 2012 as an API-driven alternative to traditional custodians and previously served as the custodian for firms like Wealthfront and Robinhood, two of the most successful fintech startups. Both companies have since left Apex to build their own custody platforms.

Apex has approximately \$100 billion under custody currently, according to the announcement. Year-to-date, Apex Clearing has provided custody for \$14 billion in new assets and serves more than 200 clients representing more than 13 million customer accounts, 3.2 million of which have been opened in 2021 alone, and more than 1 million new crypto accounts.

## CAPUZZI CONTINUES AS CEO

Following the closing of the transaction, Apex CEO William Capuzzi and the company's president, Tricia Rothschild, will continue to serve in their current roles.

Northern Star Chairwoman and CEO Joanna Coles, former chief content officer for Hearst Magazines and former editor-in-chief of Cosmopolitan Magazine and Marie Claire, will join the combined company's board of directors.

"Bill Capuzzi and his team at Apex have helped accelerate the growth of a business that now spans delivery channels (B2C and hybrid), asset classes and levels of investor affluence," William Trout, Javelin Strategy's head of wealth

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# Demand for RIA talent drives pay higher: Schwab

BY JEFF BENJAMIN

**THE RAPID EXPANSION** of the wealth management industry is driving registered investment advisers to poach talent from their competitors, according to the latest installment of the Schwab RIA Compensation Report.

Among the findings in the report, which is part of Schwab's ongoing RIA Benchmarking research, it shows that RIAs represent the most popular source of employee recruitment, at nearly 40%.

## 'UPWARD PRESSURE'

The compensation and staffing study, published last Thursday, is based on a survey of 761 advisory firms last year, which means the data reflect 2019 activity. But many of the surveys were completed after the pandemic had already taken hold early last year.

"It's safe to say that more demand [for staff] than supply is putting upward pressure on compensation," said Jerry Cobb, senior business manage-

ment consultant at Schwab Advisor Services.

In 2019, 75% of firms surveyed added staff, with the median firm hiring two people. That pace of hiring was projected to continue in 2020.

The most popular recruitment channels after competing RIAs are



## "MORE FIRMS ARE WILLING TO LOOK OUTSIDE OF FINANCIAL SERVICES FOR HIRING."

LISA SALVI, VICE PRESIDENT, SCHWAB ADVISOR SERVICES

colleges and universities (33%), banks and trust companies (16%), wirehouses (12%) and independent broker-dealers (10%).

Lisa Salvi, vice president of business consulting and education at Schwab Advisor Services, said that as demand increases, RIAs have gotten more creative in their searches for

qualified staff.

"These are the main responses we get, but I know more firms are willing to look outside of financial services for hiring," Salvi said.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the need for staff increased with firm size, and firm size and scale are a direct result

of the record-level pace of merger and acquisition activity across the wealth management space.

Compensation represents 74% of an RIA's total expenses, which explains the pattern of smaller firms having significantly smaller workforces.

"There is a true war for talent in the

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# How Black-owned fintechs are closing the racial wealth gap

Wells Fargo Chief Executive Charles Scharf created a firestorm on Twitter late last year by blaming diversity issues at his firm on a shortage of minority talent. He later apologized, but the comments highlight the challenges minorities face in wealth management.



SEAN ALLOCCA

ONTECH

A lack of representation can make it difficult to build business relationships and is often compounded in the tight-knit world of venture capital investing. Black and Hispanic certified financial planners represent just a fraction of total financial advisers, making up 3.8% of the industry's more than 87,000 accredited professionals, according to the CFP Board, the industry body that sets the standards for industry professionals.

Those dire statistics mean minority-owned firms have a more challenging road to land funding, according to Richard Powell, co-founder of Project Black, a private investment fund that



supports Black-owned businesses. Without some of the traditional avenues to capital raising, firms are unable to bring on the next level of growth or attract the levels of intellectual capital needed to take on competitors.

### STRUGGLE TO GAIN

Coupled with rapid growth in fintech, minority-owned businesses can struggle to gain traction, said Powell, a Harvard Business graduate who spent years in private equity before launching Project Black. Partnering with asset manager Ariel Investments, his fund finances middle-market companies that are not currently minority-owned to position them as leading suppliers to Fortune 500 companies.

"Even if the firms are good and smart and well-run, there is a real lack of access to the relationships and the talent necessary to deliver against the

demands of the competition," he said.

Executives at the highest levels have signed on. JPMorgan Chase & Co. committed \$200 million to the fund as part of a \$30 billion initiative over the next five years to help cut the racial wealth divide. Wells Fargo's Scharf has also spearheaded social causes at his firm and has tied executive pay to improving diversity.

The initiatives are necessary. While the challenges to compete against Robinhood, Stash or Acorns are almost insurmountable, there are disruptors building platforms that reach out to underserved communities. For example, Black-owned retail banking app Goalsetter raised \$3.9 million in January to help promote financial literacy designed for Black and Latino youth communities.

"Lack of diversity in any industry

### KEY POINTS

- Black and Hispanic CFPs represent a fraction of financial advisers.
- Minority-owned firms have a challenging road to land funding.

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# State regulators to scrutinize subscription fees

BY MARK SCHOEFF JR.

AS THE WAYS THAT investment advisers charge for their services proliferate, state securities regulators are continuing to probe whether investors are getting enough bang for their advice buck.

Over the last several years, so-called subscription fees — such as charging a client a monthly retainer fee — as well as hourly fees have become increasingly popular as an alternative to the traditional fee based on assets under management.

But state regulators have been expressing concern that new fee structures sometimes don't align with services provided over the period that the charge is assessed. The issue will continue to be a priority this year.

"We are working on providing guidance about subscription fees," Maryland Securities Commissioner Melanie

Senter Lubin said during a recent *InvestmentNews* webcast. "There are a lot of evolving fee models that we're taking a look at. It's kind of fundamental that an adviser, as a fiduciary, needs

## "FEES NEED TO BE REASONABLY RELATED TO THE SERVICES PROVIDED."

MELANIE SENTER LUBIN, MARYLAND SECURITIES COMMISSIONER

to perform the work they're being paid for, and if they're not performing that work, they need to refund the monies."

### GUIDANCE COMING

Lubin said the North American Securities Administrators Association, the umbrella group for state regulators, is aiming to produce the guidance sometime this year.

Subscription fees shouldn't be sin-

gled out for review, said Barbara Roper, director of investor protection at the Consumer Federation of America.

"We need to be sure that when we're looking at this one particular business

model, we're equally willing to challenge some of our assumptions about the other business models," Roper said on the webcast. "I look at some AUM fees that get charged — and which, if you paid them, would be much higher than you would pay under the typical subscription fee — and they pass without any sort of scrutiny, and, I think, they're egregiously high in some cases."

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# Social Security fact sheets get a much-needed online update



The Social Security Administration is stepping up its outreach efforts to working Americans of all ages by including fact sheets with new guidance when workers access their estimated benefits statements online. It is a welcome change and long overdue.



MARY BETH FRANKLIN

ONRETIEMENT

"The fact sheets are designed to provide clarity and useful information, based on your age group and earnings situation," the agency noted on its website. "They can help you better understand Social Security programs and benefits."

There are four new Retirement Ready fact sheets aimed at workers ages 18-48, 49-60, 61-69, and 70 and up. The appropriate fact sheet will be included automatically when an individual accesses his or her personal account at [www.ssa.gov/myaccount](http://www.ssa.gov/myaccount).

### TARGETED FACT SHEETS

In addition, there are targeted fact sheets for special situations such as Social Security Basics for New Workers; How You Become Eligible for Benefits; Additional Work Can Increase Your Future Benefits; You Have Earnings Not Covered by Social Security; and Medicare Ready. Anyone can access the fact sheets at <https://www.ssa.gov/myaccount/statement.html>.

So far, more than 55 million Americans have signed up for personal So-

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# Best Places to Work 2021: What top firms did to stand out in a year of change

The winners of *InvestmentNews'* 2021 Best Places to Work for Financial Advisers are in, and the unique approaches of this year's top industry employers show how firms can remain attractive workplaces even as the nature of office life has shifted dramatically.

As part of the selection process for the Best Places, firms completed a questionnaire outlining the benefits they offer to employees and the workplace policies they have in place. The policies with the largest gaps in adoption between Best Places and other firms — the biggest differentiators of top employers — are displayed in the chart below.



**NUMBERSGAME**  
DEVIN MCGINLEY

Each year, these surveys tell us that although traditional pay and benefits are important to employees, they are not enough to become a top destination in a competitive talent market. This year, the standout policies also show how the industry's top employers are shining when, in many cases, their workplaces have become a constellation of home offices.

## PAID PARENTAL LEAVE

Paid parental leave shot to the top of the standout policies among the 2021 Best Places. Eighty-four percent of these firms offer fully or partially paid leave for the birth or adoption of a child, compared with 59% of other firms. Nationally, only 14% of civilian workers have access to paid family leave, according to the National Conference of State Legislators, and about 40% of workers lack access even to unpaid leave. Not only are the Best Places far ahead of the pack on paid leave for a new child, each one also offers flexibility to accommodate school and family events. Employee time for family has become more salient amid widespread disruption to parents' usual childcare arrangements, and it is important for preventing burnout, especially among working mothers. According to an *InvestmentNews* Research survey late last year, women in the industry were about twice as likely to be working longer hours due to the pandemic.

## FLEXIBLE HOURS

Flexibility also helps address burnout. In prior years, many top employers differentiated themselves with telecommuting options. Now that the pandemic has shifted remote work from a perk for the few to an obligation for many, more flexible work hours are helping the Best Places stand out. As a standard

year-round practice, 77% of Best Places offer flexible work hours or a compressed workweek, compared with 53% of other firms. Flexible workweeks may remain a standout perk going forward, with so much uncertainty about the future of in-person work. According to a recent survey by polling firm Gallup, two-thirds of workers hope to continue working remotely after the pandemic.

## PROFIT-SHARING PLANS

It's fitting that financial advisories that help clients secure their retirement would be attentive to the retirement benefits they offer their own employees. Virtually every firm surveyed for the Best Places program offered their staff a 401(k) and a large majority — whether they made the cut or not — offered matching contributions. The Best Places stand out, however, by being about twice as likely to offer a profit-sharing component in their retirement plan. Beyond the financial incentives such plans offer employees, many workplaces institute profit-sharing to build a culture of ownership and invest employees more fully in the organization's success. Whether through profit-sharing or other means, the Best Places have achieved that goal: altogether, 96% of employees at this year's winners said they felt valued in their organization.

## EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

A majority (52%) of Best Places to Work this year sponsor employee assistance programs, up from 45% of 2020 winners. These programs, which address a range of employee mental health issues, are more common at larger firms: More than three-quarters of Best Places with more than 50 employees offered one. Not only has the offering expanded year-over-year among the Best Places to Work, but the programs have seen renewed interest for their role in helping workers manage increased stress. According to the Society for Human Resources Management, EAPs help employers raise productivity and reduce turnover costs.

## PAID VOLUNTEER TIME

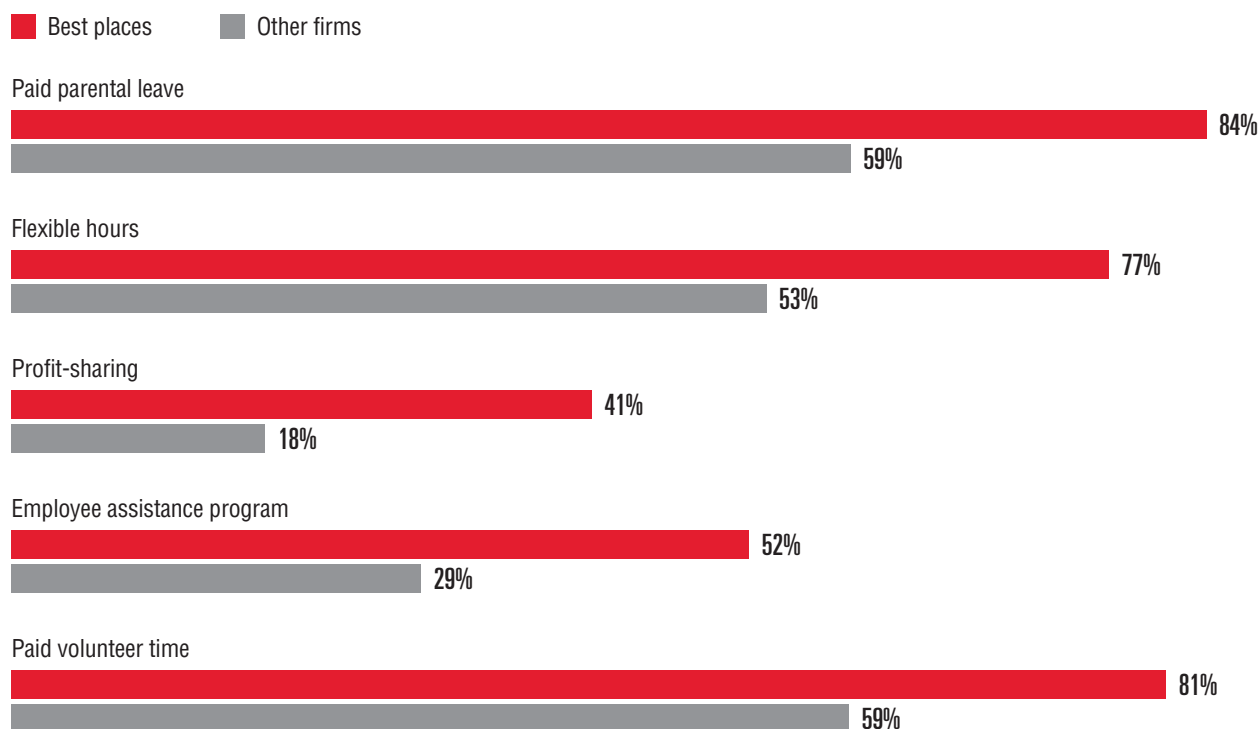
Along with mental health and wellness, for many, the events of the past year

have put a renewed focus on giving. Financial advisers have helped their own clients ramp up donations to charitable causes over the past year in response to the pandemic. Giving back is also important to advisers themselves: 81% of Best Places this year offer their employees paid time off for community service activities or volunteer work, compared with 59% of other firms. Amid high unemployment and economic uncertainty, advisers certainly had skills to offer during the pandemic, and they responded to the call. According to the Financial Planning Association, the number of individuals that its members served on a pro bono basis increased 7% in 2020.

For more information on IN's research offerings, contact [INResearch@investmentnews.com](mailto:INResearch@investmentnews.com).



## BENEFITS OFFERED BY FIRMS



Source: *InvestmentNews* Research



## EDITOR'S NOTE

### Firm culture, and why it's key

In this issue, *InvestmentNews* and Best Companies Group share the 75 Best Places to work in the industry. The common thread among winners? Companies on the list invest in



**GEORGE B. MORIARTY**

their employees and place a primacy on culture.

In terms of the investment in employees, winners offered profit-sharing plans (41% of BPTW, 18% of others), employer-sponsored employee assistance programs (52% of BPTW, 29% of others) and paid sabbaticals (17% of BPTW, 0% of others).

And the culture? *IN*'s Devin McGinley shares these five statements (page 5) that employees at BPTW were more likely to agree with than workers at other firms:

"I can trust what this organization tells me."

"I feel I can express my honest opinions without fear of negative consequences."

"Changes that may affect me are communicated to me prior to implementation."

"My employer enables a culture of diversity."

"This organization gives me enough recognition for work that is well done."

That focus on culture came up in a podcast I joined with Integrated Partners that will be released this week. We discussed lessons from our first jobs, and I remembered the example set by Dave Moore, my first great boss, who taught me to set the example by doing the work you're asking others to do. Give it a listen and share your first job lessons.

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## PE buying is good for RIAs, but what about clients?

**A**s 2021 enters its third month, the explosion of consolidation in the RIA space over the past decade shows no sign of slowing. Even a global pandemic that virtually shut down multiple economies — including its lingering economic effects in the U.S. — has not slowed the appetite that private equity firms have shown for registered independent advisory firms.

In the first weeks of the new year alone, there were no less than three deals involving firms that collectively held more than \$120 billion in assets under management, as Bruce Kelly reported in January.

This level of consolidation, while good for the industry, also brings attention to other corners of the space. As Jeff Benjamin wrote in his Feb. 22 cover story, "The unquenchable thirst for wealth management," private equity investors have been flooding into the RIA space as wealth management firms, their valuations and assets under management continue to rise through an impressive stretch of consolidation that's lasted the better part of a decade.

Though that particular article is focused on wealth management, it's yet another example of how private equity has turned its attention to the financial services industry at large. Just look at the deal last week in which two PE firms, GTCR and Reverence Capital Partners, agreed to acquire Wells Fargo Asset Management for \$2.1 billion.

Talk to any PE firm long enough, Jeff Benjamin wrote, and the conversation inevitably turns to the appeal of the fee-based business model enjoyed by most RIAs, which has been one of the few areas in financial services that remains immune to significant fee compression.

The influx of PE money into the space is a huge vote of confidence for the health and future of the RIA business model. PE investors love businesses with recurring revenues that provide a reliable source of growth.

So the focus naturally turns to the seemingly irreversible influence of private equity money on the industry and what that might mean for clients of a firm that's been bought by private equity.

Some industry observers have voiced concerns. For one, firms may be hostage to PE shareholders; they're basically controlled by the board and will have to meet their revenue targets each quarter — or else.

PE firms could choose to fully monetize RIAs, increasing their fees, for instance, instead of protecting client interests. There hasn't been much evidence to support that claim, and RIAs will rightfully have to maintain the best interest of their clients. But the interest in getting a positive return on investment could bring pressure on financial advisers to squeeze more revenue from clients.

While PE activity is clearly a positive development for RIAs in the short term, the jury is still out on what effect the growing influence of PE ownership will have on the clients of acquired firms in the long term.

Considering the outsized influence private equity capital has had on other industries, this represents a gray area that merits close monitoring right now and going forward.

**TALK TO ANY PE FIRM LONG ENOUGH, AND THE CONVERSATION INEVITABLY TURNS TO THE APPEAL OF THE FEE-BASED BUSINESS MODEL ENJOYED BY MOST RIAs.**

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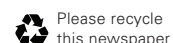
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**THURSDAY, MARCH 11, 2021 | 4:00PM-5:00PM ET**

# THE FUTURE OF FINTECH REGULATION UNDER BIDEN

The Biden presidency will likely have plans to remodel the regulatory landscape and alter at least some of the policies enacted under the previous administration. While most of the effort will be geared toward updating or dismantling Regulation Best Interest, adviser technology will also be affected by changes when it comes to compliance and oversight of the financial services industry.

Topics to be discussed include:

- What segments of wealth management fintech have the most to gain by a new administration?
- How will a Biden administration impact fintech regulation?
- Should advisers brace for more regulation under the next president?

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# BEST PLACES TO WORK FOR FINANCIAL ADVISERS | 2021



## 75 STANDOUT EMPLOYERS

**T**he fourth annual *InvestmentNews* Best Places to Work for Financial Advisers highlights 75 firms that recognize the importance of a strong workplace culture. They stand as role models for the industry.

Our list of top firms was created by Best Companies Group through online employee and employer surveys. Firms voluntarily participated in this program

and information about each firm was combined to assess its strengths and ultimately to determine its ranking.

The 75 firms presented on these pages are grouped in three categories based on employee count. The profiles of these standout firms highlight the human resources policies and workplace practices they focus on to attract and retain skilled employees in a competitive environment for talent.

— Liz Skinner, special projects editor / Profiles of the 75 firms were written by Deborah Nason, Evan Cooper and Brittney Grimes.

Visit [BestPlacesforAdvisers.com](https://www.bestplacesforadvisers.com) to find additional information about the 75 firms and to learn more about the annual *InvestmentNews* program.





## BRIDGEWORTH WEALTH MANAGEMENT

Employees 55 | Firm Type Hybrid | Founder and CEO DeLynn Zell  
Location Birmingham, Alabama | Primary Custodian LPL Financial

Giving staff an enhanced voice and a sense of security has had surprisingly positive effects on **BRIDGEWORTH WEALTH MANAGEMENT**, said DeLynn Zell, co-founder and CEO of the firm.

In 2018, Bridgeworth added a support staff liaison to the management team.

“It was the best thing we have done,” Zell said. “It’s critical — it’s a communication piece. Staff will talk more candidly to their peers than to management.”

Downward communications from management improved dramatically as the liaison provided context and insight on management directives to her peers. Upward communications improved “tremendously” as support staff appreciated having someone to speak to management on their behalf.

As part of an organizational restructuring in 2019, partners contributed their individual practices in exchange for shares of the business. All employees now work for the firm as a whole, instead of individual advisers. As a result, young advisers and support staff felt excited and more secure about their futures at Bridgeworth.

“Now they feel they have a career path with the firm because they’re not dependent on one practice,” Zell said.

Due to the pandemic, the operations team at Bridgeworth compiled a reentry protocol sheet that outlined guiding principles and changes critical for working safely. These procedures included adding safety plexiglass to the reception area, masks to be worn at all times and sanitization stations.

## CASSADAY & CO.

Employees 66 | Firm Type Hybrid | CEO Stephan Quinn Cassaday  
Location McLean, Virginia | Primary Custodian Pershing Advisor Solutions



Creating a “best place to work” means putting benefits and policies into place that eliminate the need for job-hopping, said Allison Felix, president and COO of **CASSADAY & CO.**

The company has long-standing family-friendly policies, such as a \$5,000 annual allotment to dependent care for each employee, for childcare or eldercare. There’s also a true family feel within the staff, which includes two sets of siblings; a mother, son and daughter; and the founder and his three sons.

Organizational compensation focuses more on bonuses than salary, as employee pay is based largely on the firm’s gross revenue. This approach incentivizes an ownership mentality, Felix said. Cassaday also adds 5% to employees’ 401(k) plans and another 2% to their defined-benefit accounts. “You’re rewarded through longevity,” she said.

Family-friendly policies and revenue-based compensation have also helped make the firm particularly female-friendly, with women leading nine out of 10 departments. “There is no glass ceiling. It’s the same ceiling for everyone,” Felix said.

Due to the pandemic, the firm expanded its PTO rollover. Employees were allowed to roll over up to 80 unused PTO hours (previously 40) into 2021 because of travel restrictions during the pandemic.



## SBSB FINANCIAL ADVISORS

Employees 68 | Firm Type RIA  
Principal and Co-CEO Greg Sullivan  
Location McLean, Virginia  
Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services

It’s been a year of growth at **SBSB FINANCIAL ADVISORS**, which rebranded earlier this year from Sullivan Bruyette Speros & Blayney, and the firm’s leaders have focused on keeping employees’ enthusiasm strong while mostly working remotely.

“We have employees actively involved in different committees that aim to keep employees happy and stay engaged,” said principal and co-CEO Greg Sullivan. “They plan activities to connect people despite more physical separation this year.”

The firm’s wellness committee, for instance, sets up programs focused on nutrition, mindfulness and yoga, and recently held a contest to see who could accumulate the most ran/walked miles in a month. SBSB also continues its strong mentoring program, which has been in place for more than a decade, and offers paid sabbaticals.

In response to the pandemic, the firm switched from quarterly staff meetings to having a shorter meeting every two weeks to try and keep communication strong, Sullivan said.

Though the company’s offices have reopened despite the pandemic, the vast majority of employees continue to work remotely. Sullivan said that even after Covid-19 concerns have passed, he expects about 70% of his firm will continue to work from home a day or two each week because they’ve come to enjoy it. — Liz Skinner



## BAILARD

**Employees 65 | Firm Type RIA | CEO Peter M. Hill**  
**Location Foster City, California | Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services**

Shared values are why people stay together, said Peter Hill, CEO of Bailard, where the average tenure for senior management is 20 years and the average tenure for employees is 16. Bailard's values are accountability, striving for excellence, independence, compassion, fairness and courage.

The organization is serious about walking the walk. For example, in terms of modeling fairness, Bailard has an open salary policy, allowing everyone to find out what all co-workers earn. The value of courage is also visibly supported. Hill modeled this mindset in 2012 when, inspired by the Olympics, he came up with his "gigantic, ambitious" plan to double revenues in four years.

"It was aggressive and everyone embraced it," he said.

Employees are encouraged to advocate for their ideas, whether that's developing specialized portfolios like emerging life sciences or prodding the firm do some introspection and self-analysis in the areas of branding and public relations.

"It's the kind of place where people want to work," Hill said. "We demonstrate that we are willing to listen."

Due to the pandemic, communications with colleagues, clients, prospects and service providers are taking place via voice or video calls and internal collaboration tools like Microsoft Teams. The firm is also maintaining its long-standing company culture with virtual get-togethers and celebrations.



## SIGNATUREFD

**Employees 88 | Firm Type RIA | CEO Heather Robertson Fortner**  
**Location Atlanta, Georgia | Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services**

Shared values are what keep the people at SignatureFD together. The firm's values, known as its 6 Gs, are greatness, growth, gratitude, grace, grit and generosity.

Benefits that the firm provides include contributions to employees' 401(k) accounts, unlimited vacation days and a paid five-week sabbatical every five years, along with fully paid medical coverage, tuition reimbursement and childcare expenses. The firm boasts a 95% retention rate.

SignatureFD also provides flexible work-from-home days, something it offered prior to the pandemic. "We really didn't skip a beat when Covid hit, because the infrastructure was already set," said Crystal Cooper Mathis, director of marketing and communications at the firm.

SignatureFD has multiple women in executive roles, including CEO Heather Robertson Fortner, and the firm has a diversity and inclusion task force.

The leadership team also believes that employees should embrace their entrepreneurial spirit. "There is an open floor plan where you can come talk to anyone, including the CEO," Mathis said. "It allows people to be leaders in their own right, to be seen, heard, respected and valued. They can navigate space without micromanagement."

Instead of bosses, SignatureFD uses a coaching system, which includes mentoring. The team then assess their goals and visions for the company. "You're never too big to learn," Mathis said. — *Brittney Grimes*

## HERITAGE FINANCIAL CONSULTANTS

**Employees 64 | Firm Type Broker-dealer | Managing Partner Brian Gracie**  
**Location Hunt Valley, Maryland | Primary Custodian Fidelity Institutional Wealth Services**



Employees at HERITAGE FINANCIAL CONSULTANTS enjoy reward trips, team-building and wellness consultations. The firm empowers employees to participate in community service and charitable giving, and cultivates a collaborative learning environment through organized study groups and "lunch and learns." There's also a bowling competition at the annual holiday party.

Due to the pandemic, Heritage offers teleworking, and added sanitizing stations, dividers and updated air filters.

## SIMON QUICK ADVISORS

**Employees 58 | Firm Type RIA | Founding Partner Leslie C. Quick III | Location**  
**Morristown, New Jersey | Primary Custodian Fidelity Institutional Wealth Services**



At SIMON QUICK ADVISORS, employees are recognized weekly in the firmwide meeting, and anyone can give a "shout-out" to another employee for above-and-beyond work. The firm has an employee lounge with games like shuffleboard, a TV, couches and a fully stocked refrigerator for employees to relax during or after work. The firm hosts monthly happy hours, summer and holiday parties, and brings in a masseuse quarterly.

During the pandemic, the firm implemented a work-from-home mandate through at least March.

## BALASA DINVERNO FOLTZ

**Employees 63 | Firm Type RIA | President Chad D. Carlson**  
**Location Itasca, Illinois | Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services**



This firm has embraced a form of the DiSC training program, which uses birds to teach the four DiSC personality types linked to specific communication preferences. The firm celebrates team members' anniversaries every five years at a monthly team meeting. It also has holiday celebrations like Halloween parades, toy drives and miscellaneous fun breaks like a solar eclipse viewing or a Zoom happy hour.

In response to the pandemic, Balasa Dinverno pivoted to virtual meetings and social hours using Zoom and Teams.

## ADVISER INVESTMENTS

**Employees 89 | Firm Type RIA | CEO Dan Silver | Location Newton,**  
**Massachusetts | Primary Custodian Fidelity Institutional Wealth Services**



ADVISER INVESTMENTS hosts a variety of summer outings, a holiday party with live music and great food, and partner barbecues. Employees receive generous health care coverage for themselves and their families and profit-sharing contributions to their 401(k) plans. The firm also offers in-house seminars, weekly meditation and mentoring programs for associates.

During the pandemic, employees have been encouraged to work from home and the firm put in place a daily Zoom lunch for all employees.

## MERIT FINANCIAL ADVISORS

Employees 78 | Firm Type Hybrid | Founder and CEO Rick Kent  
Location Alpharetta, Georgia | Primary Custodian LPL Financial



When MERIT FINANCIAL's leadership decided to embrace a philosophy of "What can we do together?" it reduced the firm's management hierarchy dramatically and created teams of four to six people. Every year, the executive team lays out its corporate objectives, and small teams work collaboratively to decide how to achieve them.

Due to the pandemic, working from home is allowed with manager notification. At the office, the firm no longer has meetings in conference rooms and requires temperature checks and masks.

## STRATEGIC RETIREMENT PARTNERS

Employees 83 | Firm Type Hybrid | Managing partner Jeff Cullen  
Location Shorewood, Illinois | Primary Custodian LPL Financial



Work-life balance is the theme at STRATEGIC RETIREMENT PARTNERS, which was a remote company even before Covid-19 hit. Its talent-and-culture-centric philosophy toward human capital helps the firm attract and retain top-tier advisers. Advisers benefit from a suite of services, including operational support, relationship management, innovative IT solutions, marketing and investment research. For one of its employee appreciation programs, the firm brought in a mixologist.

## JMG FINANCIAL GROUP

Employees 77 | Firm Type RIA | CEO Anthony D. Cecchini  
Location Downers Grove, Illinois | Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services



JMG FINANCIAL GROUP rewards employees with raffle tickets that can be traded in for additional vacation time. Employees also receive bonuses based on peer recognition and recommendations. To relieve stress, employees can engage in knockout basketball, tai chi and tag football at a local fitness center. The firm allows casual attire all year and offers four-day workweeks in the summer.

In response to the pandemic, the firm lets employees work remotely and limits the number of employees in the office.

## CAPTRUST

Employees 712 | Firm Type RIA | Founder and CEO Fielding Miller  
Location Raleigh, North Carolina | Primary Custodian None



CAPTRUST recognizes employees with its annual Brick Awards, in which colleagues recognize those who represent the firm's core values. The CEO honors three employees with quarterly excellence awards. The Captrust Way helps colleagues understand the Captrust culture. The firm has a band called The Rollovers that plays at company functions and consists of Captrust employees. Staff gets paid volunteer time.

Due to the pandemic, parents and caregivers can use \$50 of their 2020 reimbursement toward virtual learning.

## SIGNATURE ESTATE & INVESTMENT ADVISORS

Employees 84 | Firm Type RIA | CEO and President Brian D. Holmes  
Location Los Angeles, California | Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services



Employees at SIGNATURE ESTATE & INVESTMENT ADVISORS enjoy an annual potluck and gift exchange in December. The firm offers chair massages and wellness events. Employees get year-end bonuses and tickets to events. The firm allows half days for activities such as bowling or going to a museum. The firm holds staff events, summer events and holiday parties. It allows half days before long weekends and holidays.

As a result of the pandemic, the firm limits the number of people in the office and has upgraded its technology.

## ALLWORTH FINANCIAL

Employees 217 | Firm Type Hybrid | CEO Scott Hanson  
Location Sacramento, California | Primary Custodian TD Ameritrade Institutional



ALLWORTH FINANCIAL celebrates employees with its Service Anniversary program, awarding bonuses of between \$500 and \$5,000 every five years. Employees can also receive peer-nominated Core Competency Awards, which has a \$500 bonus. The second Friday of each month is business casual and the firm buys lunch for all associates. The firm hosts Zoom Happy Hours to connect employees from various regions.

Amid the pandemic, most employees work remotely and those in the office are trained on safety guidelines.

## KRILOGY

Employees 53 | Firm Type RIA | CEO and President Kent Skomia  
Location St. Louis, Missouri | Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services



At KRILOGY, employees are recognized through annual Art of Accomplishment Awards, an annual Leadership Award, and quarterly Accomplishment Awards. Employees are recognized for following firm culture, hard work related to production, and overall accomplishments. To help employees stay healthy, the firm offers breakout exercise sessions during meetings. Employees have flexible work schedules and receive one paid day off a year to volunteer for a local nonprofit. Employees enjoy annual holiday celebrations, family picnics and birthdays.

## THE COLONY GROUP

Employees 123 | Firm Type RIA | CEO Michael Nathanson | Location Boston, Massachusetts | Primary Custodian Fidelity Institutional Wealth Services



THE COLONY GROUP shows its appreciation by presenting the Above and Beyond award, where colleagues submit nominations and the leadership team selects a winner. The firm also celebrates milestone anniversaries. Employees enjoy a day off on their birthday. Employees can participate in 30-to-45-minute walks with other employees to discuss topics other than work. The firm also offers a book club.

Due to the pandemic, Colony has implemented a hybrid home-and-remote working environment.

# BEST PLACES TO WORK FOR FINANCIAL ADVISERS | 50+ EMPLOYEES

## MONETA

Employees 376 | Firm Type RIA | Managing Partner Eric Kittner  
Location St. Louis, Missouri | Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services



MONETA holds appreciation events monthly for its employees. The firm also celebrates the professional milestones of its staff. Employees enjoy team building events such as escape rooms, team volunteer activities, Amazing Race-style events and virtual trivia events.

Team members can choose to participate in group walks with their colleagues, known as Walking Wednesdays, and also attend group lunches on Fridays.

## TOLLESON WEALTH MANAGEMENT

Employees 172 | Firm Type RIA | CEO Carter Tolleson  
Location Dallas, Texas | Primary Custodian Pershing Advisor Solutions



TOLLESON WEALTH MANAGEMENT has a program started in 2020 that assists charitable organizations in need called Tolleson Team Cares. To keep ideas current and fresh, the firm has an active culture committee that works to formalize new programs for employees. It offers a year-round wellness program, including a step challenge and meditation sessions.

Amid the pandemic, most employees are working from home and new protocols were implemented for offices, including rules for conference rooms.

## SYM FINANCIAL ADVISORS

Employees 58 | Firm Type RIA | CEO Jerald (Jerry) Yeager  
Location Winona Lake, Indiana | Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services



SYM FINANCIAL ADVISORS offers its employees paid time off to volunteer. Although it has five locations, associates from the entire firm get together throughout the year (during non-Covid-19 times) to keep up a culture of partnership. In 2020, the firm started FTO to allow employees to take 16 hours off per year to attend to family events without having to use PTO.

Due to the pandemic, the firm allows employees to work remotely and attend virtual meetings.

## CARSON WEALTH

Employees 73 | Firm Type RIA | Founder and CEO Ron Carson  
Location Omaha, Nebraska | Primary Custodian TD Ameritrade Institutional



CARSON WEALTH celebrates its employees, which it calls stakeholders, with Years of Service Recognition and monetary gifts. Team members can participate in Carson Days for personal development, team building or attending events. The firm organizes a Bring Your Dog to Work Day and Cocktails & Questions happy hours. It hosts fitness challenges that include Team 5Ks, Ironman and Spartan races. Due to the pandemic, the firm redesigned its remote work policy, maintains a flexible workspace and holds virtual events.

## CERITY PARTNERS

Employees 214 | Firm Type RIA | CEO Kurt Miscinski  
Location Chicago, Illinois | Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services



CERITY PARTNERS celebrates birthdays, office happy hours and "lunch and learns," and has a monthly fruit delivery. It offers flexible paid time off, robust benefit choices and supplemental offerings for accident and critical illness insurance. Employees appreciate the holiday parties and cards on birthdays and anniversaries, as well as swag.

During the pandemic, the firm's employees are working remotely. Certy provided employee with technology solutions to ensure they could do their jobs without interruption.

## MODERA WEALTH MANAGEMENT

Employees 67 | Firm Type RIA | CEO and Principal Thomas Orecchio  
Location Westwood, New Jersey | Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services



MODERA WEALTH MANAGEMENT holds team-building activities throughout the year and dedicates itself to the community through a strong tradition of charitable involvement; a philanthropy committee selects a theme for each of its offices. The firm also believes in supporting its employees with seminars, mentorship programs and career development.

During the pandemic, the firm is largely working from home, conducting all meetings virtually and has stopped all nonessential travel.

## MCKINLEY CARTER WEALTH SERVICES

Employees 50 | Firm Type RIA | President and Chief Investment Officer David H. McKinley  
Location Wheeling, West Virginia | Primary Custodian Fidelity Institutional Wealth Services



MCKINLEY CARTER WEALTH SERVICES has a committee that hosts activities to foster a culture of appreciation. Known as the employee care committee, it plans events such as family picnics and birthday parties. McKinley Carter reimburses employees for exam registration fees, study materials, travel, lodging and meals associated with attending professional development classes or workshops.

The firm auto-enrolls employees in its 401(k) plan once eligible, and matches full or half of contributions up to 5%.

## WESTWOOD WEALTH MANAGEMENT

Employees 50 | Firm Type RIA | CEO and President Brian Casey  
Location Dallas, Texas | Primary Custodian Pershing Advisor Services



WESTWOOD WEALTH MANAGEMENT allows its employees to leave work early for birthdays and on summer Fridays. It offers a collaborative workspace by bringing colleagues together through the "Idea Lab" and allowing them to share materials no matter where they are through Teams.

The firm recognizes its employees annually with the Silver Whistle Award for individuals who reflect values like loyalty and initiative, and the Warriors of Westwood Award for making outstanding contributions to the company.



## STRATEGIC FINANCIAL SERVICES

Employees 32 | Firm Type RIA | CEO Alan Leist III | Location Utica, New York  
Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services

The top priority at Strategic Financial Services is employee engagement.

“My No. 1 job is building an engaged team. It’s the best thing you can do for your clients and your success,” said CEO Alan Leist III.

The firm uses the Entrepreneurial Operating System to develop organizational vision, execution and leadership. One of its tools is an employee engagement survey that includes questions such as “Do you fully understand the vision?” and “Do you feel all the right people are in the right seats?” Also contributing to engagement is the company’s commitment to the principle

of “Family First.” This is supported by its “intraday personal time off” policy, which allows people to leave during the workday to attend to personal business. The idea is to enable employees to integrate their personal lives with their work lives.

Due to the pandemic, Strategic Financial Services is holding daily virtual town hall meetings to keep everyone engaged, connected and feeling heard.

“The people who decided to work here have made one of the biggest commitments of their lives, like marriage or where to live. Because of that, we want to make them feel respected,” Leist said. — *Brittney Grimes*

## MORTON CAPITAL

Employees 48 | Firm Type RIA | CEO Jeffrey Sarti | Location Calabasas, California  
Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services



Jeff Sarti, CEO of Morton Capital, recognizes the reality of work: “It can be a grind.” Acknowledging that fact, he and the firm’s leadership team try to make coming to work each day enjoyable and fulfilling.

They do that, he says, by creating a culture that prioritizes the team above clients and by helping employees thrive and grow in their careers. In addition to generous benefits, which during the pandemic have been supplemented by additional days off to cope with the added stress, the firm emphasizes career development.

“Every person understands in a detailed way what is expected of them in terms of their role and what’s

necessary to advance,” Sarti said. “We want them to own their future.”

Like Sarti, who was a pre-med student in college, Morton Capital’s employees have diverse backgrounds.

“We intentionally hire outside of finance,” he said, seeking different perspectives as well as the all-important motivation and emotional skills needed to help clients reach their long-term goals.

To understand the intricacies of investments, finance and other subjects, the firm conducts 90-minute education sessions each Thursday. “Covid hasn’t caused us to lose sight of the importance of learning and growth,” Sarti said. — *Evan Cooper*



## FRAGASSO FINANCIAL ADVISORS

Employees 43 | Firm Type Hybrid | Chairman and CEO Robert Fragasso  
Location Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania | Primary Custodian TD Ameritrade Institutional

Collaboration and mutual support are guiding principles at Fragasso Financial Advisors, driving the satisfaction of employees that makes possible the firm’s success, says Robert Fragasso, its founder, chairman and CEO. “I made enough mistakes over my career to know what works and what doesn’t in a workplace,” he said, “and I wanted to make sure that our structure encourages people to be open, develop strong relationships and work together for clients as responsible adults.”

In addition to flexible work schedules, profit-sharing, employee stock ownership and other benefits — including paid time-off to volunteer in the community —

employees are encouraged to find their own ways to express creativity. In response to Covid-19, for example, which affected three at the firm, Fragasso’s marketing department came up with several cocktail-hour events along the lines of TV game shows, which created a virtual way for every employee at the company to come together.

The firm has been working virtually since the pandemic started, and switched to off-site operations seamlessly as a result of a technology upgrade in 2019. “Our proactive human resources manager also has been talking to our people non-stop to address stress issues that have arisen,” Fragasso said. — *Evan Cooper*

## WEALTHQUEST

Employees 31 | Firm Type RIA | CEO Daniel Wade | Location Cincinnati, Ohio  
Primary Custodian TD Ameritrade Institutional



If a financial advisory firm has a great culture, nothing else matters. If it doesn’t, nothing else matters. That aphorism sums up the philosophy of Wealthquest, where each employee signs a social contract outlining how they will work to be the best version of themselves.

“We want healthy relationships, where it’s easy to ask for and to offer help, even if that help is not part of your job,” says CEO Wade Daniel. “If there is conflict, we want to address it directly and not triangulate, but we show patience and tolerance — which defines how we want to interact with each other.”

Daniel believes Wealthquest’s

culture is a key component of employee satisfaction. Benefits reflect the culture: Friday work hours end at noon, and the company matches charitable contributions. In addition, it provides adoption assistance, “because we’re big advocates for orphans,” said Daniel, who noted that several adoptions have taken place.

Wealthquest also gives employees time off and covers costs up to \$3,500 every three years for relief or mission trips anywhere in the world.

“We have a heart for our clients and our world, and we put our money where our mouth is,” Daniel said. — *Evan Cooper*



## CENTER FOR FINANCIAL PLANNING

**Employees 30 | Firm Type Hybrid**  
**Managing Partner** Timothy Wyman  
**Location** Southfield, Michigan  
**Primary Custodian** Raymond James

With two of its eight partners coming from the firm's operations areas, the Center for Financial Planning recognizes the contributions of all its employees and encourages professional development for each of them. "One of the most important things we do as a firm is develop a personal professional development plan for each employee and keep working on it with them," said Timothy Wyman, the firm's managing partner, who notes that the firm's philosophy is "people over profits." The firm is proud that it didn't lay off anyone during the 2008-09 financial crisis, instead concentrating on efficiencies and cutting other expenses.

While focusing on the success of each employee, the firm also emphasizes teamwork. "We work on the team experience as much as the client experience," Wyman said, noting that satisfied employees make for satisfied clients.

Covid has put a strain on team members, who experienced the loss of family members and clients, he said. "We've had our share of grief, and tried to be caring and flexible." — *Evan Cooper*



## WESTMOUNT ASSET MANAGEMENT

**Employees 35 | Firm Type RIA | President and Chief Investment Officer** James Berliner | **Location** Los Angeles, California  
**Primary Custodian** Schwab Advisor Services

WESTMOUNT ASSET MANAGEMENT awards spot bonuses to employees for exemplary performance and achievements. Associates who have made extraordinary contributions over time are eligible to become equity partners. The firm implements a variety of regularly scheduled social events and outings to promote team bonding. Its culture committee is dedicated to improving the office culture through various firmwide events, and Westmount helps employees who have a long commute by establishing satellite offices.

As a result of the pandemic, all employees are working remotely and can be reimbursed up to \$400 for home equipment.



## TRUE NORTH ADVISORS

**Employees 32 | Firm Type RIA | Co-founder and CEO** Scott Wood | **Location** Dallas, Texas | **Primary Custodian** Schwab Advisor Services

TRUE NORTH ADVISORS rewards employees through nominations for "Employee of the Month," with the winner receiving a PTO day and an awesome parking spot for the month. Every year, the firm hosts a Halloween costume party and a Thanksgiving potluck. Employee birthdays or anniversaries are celebrated with a breakfast and gifts. The firm also offers in-house workout classes to relieve stress, including Zumba and yoga.

The firm initially responded to the pandemic by going 100% remote; now employees rotate between one week working in the office, then one week working from home.



## INTEGRATED PARTNERS

**Employees 33 | Firm Type Hybrid | CEO** Paul Saganey  
**Location** Waltham, Massachusetts | **Primary Custodian** LPL Financial

Paul Saganey, founder and CEO of INTEGRATED PARTNERS, said the key to a successful organization is allowing people to do what they love. For more than 20 years, the firm has been using Kolbe assessments to accomplish this. Saganey describes three sub-teams formed according to what employees excel in and prefer: creative — the people who think big; **implementation** — those who do research and come up with ways to make things happen; and **follow-through** — the people who keep everyone accountable.

Due to the pandemic, employees have the option to work from home; those in the office must wear masks. All meetings are held via Zoom.



## PER STIRLING CAPITAL MANAGEMENT

**Employees 39 | Firm Type Hybrid | CEO** John Per O'Sullivan  
**Location** Austin, Texas | **Primary Custodian** Fidelity Institutional Wealth Services

PER STIRLING CAPITAL MANAGEMENT recognizes employees in an internal Employee Highlight of the Month newsletter and gives annual appreciation gifts and birthday recognition. The firm hosts trivia happy hours, staff luncheons and holiday events. Employees can go home early on most Fridays and days before holidays. The company holds a yearly firmwide fitness contest and employees can take paid time off to volunteer. Per Stirling Capital Management believes in treating both its clients and team members like family.

Due to the pandemic, the firm is holding virtual meetings, has shortened in-office hours and has very limited in-office meetings.



## MIRACLE MILE ADVISORS

**Employees 30 | Firm Type RIA | Founding Partner** Brock Moseley | **Location** Los Angeles, California | **Primary Custodian** TD Ameritrade Institutional

MIRACLE MILE ADVISORS seeks to create an environment where employees feel they have room to grow professionally and personally. It does this by providing an open-ended vacation policy, allowing employees to take time off as necessary, and by encouraging extensive mentoring, whether it's a partner guiding an employee or an employee guiding another employee.

The firm also sponsors monthly group activities outside the office, such as yoga and boxing classes.



## HOYLECOHEN

**Employees 47 | Firm Type RIA | CEO** Mark Delfino  
**Location** San Diego, California | **Primary Custodian** Schwab Advisor Services

At HOYLECOHEN, employees who go above and beyond can receive tokens of appreciation from colleagues called Core Bucks, which are redeemable for Amazon gift cards. Employees can choose from 10 different medical plans. The firm celebrates anniversaries of staff members with monetary gifts and public recognition. Employees can access back-up child or elder care if the regular caregiver is not available. During workplace challenges, every employee is given a Fitbit to use. They can also access fitness facilities and personal trainers on-site during working hours.

During the pandemic, the firm is sending regular "Stay Safe & Sane" quarantine care packages.



## RFG ADVISORY

**Employees:** 45 | **Firm Type:** Hybrid  
**CEO** Bobby White | **Location:** Birmingham, Alabama | **Primary Custodian:** TD Ameritrade Institutional

Employees at RFG Advisory celebrate new hires with team lunches. The firm offers weekly virtual team huddles that include motivational speaking and recognition for jobs well done. Employees participate in Wonderful Wednesdays, where team leadership picks a team member they haven't connected with and reaches out to check in. New employees take part in the company's mentorship program to ensure that they feel supported as they join the team.

In response to the pandemic, RFG went remote and implemented a rigorous communications plan. The CIO began filming investment updates for advisers and clients multiple times a week. As the firm has returned to office work, it's adopted a more flexible schedule.



## PRIVATE OCEAN WEALTH MANAGEMENT

**Employees** 46 | **Firm Type** RIA | **Founder and CEO** Greg Friedman | **Location** San Rafael, California | **Primary Custodian** Schwab Advisor Services

Cultivating strong employee connections to PRIVATE OCEAN WEALTH MANAGEMENT and to one another is one of the primary goals of the twice-a-year, off-site retreats the firm holds. Retreat activities include 60-second shout-outs, where individuals are assigned to interview someone they don't know well and give a short speech about one of the person's accomplishments. Employees talk in small groups about why they like working at the firm and also learn how to convey this message to listeners according to their communication style.

As a result of the pandemic, Private Ocean moved to remote work and implemented a dress code for virtual meetings and new protocols for data transmission to protect client information.



## RTD FINANCIAL

**Employees** 36 | **Firm Type** RIA | **Chairman and CEO** Richard J. Busillo | **Location** Philadelphia, Pennsylvania | **Primary Custodian** TD Ameritrade Institutional

Employees at RTD FINANCIAL meet every summer for unique activities that have included ax throwing and race-car driving. The company has a "fun committee" that organizes activities for employees. Associates have picnics in the park during the summer and participate in 5K races together. The firm offers special hours in the summer, with employees allowed to leave work early on Fridays between Memorial Day and Labor Day. Associates may receive an incentive bonus from a portion of the firm's revenue each year, and there's an education budget for professional development.

In response to the pandemic, all employees are working remotely and the firm ordered laptops to ensure they can work efficiently.



## HALBERT HARGROVE

**Employees** 34 | **Firm Type** RIA | **Chairman and CEO** Russ Hill | **Location** Long Beach, California | **Primary Custodian** Fidelity Institutional

HALBERT HARGROVE GLOBAL ADVISORS offers employees an incentive equity plan in which it grants associates shares of the company. The firm pays for sabbaticals after 10 years of service and has unlimited vacation time. There is an emphasis placed on reaching goals. Associates receive yearly recognition for AUM milestones, years of service and education goals. Employees participate in a number of charities, including Ronald McDonald House. The company pays for continuing education, such as graduate degrees, and associates can relieve stress with monthly yoga classes and games like Ping-Pong.

During the pandemic, employees are working remotely and the firm has sent food delivery gift certificates and treats like pizza to their homes.



## WEST FINANCIAL SERVICES

**Employees** 35 | **Firm Type** RIA | **President** Glen J. Buco | **Location** McLean, Virginia | **Primary Custodian** Fidelity Institutional Wealth Services

WEST FINANCIAL SERVICES offers its employees a flexible work schedule, excellent compensation and benefits, and a bonus incentive for outstanding achievement. Other perks include casual Fridays and dress-up days such as for a favorite sports team or Halloween. The company celebrates weddings, baby showers and holiday gatherings. It also awards employees who exemplify the company's principles in their work through a program known as the President's Circle. Employees also participate in various company outings, such as happy hours and bowling nights.

During the pandemic, the firm has mostly been working from home and began virtual biweekly happy hours to stay connected to each other.



## KUTTIN WEALTH MANAGEMENT

**Employees** 49 | **Firm Type** Broker-dealer | **CEO** Jonathan Kuttin | **Location** Hauppauge, New York | **Primary Custodian:** Ameriprise Financial

At the beginning of every weekly meeting, KUTTIN WEALTH MANAGEMENT acknowledges team members who have done great work at the firm. Every quarter, the company gives out four employee rewards during the quarterly meeting. The core values at Kuttin Wealth Management are family, integrity, leadership, security and happiness. It strives to make sure that these core values guide both clients and staff. The firm provides leadership opportunities for employees and offers opportunities to grow and learn.

As a result of the pandemic, plexiglass dividers were placed between all employees' desks and staff adhere to social distancing guidelines.



## ACCREDITED INVESTORS WEALTH MANAGEMENT

**Employees** 48 | **Firm Type** RIA | **CEO and founder** Ross Levin | **Location** Edina, Minnesota | **Primary Custodian** Schwab Advisor Services

ACCREDITED INVESTORS WEALTH MANAGEMENT is focused on the health and wellness of its employees and seeks to make sure they are relaxed by offering on-site private meditation rooms. The company shows its appreciation by issuing Thank You Awards, which employees present to colleagues they feel have been helpful. Accredited Investors also offers gym benefits, a treadmill desk, standing desks and ergonomic hardware, and provides fresh fruit and veggie delivery.

In response to the pandemic, the firm started hosting socially distanced gatherings in its office parking lot, including a food truck event and a fire pit and s'mores event. It's also now using Zoom for social and work meetings.

## BEST PLACES TO WORK FOR FINANCIAL ADVISERS | 30-49 EMPLOYEES

### REILLY FINANCIAL ADVISORS

Employees 37 | Firm Type RIA | President Frank Reilly | Location La Mesa, California  
Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services



REILLY FINANCIAL ADVISORS hosts holiday office parties and company picnics for its employees. It also caters lunch for the entire office when a new employee starts. Workers who have been with the firm for at least three years can enjoy Disneyland passes and paid dinner at Disneyland's Club 33 every other year. Reilly Financial Advisors pays 100% of health insurance premiums for employees, their spouses and all child dependents. Team members can take time off to volunteer and donate time to a cause they believe in.

### PRIVATE VISTA

Employees 31 | Firm Type RIA | Managing Partner James M. Weil | Location Chicago, Illinois  
Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services



PRIVATE VISTA gives its employees bonuses for exceptional work and limits meetings to regular work hours. When overnight travel is required, the firm offers monetary incentives or paid time off. Private Vista offers its employees flexible hours and early Fridays. The firm holds a year-end meeting where associates are recognized for their efforts. There is also an employee experience committee that meets monthly to review issues such as enhancing employee benefits.

### PROVENANCE WEALTH ADVISORS

Employees 42 | Firm Type Hybrid | CEO and Managing Director Eric Zeitlin | Location Fort Lauderdale, Florida | Primary Custodian Raymond James Financial Services



At PROVENANCE WEALTH ADVISORS, many employees have been with the firm for 10 years or more because of the opportunity for growth and learning. Team members enjoy monthly happy hours and virtual holiday gatherings. The firm also held a virtual baby shower for one of its employees. All employees are eligible for a new-hire referral bonus program, which ranges from \$1,000 to \$10,000 depending on the reference. The firm offers generous paid time off for the entire staff, along with alternative and flexible work schedules.

### SHP FINANCIAL

Employees 31 | Firm Type RIA | CEO Keith Ellis | Location Plymouth, Massachusetts  
Primary Custodian Fidelity Institutional



SHP FINANCIAL creates a relaxing environment for its employees by offering chair massages and monthly in-house yoga classes. Employees are offered half-days before holidays and given days off between Memorial Day and Labor Day. Charitable activity is encouraged and employees at the firm volunteer at Habitat for Humanity.

Amid the pandemic, employees can work from home and use Zoom meetings. SHP Financial also added air purifiers throughout the office and black lights to sanitize phones.



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## ML&R WEALTH MANAGEMENT

**Employees 16 | Firm Type RIA | Lead Partner Stuart Smith | Location Austin, Texas | Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services**

Switching to remote work as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic didn't require much shifting, says lead partner Stuart Smith. "We've always allowed our employees to work from home and on flexible schedules to fit their particular circumstances," she explained. "Our core value is that no success at work is worth failure at home, so we try to create an environment where everyone can succeed without making the rest of their life more difficult."

Along with being proactive on work-life balance, ML&R has always emphasized technology, which also made the transition to working at home seam-

less. "Everyone was equipped to work remotely, and we gave each employee a \$1,000 stipend to spend on anything that would make working from home easier and more comfortable," Smith said.

Employees are encouraged to take off an hour or so during the day and "take a walk or do something for themselves so they're not on Zoom or staring at a computer screen nine hours straight," she said. To combat the isolation, the firm treated employees to virtual escape rooms and gives them lunch allowances so they can order in and then take a lunch break with colleagues online. — *Evan Cooper*

## RICHARD P. SLAUGHTER ASSOCIATES

**Employees 18 | Firm Type RIA | CEO Brooks Slaughter | Location Austin, Texas | Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services**



Reflecting on lessons learned over 30 years of fostering a "best place to work," Brooks Slaughter, president and CEO of Richard P. Slaughter Associates, cites a long-held company strategy.

"The demand for our wealth management services has been steadily growing over the years," Slaughter said. "By maintaining our strategy of hiring and training in advance of demand, we've been able to integrate [new employees] into our culture of graciousness and keep our service levels at our highest standards."

Another strategy contributing to worker satisfaction is the decision 10 years ago to offer employees stock in the company. With an ownership mindset comes a greater commitment. "The employees feel that 'I'm not just minding the company's money, I'm minding mine, too,'" Slaughter said. "There are no partners. It's not that two-tiered system of owners and nonowners. Employees don't have that psychological barrier of feeling less important."

Due to the pandemic, employees can work from home and the firm has limited in-office client exposure. The staff must also wear masks and practice social distancing. — *Brittney Grimes*



## PELL WEALTH PARTNERS

**Employees 17 | Firm Type Broker-dealer | CEO Geri E. Pell | Location Rye Brook, New York | Primary Custodian Ameriprise Financial**

Geri Pell wants employees at her firm to get the most out of work and out of their personal lives, and to stay for a long, long time. "Because we are a planning firm that helps clients reach their goals, we believe it's important for employees to reach their goals, so we have everyone here go through a process of identifying what they want for themselves professionally and personally, and then we help them hit their goals," she said.

To help attract the best people and get them to stay, the firm offers some unusual benefits. Employees with children get off on their child's first day of school,

from kindergarten to college. Each employee also gets a gift card on their work anniversary that increases by \$100 every year. Starting in an employee's 10th year, the company pays for a car lease.

Maintaining the culture during the pandemic, which Pell describes as being like a "year-long snow day — except you keep working," has meant tying together the firm's all-virtual workforce through daily all-firm meetings and twice-daily meetings for the operations team. "We've also brought in experts on stress to help us help our employees," Pell said. — *Evan Cooper*

## WILLIS JOHNSON & ASSOCIATES

**Employees 20 | Firm Type RIA | CEO and Founder Willis Johnson | Location Houston, Texas | Primary Custodian Fidelity Institutional Wealth Services**



Having a young team and doing things by the book have helped Willis Johnson & Associates not only cope successfully with Covid-19 business challenges, but also be a satisfying workplace, in the view of Nick Johnson, the firm's president. The book the organization follows is "Traction: Get a Grip on Your Business," by entrepreneur Gino Wickman, which lays out the principles of a system that emphasizes team involvement and continual improvement.

"It's a management communication structure that provides a channel for team members to give feedback about things that aren't working as well as they should, allowing us to concentrate on improving our processes," Johnson said.

Willis Johnson's tech-savvy team, whose average age is in the early 30s, has adapted easily to the system, which lends itself to online collaboration.

Going to an all-virtual operation, therefore, including online versions of the in-person social events held in pre-Covid days, was an easy transition, Johnson said. "Trusting our team to focus more on output, such as taking care of clients and meeting deadlines, than on how or when people are working, makes this a good place to be." — *Evan Cooper*



## ARMSTRONG FLEMING & MOORE

**Employees 19 | Firm Type Hybrid | Principal Ryan Fleming | Location Washington, D.C. | Primary Custodian National Financial Services**

A financial advisory firm as a teaching hospital? That's how Ryan Fleming, a principal of the hybrid that financial planning pioneer Alexandra Armstrong founded in 1983, describes its culture. "When an adviser meets with a client, there's always someone else from the firm in the room in order to learn and offer a different perspective," he says. "We never go into a meeting alone."

These days, those meetings are held virtually, as is everything else at the firm. "My wife is our chief compliance officer and our chief worrier, and because our office is located six blocks from the White House, where there often are protests, we've been prepared for the last decade to shut down and operate remotely at a moment's notice," Fleming said.

The firm's location in downtown Washington also shapes its benefits: The firm provides transportation reimbursement, since most employees commute. And in a move that emulated the many consulting firms with offices nearby, it aggregated its vacation, sick days and personal days off into a four-week block of personal days off that increases with tenure at the firm. Fleming says employees have told him that the switch "was the most positive change we've ever made." — *Evan Cooper*



## GREENSPRING ADVISORS

**Employees 25 | Firm Type RIA | CEO and Managing Director J. Patrick Collins Jr. | Location Towson, Maryland | Primary Custodian Fidelity Institutional Wealth Services**

GREENSPRING ADVISORS encourages employees to recognize one another for living by the core values of the company. Employees can display handwritten thank-you notes on the company's Praise Wall (virtually in 2020) and be entered into a monthly raffle. Before the pandemic, the firm engaged in monthly happy hours that entail scavenger hunts, mini-golf, and team lunches. During holidays, the office may close early, or employees may receive additional paid time off.

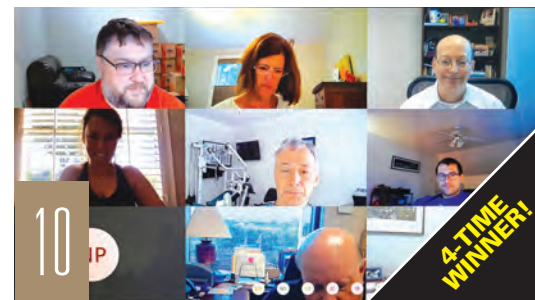
Due to the pandemic, those whose workspace is a cubicle must use an office, breakout room or conference room. The dress code was changed to business casual, with masks and Covid protocols in place.



## ZUCKERMAN INVESTMENT GROUP

**Employees 15 | Firm Type RIA | President and CEO Daniel Zuckerman | Location Chicago, Illinois | Primary Custodian Pershing Advisor Services**

ZUCKERMAN INVESTMENT GROUP recognizes its employees quarterly for outstanding work performance. Employees celebrate with a toast when colleagues pass certification exams and enjoy annual summer outings, such as going to a Cubs baseball game. Employees are allowed to work in different departments and expand their knowledge at the firm. Every person gets to work with and be mentored by the CEO. Employees receive birthday lunches at the office and enjoy happy hour. The firm allows for employees to have the flexibility to decide what projects to work on based on their passions and to choose the direction of their career path.



## LEGACY WEALTH MANAGEMENT

**Employees 22 | Firm Type RIA | CEO and President James J. Isaacs | Location Memphis, Tennessee | Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services**

LEGACY WEALTH MANAGEMENT focuses on core values such as honesty, integrity, compassion and putting clients first. Together, those values create an office culture that encourages teamwork and prizes knowledge. Compassion underlies the firm's generous sick leave and caretaker-leave policy.

Due to the pandemic, most staff members are working from home, and the firm installed a plexiglass barrier to protect its office receptionist. Employees are using Microsoft Teams and Zoom for client meetings. Weekly educational presentations are being held virtually. Working from home and client e-signatures will continue post-Covid.



## THE BAHNSEN GROUP

**Employees 25 | Firm Type RIA | Managing Partner, Founder, and Chief Investment Officer David L. Bahnsen | Location Newport Beach, California | Primary Custodian Fidelity Institutional Wealth Services**

THE BAHNSEN GROUP shows its appreciation by providing catered lunches and dinners, along with unlimited health-conscious snacks and drinks. The firm offers an annual all-expenses-paid retreat, golf tournaments, happy hours, game nights and milestone celebrations. Bahnsen Group also offers internships and growth opportunities. It celebrates employee of the year recognition, and gives gifts for birthdays and milestone moments. The firm sends care packages when employees recover from surgery or illness. Employees have unlimited sick days.

Due to the pandemic, the firm allows more schedule flexibility.



## WEALTHSTREAM ADVISORS

**Employees 16 | Firm Type RIA | President Michael Goodman | Location New York, New York | Primary Custodian Fidelity Institutional Wealth Services**

WEALTHSTREAM ADVISORS INC. offers fitness reimbursement benefits and firm exercise classes. Employees can enjoy various social activities and monthly firm lunches. The company takes the entire team to an annual industry conference and provides coaching for personal and professional development. It offers employees paid sabbaticals and financial education workshops, seminars and classes.

Due to the pandemic, Wealthstream Advisors encourages staff to work from home and has adopted the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as New York state guidelines.



## HEMINGTON WEALTH MANAGEMENT

**Employees 16 | Firm Type RIA | Co-founder and CEO Eileen O'Connor | Location Falls Church, Virginia | Primary Custodian TD Ameritrade Institutional**

HEMINGTON WEALTH MANAGEMENT stands out for its diversity; women represent 55% of its employees. The company offers mentoring and monthly meetings with its CEO. It specializes in serving "breadwinner women"—female professionals who balance the demands of work and family. Before the pandemic, Hemington employees enjoyed summer outings, yoga Fridays and an annual charity day.

Due to the pandemic, Hemington held its first-ever virtual onboarding and celebrated a happy hour with Covid protocols in the CEO's backyard. The firm is marking milestones during Covid with video meetings, including champagne delivered to employees.

## SMITH ANGLIN FINANCIAL

Employees 25 | Firm Type Hybrid | Managing Partner Steven W. Anglin | Location Dallas, Texas  
Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services



SMITH ANGLIN FINANCIAL plans quarterly social events and monthly birthday celebrations for its employees. It offers a rotating executive parking spot and generous time off, whether it is for sporting or school events or just spending time with family.

The firm also encourages professional development and supports enrollment in educational classes and conferences to enhance industry knowledge.

## MULTNOMAH GROUP

Employees 18 | Firm Type RIA | Managing Principal Erik Daley  
Location Portland, Oregon | Primary Custodian TIAA



Employees at MULTNOMAH GROUP enjoy flexible schedules and unlimited paid time off once they've been with the company at least a year. To foster professional development, employees are encouraged to attend conferences, and the firm offers education reimbursement for advanced or post-graduate degrees. Multnomah Group also offers a profit-sharing contribution plan to help save for retirement.

Due to the pandemic, the firm pays part of employees' internet bills while the firm is mandated to work remotely.



## BERGANKDV WEALTH MANAGEMENT

Employees 22 | Firm Type RIA | CEO Dave Hinnenkamp | Location Bloomington, Minnesota  
Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services

BERGANKDV WEALTH MANAGEMENT recognizes employees through peer-recognition software called Kazoo Points. Accrued points can be cashed in for gifts. Employees can also receive annual core value awards. The firm hosts picnics, pancake breakfasts, grill-out days and bowling. It also holds a REST Week that raises mental health awareness through well-being activities, concluding with a paid mental health day. Due to the pandemic, the firm offers a permanent work-from-home option.



## MERSBERGER FINANCIAL GROUP

Employees 17 | Firm Type Hybrid | Co-CEO Zachary Mersberger | Location Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin | Primary Custodian Pershing Advisor Solutions

At MERSBERGER FINANCIAL GROUP, employees' achievements are touted on social media and in press releases. Individual and team bonuses are given. The firm holds weekly meetings, quarterly socials, and virtual happy hours in the pandemic. Employees have a flexible work week and can qualify for a paid sabbatical after five years.

Due to the pandemic, the firm made remote work and virtual client meetings permanent options.



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## ALESCO ADVISORS

Employees 23 | Firm Type RIA | President James G. Gould  
Location Pittsford, New York | Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services



When goals are met within the company, **ALESCO ADVISORS** takes all of its employees and their spouses on a trip to a location chosen by the group. Every December, the team decides on ideas for the next year's activities, which usually include a picnic and baseball. During the summer, employees can enjoy food cooked on the company's backyard grill. Alesco provides all its employees a \$100,000 life insurance policy paid for by the firm.

16

## VIEWPOINT FINANCIAL NETWORK

Employees 16 | Firm Type Broker-dealer affiliate | Managing Principal Benjamin W. Wong  
Location Pleasanton, California | Primary Custodian National Financial Services



**VIEWPOINT FINANCIAL NETWORK** creates a fun work environment by allowing employees to participate in games, celebrating special occasions, and letting them bring dogs to work. Other benefits include a stipend that can be used to cover a portion of health care plans, and time off to deal with mental health and family issues. Prior to Covid-19, the firm took yearly trips to places like Las Vegas or Disneyland. In response to the pandemic, the firm put into place a hybrid working environment with two to three days in the office and other days remote.

17

## THE WELCH GROUP

Employees 27 | Firm Type RIA | Managing Member and Chief Compliance Officer Greg Weyandt  
Location Birmingham, Alabama | Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services



**THE WELCH GROUP** shows its appreciation for employees by hosting annual parties, spa days, catered lunches and dinners for special occasions and fantasy sports tournaments. There is also an emphasis placed on a healthy culture by rewarding employees for jobs well done. The firm offers free health insurance and profit-sharing to all full-time employees.

Due to the pandemic, The Welch Group has implemented social distancing guidelines and sanitization zones throughout the office and made masks mandatory.

18

## FINANCIAL SYMMETRY

Employees 23 | Firm Type RIA | President Bill Ramsay  
Location Raleigh, North Carolina | Primary Custodian Pershing Advisor Solutions



**FINANCIAL SYMMETRY** offers employees an adviser-in-training program and reimburses for CFP course work, review sessions and exam costs. It manages the retirement plan for employees at no charge and covers all plan costs. Employees can enjoy happy hours, trivia events and group lunches. The firm challenges its employees to learn new concepts regularly and accepts new ideas from employees, while also cross-training them to serve clients effectively.

In response to the pandemic, the firm no longer meets with clients in person, and uses Microsoft Teams for weekly meetings with staff and clients.

19

## CIC WEALTH

Employees 15 | Firm Type RIA | CEO Ryan Wibberley | Location Rockville, Maryland  
Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services



**CIC WEALTH** executives are proud to give employees a lot of say in how things are run. In recent years, the firm transitioned from an independent broker-dealer model to an RIA. This change involved employee-run committees redesigning work processes and coming up with solutions. The firm provides in-office lunches, outside activities like happy hours, and an environment that promotes professional growth.

In response to the pandemic, the firm allows anyone to work from home if they feel more comfortable doing so.

20

4-TIME WINNER!

## BSW WEALTH PARTNERS

Employees 24 | Firm Type RIA | CEO David Wolf | Location Boulder, Colorado  
Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services



Guided by the motto "Make Life Better," **BSW WEALTH PARTNERS** encourages both its clients and employees to pursue their passions. For example, the firm enabled one staffer to pursue an interest in international wildlife conservation through travel. The firm boasts a high percentage of female employees at all levels, a commitment to equitable pay, a longstanding expertise in impact investing, and is a Certified B Corporation and Gender Equity Now certified company.

Due to the pandemic, the firm's employees are working fully remote.

21

4-TIME WINNER!

## SKYEBURST WEALTH MANAGEMENT

Employees 23 | Firm Type Broker-dealer | Managing Partner Daniel T. Wilson  
Location Auburndale, Massachusetts | Primary Custodian Ameriprise Financial



At **SKYEBURST WEALTH MANAGEMENT**, employees are 100% vested in their 401(k) plan match from the day they start at the company. The match is 100% of employees' first 3% contribution and 50% of the next 2%.

Prior to the pandemic, employees could go on team power walks to recharge and enjoy themed potluck lunches every other month.

Skyeburst also offers its employees weekly yoga classes that are currently virtual due to the pandemic.

22

FIRST-TIME WINNER!

## PETERSEN HASTINGS INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT

Employees 23 | Firm Type RIA | CEO and President Scott Sarber  
Location Kennewick, Washington | Primary Custodian TD Ameritrade Institutional



**PETERSEN HASTINGS INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT** is dedicated to providing a culture that fosters growth, learning and excellence, as well as a family-friendly work environment. The firm recognizes work anniversary milestones, such as with a branded jacket after the first year and a sabbatical after 10 years. The firm offers monthly engagement events such as staff lunches, games, breakfasts, activities, and paid time off for community service. There's also a flexible summer schedule. Due to the pandemic, the firm enhanced its telework options and added small group organizational outreach opportunities in compliance with Covid-19 restrictions.

23

4-TIME WINNER!

## BURNHAM GIBSON WEALTH ADVISORS

Employees 18 | Firm Type Hybrid | President Darin Gibson  
Location Irvine, California | Primary Custodian LPL Financial



Employees at **BURNHAM GIBSON WEALTH ADVISORS** enjoy team-building summer parties and other holiday celebrations. The firm also shows its appreciation through outings, such as to arcades, go-kart racing and bowling. Each year, employees hold a March Madness ice cream contest. They also enjoy half-day Fridays and are allowed to wear jeans every Friday.

As a result of the pandemic, the firm has increased accommodations for working from home and is adhering to daily employee health monitoring and cleaning guidelines.

## WACKER WEALTH PARTNERS

Employees 19 | Firm Type RIA | CEO Ryan Caldwell | Location San Luis Obispo, California  
Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services

Employees at **WACKER WEALTH PARTNERS** enjoy staff events such as bowling, archery and art, along with team-building excursions. The company also offers flexible schedules to promote a balanced life. The firm has a charitable gift-matching program along with paid time off for volunteering. The company applies its “Clients First” values to its employees to create a positive, encouraging atmosphere.

Due to the pandemic, the firm created an in-office work policy that clearly outlines expectations surrounding office density, masking, office sterilization and the ramifications for engaging in different risk-level activities. All in-person internal and client meetings are now held via Zoom.



## GIBSON CAPITAL

Employees 16 | Firm Type RIA | Chief Operating Officer Christine T. DeMao  
Location Wexford, Pennsylvania | Primary Custodian Fidelity Institutional Wealth Services



**GIBSON CAPITAL** recognizes its employees who go above and beyond with awards and personalized gift cards. The firm offers executive coaching for leaders through the Leadership Circle Profile. The founders hold an annual “GC Decathlawn” picnic and employees can enjoy quarterly luncheons to publicly share “kudos” messages from staff. The company hosts catered parties with gifts to celebrate all employee milestone anniversaries of 10 years or more. Employees can also enjoy QuizBreakers every Thursday to stay connected with each other.

During the pandemic, employees have enjoyed virtual escape rooms, virtual game night competitions, Blue Apron quarantine cuisine month and a remote “Shower in a Box” to mark a staff member’s wedding.

## THE PLANNING CENTER

Employees 28 | Firm Type RIA | CEO Eric Kies | Location Moline, Illinois  
Primary Custodian Trust Company of America



**THE PLANNING CENTER** provides employees with time and financial help to continue their education. It supports them by allowing them to take risks, try new things and learn new skills. The firm provides both maternity and paternity leave for biological and adoptive parents alike. Every year it hosts an all-company meeting for everyone from all seven of its U.S. offices. Amid the pandemic, employees have been encouraged to work from home whenever possible; if they choose to work from the office, they must follow protocols such as wearing masks.


## CAPSTONE FINANCIAL ADVISORS

Employees 27 | Firm Type RIA | CEO Troy Bute | Location Downers Grove, Illinois  
Primary Custodian Schwab Advisor Services



**CAPSTONE FINANCIAL ADVISORS** celebrates employee achievements such as certifications at monthly and semi-annual team meetings. It hosts holiday parties, gift exchanges, ugly sweater day and office mini golf. Employees enjoy summer hours, early holiday departures and flexible work hours. Capstone contributes 3% of each employee’s salary and bonus to their 401(k) account after six months of employment. Due to the pandemic, the firm extended unused 2020 paid time off for advisers into 2021 and modified its office layout, while allowing remote access for all employees.

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## WELLS FARGO

➔ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

pre- and post-retirement, he explained. “We’ve grown to be a key player in money markets,” he added.

Insurance and ESG will also be a growing focus under Marais. “Probably most of what will be coming to market will be dealing with client concerns around climate change and global warming,” he said.

### ETF AGENDA

Regarding the wildly popular ETF space, an area Wells Fargo has yet to enter, Marais said it is on the agenda, just not at the top of the agenda.

“ETFs is an area we were slow in and we have been looking at it in various ways,” he said. “It will be on the agenda, but slightly more important right now is the leading role we play in SMAs, which is incredibly important.”

Marais’ downplaying the ETF market was a surprise to Todd Rosenbluth, director of mutual fund and ETF research at CFRA.

“Advisers are increasingly shifting toward actively managed and smart-beta ETFs and away from equity mutual funds,” he said. “Asset managers that do not have an ETF presence will lag be-

hind by not providing the option to invest in their strategies using ETFs.”

The deal is the latest in a growing trend of private equity investors charging into the lucrative wealth management space.

In a prepared statement, Milton Berlinski, co-founder and managing partner of Reverence Capital, said: “As an independent organization, WFAM will pivot to the next phase of its growth and is positioned to expand on its solutions-based approach, multi-asset offerings, retail separately managed accounts, and customized investment products.”

### MORE MEGA-DEALS TO COME

Mark Bruno, managing director at Echelon Partners, called the deal “a clear continuation of the trend of mega-deals that are re-shaping the asset management industry.”

“The deals are driven by a mix of cost-cutting, the need to scale, a desire to consolidate managers and providers for investors — and a way to accelerate the development of more innovative investment products,” he said. “Every deal assigns a different weighting to these factors, and the Wells Fargo deal will be an interesting one to watch given the private equity involvement.”

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## DEMAND FOR TALENT

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RIA channel as demand for high-quality advisers is at an all-time high and the supply is limited,” said Mark Bruno, managing director at Echelon Partners.

“You absolutely see more RIAs going head-to-head to attract and retain advisers and that has translated to notable increases in adviser compensation over the last several years,” Bruno said.

Growing demand for talent led to a 4% increase in cash compensation from 2018 to 2019 across all roles, according to the study, versus the 2.9% increase for wages nationally over the same period, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The biggest bump was for senior client account and relationship managers, whose median total cash compensation was \$240,000, up 19% from 2018. The second-highest percentage increase was for operations managers, whose median total compensation climbed 18% to \$113,000.

Salvi talked about the importance of creating formal career paths for employees at all levels and in every position to provide a realistic perspective on where they fit into the organization.

“We’re seeing more career pathing with the operational roles,” she said.

Across all positions, the base salary represents 81% of total compensation, but the percentage dropped for revenue-generating roles, where base salary makes up 70% of total compensation.

### INCENTIVE PAY

In terms of motivation, 77% of firms compensated staff with performance-based incentive pay.

Equity ownership as a percentage of total compensation was unchanged at

33% of firms with between \$100 million and \$250 million under management, and at 22% for firms managing more than \$1 billion.

But for RIAs in the middle, there was an increase in ownership as a form of compensation, which Salvi attributed to midsize firms giving people more opportunities to participate in the growth of the business.

Another trend cited in the report was the use of health benefits as part of the compensation package, which is still dominated by the larger firms but is seeing traction among smaller practices.

For firms managing more than \$1 billion, 99% offer health insurance, 85% offer dental insurance and 81% offer life insurance. By contrast, for firms with up to \$100 million, 40% offer health insurance, 11% offer dental insurance and 14% offer life insurance.

Charles Failla, principal at Sovereign Financial Group, described noncash benefits as an “absolute.”

“I actually have a call today with a health benefits consultant to discuss adding group health, dental and vision to our benefits package,” he said. “We’ve had a 401(k) and other benefits for years, but as we have been interviewing over the past couple of weeks, it became clear that offering health benefits is an absolute must.”

Schwab’s Cobb said compensation-related questions are the No. 1 topic he hears about from RIAs.

“2021 is going to be the year advisers will have a lot more they need to be balancing with remote working and flexibility bursting onto the scene,” he said. “You have to create a compensation philosophy of how people are paid.”

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## SCHORSCH

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His son-in-law, Brendan O’Donnell, is CEO, and his son, Nicholas Schorsch Jr., is president, according to filings with the SEC. Mike Weil, a longtime partner of Schorsch and CEO of the real estate partnership, now called AR Global, has been nominated to the SPAC’s board.

Schorsch’s career has been littered with successes and failures. As the SEC registration for the SPAC notes, in 2013 and 2014 the American Realty Capital Properties REIT made six mergers, including the acquisition of Cole Capital, the second-largest nontraded REIT sponsor at the time. Investors in those earlier deals saw handsome returns and advisers were snapping up ARC alternative investment products for clients.

But there was a downside to some of his later efforts. RCS Capital Corp., known as RCAP, the bro-

kerage holding company Schorsch controlled, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in May 2016. Cetera Financial Group emerged as a separate broker-dealer network, but the filing wiped out stockholders, including financial advisers and executives, who held onto RCAP stock believing in Schorsch.

And some of the legacy Schorsch and ARC REITs continue to struggle. In the weeks after a stock split and listing on the NYSE last August, New York City REIT Inc. (NYC), managed by AR Global, took a hit to its share price, with the value of investors’ holdings dropping as much as 80% from the initial sales price.

When the REIT was launched in 2013 by AR Global, dozens of independent broker-dealers sold it at its offering price of \$25 per share. Last Thursday, shares of the REIT closed trading at \$9.94.

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## VOYA ADVISERS

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prior year’s revenues. LPL has been favoring making selective recruiting offers to advisers for the past couple of years based on adviser assets, and that structure can be turned into more dollars for the adviser.

For example, an adviser with \$100 million in assets is likely to generate in the neighborhood of \$1 million per year of GDC. Cetera is offering transition money to that Voya adviser of 30% of GDC greater than \$1 million, or \$300,000, in a note over five years, according to several sources.

But that same adviser at LPL could see a transition offer of 70% on assets, or \$700,000, in a forgivable note over nine years, which

translates into more than twice as much as Cetera’s top offer, according to several sources.

Cetera’s transition offer to Voya advisers rounds out in the following manner, sources said. Those advisers who generate \$500,000 to \$1 million in GDC will receive transition assistance of 20 basis points of annual production, and those with \$150,000 to \$499,000 receive 10 basis points. Any Voya adviser producing less receives no transition money from Cetera.

A Cetera spokesperson did not comment on details of the transition package for the Voya advisers.

“LPL offers a highly competitive transition package that is tailored to the adviser,” LPL’s spokesperson said.

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## APEX

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management, wrote in an email. “Remember when digital advice was dismissed as a tool for millennials?”

Apex is just the latest wealthtech company to use a SPAC deal to go public. Digital investing and banking platform MoneyLion announced Feb. 12 that it is going public through a merger with a SPAC in a deal that puts the combined company’s value at \$2.9 billion. And in January, Social Finance Inc. agreed to be taken public by a blank-check firm backed by Social Capital CEO Chamath Palihapitiya in a deal that values the upstart at around \$8.7 billion.

“We are at an inflection point in the wealth management industry, with demand for a one-stop-shop approach to banking and investments driving investor interest in firms like SoFi and MoneyLion, as well as in infrastructure providers

like Apex Clearing that undergird the digital experience,” Trout said.

SPACs are appealing for companies because they offer a vehicle for tapping into investor interest while supporting the broader industry trend toward democratization, he added. “They present an alternative to the heavily regulated IPO model, in which institutions and the very wealthy have first crack at the deals.”

One potential problem is that they may funnel capital into businesses that couldn’t withstand serious investor scrutiny, Trout said.

“The SEC and other regulators may want to take a look at the extent to which the ‘SPACtacular’ growth of these vehicles could signal a decoupling from economic fundamentals as well as the role of social media in amplifying investor enthusiasm,” he said.

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## SOCIAL SECURITY

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cial Security accounts, an increase of nearly 10 million people since the end of 2019, SSA spokesman Darren Lutz said in an email.

While that is an impressive surge in people signing up for Social Security accounts, it still represents a mere fraction of the American workers who pay Social Security taxes and receive benefits.

An estimated 178 million workers were covered by Social Security in 2019, and 65 million Americans, including retired and disabled workers, their dependents, and survivors, received more than \$1 trillion in Social Security benefits last year.

For most Americans, setting up a personalized Social Security account is the only way to receive estimates of their future benefits. In the past, estimated benefits statements were mailed to all covered workers age 25 and older, but now paper statements are sent only to people age 60 or older who have not signed up for an online account.

The basic Social Security statement, a critical financial planning tool, shows individuals how much they've paid in Social Security and Medicare taxes each year and how much they would get in Social Security benefits at 62, their full retirement age and age 70. It also shows how much in disability benefits they may be eligible for if they became disabled and are unable to work, as well as the benefits available to eligible dependents and survivors.

The statements explain that individuals need at least 40 credits earned during their working lifetime to be eligible for Social Security retirement benefits, but the amount of those future benefits is based on their top 35 years of average lifetime earnings and the age at which they claim them. The benefit estimates assume workers continue to earn about the same amount of money up to retirement age.

"Generally, the older you are and the closer you are to retirement, the more accurate the retirement estimates will be because they are based on a longer work history with fewer uncertainties such as earnings fluctuations and future law changes," every

benefit statement notes.

The combined Old Age, Disability and Survivors trust fund is expected to be exhausted in 2035, meaning there would only be sufficient revenue from payroll taxes to pay about 79% of promised benefits unless Congress acts before then.

"It is true that Social Security faces financial problems and action is needed soon to make sure the system can continue to pay approximately the same level of benefits," one fact sheet notes.

On average, Social Security will replace about 40% of annual pre-retirement earnings, about half of the recommended income replacement rate needed for a comfortable retirement. Although higher-income workers get a larger monthly benefit based on their average lifetime earnings, Social Security tends to represent a smaller portion of their pre-retirement income.

The fact sheet for workers ages 18-48 stresses the importance of starting early to save for retirement, either through an employer plan or an individual retirement Account. The fact sheet for workers age 49-60 explains how continued work can boost future benefits, details the ability to make "catch-up contributions" to a 401(k) or IRA at age 50 or later, and outlines the tax consequences and penalties for tapping retirement accounts early.

The fact sheet targeting workers age 61-69 emphasizes that one's claiming age affects benefit amounts, that benefits are adjusted for inflation and will continue as long as you live, and notes the importance of signing up for Medicare at 65 unless you are covered by a health insurance plan from a current employer.

The fact sheet for workers ages 70 and up proclaims that "now is the time to claim what you've earned." It notes that "because you are 70 or older, you will receive no additional benefit increases if you delay claiming them. Apply now at [www.ssa.gov/applytoretire](http://www.ssa.gov/applytoretire)."

**(Questions about new Social Security rules? Find the answers in my ebook at [InvestmentNews.com/MBFebook](http://InvestmentNews.com/MBFebook).)**

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## RACIAL WEALTH GAP

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isn't a pipeline problem," said Lauryn Nwankpa, head of social impact at Dave, a challenger bank that currently has 8 million customers and helps underbanked Americans. "Instead of simply promoting diversity, we need to be demanding and architecting it within organizations," she said.

Encouragingly, the fintech funding ecosystem has never been more democratized than it is today, according to Powell. His advice is to be deliberate. Build relationships with the intent of finding pathways to financial capital. Continue to build fintechs that open access to banking and investing

to underserved communities.

The Black Lives Matter movement, along with other social justice causes of the past few years, have opened the eyes of the mainstream. While Martin Luther King Jr. and others fought for human rights more than a half century ago, today supporters of social equity are striving to close the racial wealth divide and help give minority entrepreneurs access to capital funding.

The road to racial equality might be uphill, but today's social justice movement has ushered in new avenues for fresh ideas and innovation in wealth management, which can only push our industry forward.

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## SUBSCRIPTION FEES

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Lubin agreed there can be drawbacks to AUM fees: "AUM fees are a really dicey issue."

A recent study by Kitces Research found that AUM fees can amount to more on an hourly basis than prevailing levels for hourly fees.

"At median levels, we found that primarily AUM advisors are generating revenue at rates that would imply hourly fees between \$350 and \$800," the study states. "This is in stark contrast to the \$100 to \$300 implied hourly fees generated by advisors operating on a primarily hourly basis and speaks to the challenge of building an hourly practice that is as financially successful as advisors operating on an AUM basis at common fee levels."

### SLOW GOING

The difficulty of parsing different fee approaches may be slowing down state regulators, said Michael Kitces, head of planning strategy at Buckingham Wealth Partners.

Kitces, co-founder of XY Planning Network, has been in talks with state regulators about subscription fees, which are utilized by many XYPN investment advisers.

"I suspect the regulators may have realized that their concerns about monthly subscription fees actually apply to all advisor compensation models — including and especially AUM — which is leading them to

take a more measured approach to uniformly consider all advisor compensation and fee reasonableness, not just monthly subscriptions," Kitces wrote in an email.

### CFP BOARD WEIGHS IN

The Certified Financial Planning Board of Standards Inc. also has been talking to state regulators about fee oversight.

"Alongside our partners in the Financial Planning Coalition, CFP Board appreciates the opportunity to engage in a dialogue on issues related to fees with members of NASAA's Investment Adviser Regulatory Policy & Review Committee," CFP Board Chief Executive Kevin Keller said in a statement. "We look forward to picking up the conversation again in the hope of arriving at a solution that facilitates broader consumer access to competent and ethical financial planners without sacrificing investor protections."

During the webcast, a listener asked whether it's okay for advisers to charge a fee for their availability to investors. "I'm not so sure whether it's reasonable to pay just to have someone be ready to help you," Lubin said.

Regardless of the form of the fee, state regulators want to ensure investors are getting what they pay for.

"The bottom line is the fees need to be reasonably related to the services provided," Lubin said. "But the services have to be provided."

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