RADiUS
Wealth Management LLC

A RADIUS WEALTH MANAGEMENT GUIDE

Questions to Ask Before You Hire a Financial Advisor

A plain-English checklist for choosing someone to trust with your savings: what to ask, what good answers sound like, and how to check them yourself.

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WELCOME

Why This Guide

Choosing a financial advisor is a big decision, and it is not an easy one to compare. The titles sound alike, the fee structures vary, and almost everyone says they put clients first. Most people hire after one or two conversations without ever seeing the questions that would have set the options apart.

This guide gives you those questions. They are organized the way a first meeting tends to unfold: who the advisor is, how they are paid, what they will actually do for you, where your money is held, and whether the relationship is a good fit. Under each question you will find what to listen for and, where possible, how to check the answer yourself instead of taking anyone's word for it.

How to use it

- **Bring it to every meeting.** Ask the same questions of each advisor you speak with, including us, and compare the answers side by side on the worksheet on page 7.
- **Ask for answers in writing.** A good advisor will be comfortable putting fees, services and duties on paper.
- **Take your time.** You are interviewing someone for a long-term role. A good advisor will not pressure you to decide quickly.

INSIDE

1. Who you are hiring · 2. How they are paid · 3. What you get · 4. Where your money is held · 5. Fit and communication · 6. Warning signs · 7. Comparison worksheet

A NOTE ON TITLES

"Financial advisor" is a general term, not a protected one. It can describe an investment adviser, a broker, an insurance agent or a planner, and each is regulated differently. That is why the specific questions below matter more than the title on a business card.

SECTION ONE

Who You Are Hiring

Start with the basics. These questions are quick to ask, and most of the answers can be checked in a few minutes on free public databases.

1. Are you a registered investment adviser or a broker, and who regulates you?
Registered investment advisers (RIAs) are registered with the SEC or their state. Brokers are registered with FINRA. Some people are both. Ask which role applies to the advice and accounts you would be using.

2. Can I look you up on a public regulator website?
Yes should be the only answer. You can search advisers at **adviserinfo.sec.gov** and brokers at **brokercheck.finra.org**. Both show registration status, employment history and any disclosed disciplinary events.

3. What credentials do you hold, and what do they require?
Credentials such as CFP®, CFA® or CPA each have different training, exam and ethics requirements. If an advisor lists one, ask what it took to earn it and look it up with the issuing organization. The CFP Board, for example, has a public "Verify a CFP® Professional" tool.

4. Have you ever had a customer complaint, regulatory action or disciplinary event?
Ask directly, then compare the answer with the public record. A past complaint is not automatically disqualifying, but an advisor who is vague about it deserves more questions.

5. How long have you been advising, and what kinds of clients do you usually work with?
Experience with people in situations like yours (a similar stage of life, similar goals and similar complexity) often matters more than total years in the business.

DO IT YOURSELF

Before you meet, search the firm's name on the SEC's adviser search. You will find its Form ADV, a registration document that describes the firm's services, fees, conflicts of interest and disciplinary history in the firm's own words. Part 2A is the plain-language "brochure," and an adviser must give it to you.

SECTION TWO

How They Are Paid

How an advisor is paid shapes the advice you hear, so this section is worth the most attention. There is no single right model, but there is a wrong outcome: not understanding what you are paying.

6. Are you a fiduciary, and are you one for everything you recommend to me?

Registered investment advisers owe a fiduciary duty under federal law, which generally means acting in a client's best interest. Brokers are generally subject to a different standard, Regulation Best Interest. Some professionals wear both hats. Ask whether the fiduciary duty applies to all of the advice you would receive, and ask for that in writing.

7. How are you paid, in dollars and in every form?

Common models include a percentage of assets, a flat or hourly fee, and commissions on products sold. Ask whether any compensation comes from anyone other than you, such as commissions, referral fees or payments from fund companies.

8. What will I pay in total each year?

Ask for a written estimate that adds up the advisory fee, the expenses inside any funds or products, and any trading or account costs. Fees quoted as percentages can hide how many dollars they represent, so ask for the figure in dollars, too.

9. Do you or your firm earn more from recommending certain products?

Conflicts of interest are common in the industry and are not automatically a problem when they are disclosed and managed. What you want to hear is a clear explanation, not a denial.

10. Can you give me your Form CRS?

Form CRS is a short "relationship summary" that advisers and brokers must provide to retail investors. It sets out services, fees, conflicts and disciplinary history in a few pages, and it is a convenient way to compare firms.

FEE MODEL	HOW IT GENERALLY WORKS	WORTH ASKING
Percentage of assets	An annual percentage of the assets managed, often billed quarterly	What does the fee include, and does it change as the account grows?
Flat or hourly fee	A set price for a plan or for time spent	What is covered, and is ongoing support included?
Commissions	Paid by a product provider when a product is sold	Who pays, how much, and are there lower-cost alternatives?

Descriptions are general. Each firm's actual arrangement is in its Form ADV and fee agreement.

SECTION THREE

What You Actually Get

Two advisors can charge a similar fee and deliver very different things. Pin down the services before you compare prices.

11. What services are included, and what costs extra?
Investment management, financial planning, tax planning, retirement income planning, estate coordination and insurance review are separate services. Ask which ones are included in the fee and which are not.

12. Will I get a written financial plan?
Not every advisor builds one. If planning is part of the service, ask to see a sample and how often it is updated.

13. How do you decide how my money should be invested?
Listen for a process built around your goals, time horizon and tolerance for risk, rather than a standard answer. Ask what you can expect from the approach in good markets and in poor ones. No advisor can promise a result, and you should be cautious of anyone who does.

14. How do you think about taxes?
Taxes affect what you keep. Ask whether the advisor coordinates with your CPA, and how decisions such as which accounts to draw from or when to sell are handled.

15. How will you help with decisions beyond the portfolio?
Many of the biggest financial decisions are about retirement timing, Social Security, Medicare, an inheritance or a business sale. Ask how the advisor would approach the ones likely to come up for you.

WHY IT MATTERS

An advisor who can explain in plain terms what they do, why they do it and what it costs is usually an advisor who can keep doing so for years. If an answer leaves you more confused than before you asked, it is fair to ask again or to move on.

SECTIONS FOUR AND FIVE

Safety, Fit and Communication

Where your money is held

16. Who holds my assets?
In most advisory relationships, your money should sit at an independent custodian, a large third-party firm such as a brokerage or bank, in an account in your name. You should receive statements directly from the custodian.

17. What can you do in my account, and what can't you?
Ask whether the advisor can trade, whether they can withdraw money, and whether they can send money to anyone other than you. A clear separation between managing and moving money is a basic protection.

18. How will I see what I own and what I pay?
You should be able to view your holdings and see fees charged on your statements. If you cannot, ask why.

Fit and communication

19. Who will I work with day to day, and how often will we meet?
Ask whether the person you are meeting is the person who will manage your relationship, how quickly calls are returned, and how many reviews a year are standard.

20. Is there a minimum, and what happens if my situation changes?
Ask about account minimums, how fees change if your assets change, and how to end the relationship. Fees and notice terms should be in the agreement.

21. What happens to my account if you retire or leave the firm?
A good firm has a succession plan and can tell you how clients are looked after if the lead advisor moves on.

SECTION SIX AND SEVEN

Warning Signs and Your Worksheet

Warning signs worth pausing over

- Any promise or guarantee of investment returns, or claims of little or no risk
- Pressure to decide quickly, or to move money before you have seen the paperwork
- Reluctance to put fees, services or duties in writing
- Not being willing to tell you how they are paid
- Asking you to write checks or make transfers to the advisor personally rather than to a custodian in your name
- An advisor or firm you cannot find on the SEC or FINRA lookup tools, or whose records show events they will not discuss
- Complex products you do not understand, recommended without a clear explanation of cost and alternatives

Comparison worksheet

QUESTION	ADVISOR 1	ADVISOR 2	ADVISOR 3
Registered? (SEC / state / FINRA lookup)			
Fiduciary on everything, in writing?			
Total annual cost, in dollars			
Any commissions or third-party pay?			
Services included			
Independent custodian?			
Who I will work with			
How I felt after the meeting			

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