

Take Charge: Your Money. Your Life.

How to Choose the Right Financial Planner

Choosing the right financial planner may be one of the more important decisions you make in your lifetime. Ideally, you will be creating a trusted relationship that works for the long term. Selecting a planner is like choosing a CFO, a confidant, a friend, a teacher, a psychiatrist and counselor all rolled into one. Here are some tips to help you make this important decision:

1. **Educate yourself.** Just about anyone can call themselves a financial planner. They are not all alike and one size does not fit all. Learn what to look for in a planner in the next section.
2. **Ask probing, meaningful questions** that will help you really understand the person in front of you. For example, “What qualifies you to provide financial advice?” Also, get them to talk about themselves personally so that you can determine whether you are compatible before moving forward.
3. **Add a healthy dose of skepticism.** Don’t take every answer at face value. And get particularly important statements in writing – statements like “I will avoid conflicts of interest that impair my objectivity” and “I will disclose to you everything you need to know to understand exactly how I get compensated and where my loyalties lie.”
4. **Inquire and investigate.** Check with state and federal regulators and professional organizations on any disciplinary actions against this person or firm. Call the college or university to verify attendance and graduation.
5. **Connect.** Is the communication smooth and easy with this person? Do you feel that a bond of trust and confidence could develop over time? Trust your gut (but only after everything checks out, of course).

How do you get started on your search for a financial planner?

You'll find many financial planner options and varying levels of qualifications.

So where do you turn to get the kind of financial plan you really need? There are many different answers to that question. Financial planners hold varying levels of education, qualifications and credentials. They may have their own practice or be part of a larger one; they may work for a CPA firm or a financial services organization. Their services will differ as well. So it's important that you do your homework and ask the right questions to ensure they are capable of meeting your unique needs.

The CPA financial planner offers both financial planning and tax expertise.

As a trusted advisor, your CPA (Certified Public Accountant) is in a unique position to understand the details of your financial situation. CPAs who are also financial planners or who hold the Personal Financial Specialist (PFS) credential have the added ability and experience to help you see the big picture – providing objective recommendations so you can make informed decisions. It's the comprehensive knowledge and expertise in both financial planning and tax that uniquely qualifies the CPA financial planner.

Licensed, rigorously trained and accountable to a strict professional code of conduct.

CPAs first and foremost are licensed by the state in which they practice and adhere to a strict professional code of conduct. They've passed a rigorous exam and are required to complete generally 40 hours of continuing professional education every year. Whether you are working with a CPA/PFS or CPA financial planner, you can count on competence, objectivity and the highest standard of integrity for your most important financial decisions.

Anyone planning their financial future will sleep better knowing their plan is CPA Strong.

To find a CPA/PFS, visit www.findapfs.org.

Interviewing Your Financial Planner

No question is off limits. You are interviewing for a position that is of great importance to you. Don't be afraid to ask hard questions:

- What qualifies you to give financial advice?
- Do you recommend products? If so, what process have you gone through to ensure these are the best available for the price?
- Will you tell me exactly how much you will make on products you sell to me during the implementation process?
- What sources of compensation do you, and the firm, receive from your planning operations and what percentage of total firm revenues do they represent?