

What is a Fiduciary Financial Advisor?

Everything You Should Know

By Lucas Belanger, Private Wealth Advisor

If you've ever wondered whether your financial advisor is truly acting in your best interest, that instinct is worth paying attention to. Not all financial advice is created equal.

A fiduciary financial advisor is held to the highest standard in the industry. They are legally required to put your interests first at all times. In this guide, we'll explain what that means, why it matters—especially for individuals and families with significant wealth—and how to find a fiduciary partner who aligns with your goals and values.

In this guide, we cover:

- What is a fiduciary financial advisor?
- Why does fiduciary advice matter?
- How does a fiduciary advisor get paid?
- How do I find a qualified fiduciary financial advisor?
- When should I work with a fiduciary financial advisor?

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What is a Fiduciary Financial Advisor?

A fiduciary financial advisor is a wealth professional who manages money on behalf of clients while being legally and ethically bound to act in the client's best interest above their own compensation or firm's incentives. Their advice must be objective and transparent, ensuring that your financial goals always come first.

"A Fiduciary Financial Advisor is someone who professionally manages money on behalf of a client and is required by law to put the client's interests and benefits ahead of their own." ([Source](#))

These advisors typically operate under the Registered Investment Adviser (RIA) model and may hold credentials like CFP® (Certified Financial Planner) or AIF® (Accredited Investment Fiduciary), which reinforce their fiduciary commitment.

Tip: Always ask a prospective advisor, "Do you operate as a fiduciary at all times?"

Understanding Fiduciary Duty

Fiduciary duty is far more than a concept. **It's a binding legal and ethical obligation that shapes every aspect of the advisor-client relationship.** It means that every recommendation, every portfolio decision, and every piece of guidance must be made with the client's best interest as the top priority - without exception.

A fiduciary is required to put your needs ahead of their own compensation, firm incentives, or convenience. **This duty extends beyond investment choices; it influences how conflicts of interest are handled, how advice is communicated, and how your long-term goals are supported over time.**

The fiduciary standard includes:

- **Loyalty:** Always placing the client's interests ahead of the advisor's or the firm's.
- **Care:** Providing well-informed, prudent, and thoroughly researched recommendations.
- **Disclosure:** Being transparent about fees, potential conflicts of interest, and compensation.
- **Diligence:** Maintaining a commitment to your financial well-being—not just during transactions (i.e., buying and selling securities, rebalancing portfolios, managing investment accounts, etc.).

At a fiduciary advisory firm like Verdenance Capital Advisors, this standard applies across every client interaction and is woven into every service. Whether planning a business exit, structuring charitable giving, or managing family governance, the advice you receive is personalized and designed to align with your best interests—not influenced by commissions or sales incentives.

Why Does Fiduciary Advice Matter?

When managing complex wealth, you need more than investment recommendations. You need a strategic partner who:

- Understands your broader financial architecture.
- Coordinates with your other advisors (attorneys, CPAs, etc.).
- Helps anticipate and navigate life's most important transitions.

A fiduciary advisor provides long-term alignment and consistency—serving not just as an investment manager, but as a steward of your financial life and legacy.

Your financial life isn't a single transaction. It's an evolving system of goals, responsibilities, and opportunities. Whether you're managing trusts, navigating tax strategies, overseeing real estate or private business holdings, or planning for a multigenerational legacy, fiduciary advisors are trained to serve as your central point of coordination. They bring in-house expertise and collaborate with attorneys, accountants, and family members seeking to integrate and optimize key wealth-impacting decisions.

Fiduciary advisors are also equipped to help you avoid blind spots. They seek to anticipate challenges before they arise and offer solutions that are both technically sound and aligned with your values. Ultimately, fiduciary advice is designed to provide consistency, transparency, and alignment in an industry that can otherwise feel opaque or fragmented.

How Much Does a Fiduciary Advisor Cost?

A common question is: *"If fiduciary financial advisors aren't compensated through product commissions, how do they get paid?"*

The answer: Many fiduciary advisors offer transparent fees based on the overall value of the managed portfolio.

The various models highlighted below aim to eliminate hidden incentives and ensure the advice you receive is independent. The key advantage is clarity: you understand exactly what you're paying for and why, with no surprises and no pressure to purchase specific products. That transparency is a hallmark of fiduciary care—and for many clients, it's well worth the value delivered.

Common compensation models include:

- **Fee-only fiduciary financial advisor:** Charges a percentage of assets under management (AUM), typically **-ranging around .75%-1.50%. per year.**
- **Flat-fee fiduciary financial advisor:** Offers fixed fees for services like planning or portfolio reviews.
- **Hourly fiduciary financial advisor:** Charges by the hour, often for specialized planning engagements.
- **Fee-based fiduciary financial advisor:** A hybrid that may charge both fees and receive limited commissions (note: be cautious with hybrids and clarify the fiduciary scope).

When a fiduciary acts in your best interest, conversations around cost happen transparently after gaining a full understanding of a client's goals and situation. That way, fees are better aligned with the value delivered.

The infographic features a large blue number '3' on the left. To its right is the title '3 Signs Your Advisor May Not Be Following the Fiduciary Standard' in a bold, dark blue font. Below the title are three white boxes, each containing a sign and a detailed explanation.

3 Signs Your Advisor May Not Be Following the Fiduciary Standard

- They Earn Commissions**
They earn commissions or layered fees on the products they recommend such as Class A Shares, Non-Traded REITs, Annuities, and Proprietary Funds. This creates potential conflicts of interest and may influence the advice you receive.
- They Give Vague Answers**
They can't clearly say "yes" when asked if they're a fiduciary 100% of the time. If the answer is vague or includes "it depends," they may not be legally obligated to always act in your best interest. Fiduciaries are required to be transparent. So, if they don't disclose their compensation or potential conflicts, that's a red flag.
- Their Advice Focuses Mostly On Transactions**
(Not on Long-Term Strategy)
A fiduciary prioritizes comprehensive, personalized planning, not quick sales or one-off recommendations.

How to Find a Qualified Fiduciary Financial Advisor

If you're searching for a fiduciary financial advisor who understands complex wealth, business transitions, or multigenerational planning, start with looking for firms that specialize in working with clients like you.

Are you a business owner planning to sell your business? Are you nearing a liquidity event such as an inheritance or wealth transfer? Are you a family managing trusts and estate structures? Or professional navigating sudden wealth, such as an RSU or options sale? There are many complex financial decisions to make beyond investing.

A dedicated fiduciary advisor like Verdence, manages investments and serves as a strategic partner, helping you coordinate financial, tax, legal, and legacy partners with precision. A qualified advisor strives to bring structure to complexity while offering a relationship built on trust, transparency, and long-term alignment.

When researching advisors, start with:

1. Searching for SEC-registered RIAs

Use the SEC's Investment Adviser Public Disclosure (IAPD) database at adviserinfo.sec.gov to verify fiduciary status.

2. Checking for certifications and credentials

Designations like CFP® and AIF® require professionals to act as fiduciaries when providing financial advice. But do your due diligence and verify the advisor actively holds these credentials — rather than just placing the letters behind their name. Further research these credentials to understand the scope of the qualification. Use FINRA's database of qualifications to better understand the value of the designation or certification

3. Looking for firms that focus on complexity.

Advisors who serve ultra-high-net-worth (UHNW) families, business owners, or multi-entity structures tend to have experience with succession planning, generational wealth transfer, and advanced planning strategies other firms may not have experience with.

4. Understanding the firm's structure

Does the firm offer integrated services like financial planning, investment management, and family office support? Firms like Verdence, for example, provide a dedicated team of experienced professionals providing solutions for UHNW clients facing various complex wealth situations.

5. Asking your peers.

Referrals from other UHNW individuals, business leaders, or family office contacts can offer powerful insights. Those who've worked with a fiduciary through a business exit, inheritance, or major life transition often know which advisors truly deliver long-term value and alignment.

If you want to verify whether an advisor is truly a fiduciary, several reliable tools can help. The **National Association of Personal Financial Advisors (NAPFA)** offers a searchable directory of fee-only financial planners all of whom are committed to acting in a fiduciary capacity. You can also search for professionals with **Certified Financial Planner™** credentials using the **CFP Board's "Find a CFP® Professional" tool**. For a broader background check, the **Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA)** provides a **free tool** to look up an advisor's registrations, licenses, and any disciplinary history.

What Questions to Ask a Fiduciary Financial Advisor?

- Do you operate as a fiduciary 100% of the time?
- What services do you provide in-house (e.g., financial planning, investment management, multi-family office support)?
- How do you get paid?
- Who will I be working with day-to-day? Just you, or a team?
- How do you help clients navigate liquidity events, succession planning, or charitable giving?
- What types of clients do you specialize in?
- Do you have experience with clients like me (e.g., business owners, corporate executives, or families with generational wealth)?

The right fiduciary will welcome these questions and provide thoughtful, customized answers based on your specific situation.

Tip: Schedule a consultation call. It's free and the perfect opportunity to ask questions.

How to Choose a Fiduciary Financial Advisor

Once you've narrowed down your options, choosing the right fiduciary for you is about more than credentials. It's about alignment. What sets the right advisor apart is their ability to understand your unique goals, communication style, and decision-making preferences.

A strong fiduciary relationship should feel collaborative, rather than transactional, built on trust, clarity, and a shared vision for your financial future. The conversation shouldn't start with where he or she will invest your money. Look for an advisor who listens carefully, asks thoughtful questions, and demonstrates a genuine commitment to guiding you through life's most important financial decisions with consistency and care.

Beyond that, consider how the advisor integrates into your broader financial picture. Do they coordinate with your other professionals, such as attorneys and CPAs? Do they bring structure to complex, multigenerational wealth, or simply manage investments? How proactive are they in anticipating needs before you bring them up?

Also evaluate their team. Are you gaining access to a deep bench of planning, investment, and family office specialists, or are you dependent on a single point of contact? For UHNW individuals and business owners, the right fiduciary isn't just a financial advisor. They're a long-term strategic partner.

Ultimately, choosing a fiduciary should feel like selecting someone you'd trust in a boardroom, at a family meeting, and during moments of major transition. It's not just about qualifications. It's about finding the right fit for the next chapter of your financial life.

When Should You Work with a Fiduciary Financial Advisor?

While fiduciary advice benefits nearly anyone, there are certain moments in your financial life when working with a fiduciary isn't just a smart move, it's essential.

You should strongly consider a fiduciary financial advisor when:

- **You're preparing for or have recently experienced a major liquidity event**

Whether you're selling a business or receiving a substantial inheritance, these inflection points demand coordinated, tax-aware planning and long-term vision, not transactional advice. A fiduciary can help you make informed, strategic decisions from the start.

- **Your financial picture has become more complex**

As your wealth grows, so do the moving parts: trusts, business entities, real estate holdings, philanthropic goals, and multi-generational planning. Fiduciary advisors often work as the central hub, bringing clarity, cohesion, and long-term strategy to the big picture.

- **You want sophisticated advice that's truly independent**

If you're seeking a relationship built on transparency, objectivity, and ongoing alignment, a fiduciary is legally bound to deliver exactly that. You shouldn't have to wonder whether recommendations are driven by incentives or commissions.

- **You're thinking about legacy, family governance, or estate planning**

Fiduciaries can guide not just the financial, but also the human side of wealth. They can help you design structures and strategies that reflect your values and create harmony across generations.

- **You want to prepare your next generation**

Education, mentorship, and intentional preparation should be considered for those who will inherit it. A fiduciary advisor can help you design a plan that engages your next generation early, instills financial literacy, and builds the confidence and competence they'll need to manage their inheritance responsibly and lead with purpose.

- **You're ready for a more elevated client experience**

UHNW clients often outgrow traditional advisory models. A fiduciary relationship can provide depth, coordination, and discretion that aligns with your lifestyle, risk tolerance, and future goals.

If your financial decisions are becoming more consequential, and you want a partner who will prioritize your best interests, a fiduciary advisor is indispensable. Fiduciaries like Verdenance are built for exactly these moments.

Conclusion: Work with a Fiduciary Who Puts You First

Choosing a fiduciary financial advisor is about identifying a strategic partner who understands your financial complexity and always puts your interests first.

A fiduciary offers:

- True alignment
- Transparent guidance
- A legal and ethical standard of care
- Customized support from a team of experienced professionals

Whether you're building a legacy, selling a business, or planning for your family's future generations, working with a fiduciary firm like Verdenance is the first step in helping see that your wealth is managed with clarity, care, and conviction.

Ready to experience the difference of fiduciary advice? [Book a consultation now at www.Verdenance.com](https://www.verdenance.com).

FAQs:

What exactly is a fiduciary financial advisor?

A fiduciary financial advisor is a wealth professional legally and ethically obligated to act in your best interest at all times. This includes making recommendations which seek to mitigate conflicts of interest and prioritizing your financial well-being over any potential compensation or incentives.

How do fiduciary advisors get paid?

Most fiduciaries operate on a **fee-only or fee-based model**, meaning they charge a transparent fee for their services—typically as a percentage of assets under management, a flat fee, or hourly rate. Most do not receive commissions for selling products.

Are all Registered Investment Advisers (RIAs) fiduciaries?

Yes, RIAs are legally required to follow the fiduciary. However, dually registered firms (RIA + broker) may not always act as a fiduciary depending on the service provided.

Can someone call themselves a fiduciary and still earn commissions?

Some advisors use the term “fiduciary” loosely. True fee-only fiduciaries do not earn commissions. If an advisor receives product-based compensation, ask for full transparency and clarification on when they operate as a fiduciary.

What are signs my current advisor may not be a fiduciary?

They may earn commissions on investment products, give vague answers about their fiduciary status, or focus more on selling funds than building a long-term plan.

Are CFP® professionals required to act as fiduciaries?

Yes. Certified Financial Planner™ professionals must act in a fiduciary capacity when providing financial advice under the CFP Board’s Code of Ethics and Standards of Conduct.

How can I verify whether an advisor is a fiduciary?

You can check the SEC’s Investment Adviser Public Disclosure website (adviserinfo.sec.gov), NAPFA’s directory for fee-only fiduciaries, or use the CFP Board’s Find a CFP® tool.

Do fiduciary advisors only manage investments?

No. A financial planning professional is a fiduciary and may not offer investment management services. Furthermore, an experienced and dedicated fiduciary advisor can coordinate tax planning, estate strategy, family governance and education, philanthropic planning, and business transitions offering comprehensive support beyond investments.

When should I consider hiring a fiduciary?

While fiduciary advice benefits nearly anyone, it's practically essential for major financial events like selling a business, inheriting wealth, preparing for retirement, or planning for multigenerational wealth transfer.

What questions should I ask when interviewing a fiduciary advisor?

Ask about their fiduciary status, how they're compensated, what types of clients they serve, whether they coordinate with other professionals (e.g., attorneys, CPAs), and how they help clients navigate complex financial decisions.



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Disclosures:

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