

## Financial Planners

As you seek out a financial professional, you are apt to come across individuals who call themselves financial planners. It's a phrase that encompasses many types of services and skills. Here's what you need to know about financial planners.

- > **What they are:** Financial planners can come from a variety of backgrounds and offer a variety of services. They could be brokers or investment advisers, insurance agents or practicing accountants—or they have no financial credentials at all. Some will examine your entire financial picture and help you develop a detailed plan for achieving your financial goals. Others, however, will recommend only the products they sell, which may give you a limited range of choices.
- > **Who regulates them:** Unlike other professions discussed in this chapter, the financial planning profession does not have its own regulator. Instead, individuals who call themselves financial planners may be regulated in relation to other services they provide. For example, an accountant who prepares financial plans would be regulated by the state Board of Accountancy, and a financial planner who is also an investment adviser would be regulated by the Securities and Exchange Commission or by the state where the advisor does business. If a planner you're considering uses a particular professional credential, be sure to check out that credential using our Professional Designations lookup tool.
- > **What they offer:** The breadth and depth of services a financial planner offers will vary from provider to provider. Some create comprehensive plans that delve into every aspect of your financial life, including savings, investments, insurance, college savings, retirement, taxes and estate planning. Others have a more limited focus, such as insurance or securities. Some only prepare plans, while others also sell investments, insurance, or other products. If they sell products, their recommendations typically will correspond with the products or services they sell. For example, an insurance agent will tell you about insurance products (such as life insurance and annuities) but likely won't discuss other investment choices (such as stocks, bonds or mutual funds). You'll want to make certain you fully understand which areas of your financial life a particular planner can—and cannot—help with before you hire that person.