

# Advisory board starter kit

Among the thousands of advisors our team meets with each year, those with successful advisory boards have an edge. Done well, an advisory board is one of the best ways to transform clients into advocates for your business, generating loyalty, business ideas and potential referrals. But those benefits don't come without effort. Here are our easy steps to get started.

## What is an advisory board?

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A group you can create to help solicit feedback, manage ideas and make decisions for your business of clients, centers of influence or related professionals.

## Who should be included?

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**Clients.** Start with your most loyal or ideal clients, those whose feedback you respect. You may also add new clients who are still in the honeymoon phase of working with you. Consider including clients who have advisors other than you. These people can help provide perspective on your service.



**Centers of influence (COIs).** Professionals like accountants, attorneys, third-party administrators and business consultants who you work with in support of shared clients can have a stake in your firm's success. Get creative and include realtors, marketers, divorce mediators, industry experts, etc.

## What does success look like?

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**Feedback.** You get a sounding board to test out new business ideas, future client events, staff changes, branding and marketing initiatives and more.



**Advocacy.** Clients and COIs feel honored to be included, which can help deepen loyalty. They may be more likely to share your enthusiasm about the firm.



**Referrals.** By opening up your business and asking for help, you may be more likely to acquire new clients organically. Just beware of overselling – board members should be excited to refer you, not obligated.

## What's asked of members?

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Most boards have term limits and rotate new members in every two years. That's at least two meetings to attend depending on your meeting cadence.

## 5 steps to build a successful advisory board

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### Step 1. Determine who you want on your board.

- Client council with a mix of new and loyal clients
- Targeted or specialty focus (e.g. retirement plans)
- COI or professionals surrounding ideal clients
- A mix of all of these

### Step 2. Prepare your pitch.

**Use words like:** “I am inviting you because I really respect your opinion,” “I would love your advice,” or “All successful companies have boards that provide insight and perspective and my business is no different. I’d like to invite you to join my advisory board, because I value your counsel and business acumen.”

### Step 3. Host a meeting.

- Decide on the venue and type of event (lunch or dinner, in-office or off-site, etc.).
- Send invitations four to six weeks beforehand and reach out personally to confirm attendance.
- Consider rotating other staff members to help facilitate.
- Have someone (e.g. a moderator or staff member) taking notes and collecting feedback.
- Meet at least once a year and share progress on past events.

### Step 4. Have an agenda.

**Introductions.** Start with brief introductions from everyone in the group, with clients explaining how they became clients. Or consider including an ice breaker like, “What is your biggest challenge?”

**Business and practice update.** Show how your business is growing according to various metrics. For example, share year-over-year growth in assets under management and revenue, as well as where it’s coming from. This is an opportunity to cover any initiatives that have come from past board meetings.

**Roundtable feedback.** Ask your board what they think about new ideas and initiatives. You may even structure this as a “stop/start/continue” exercise to get a sense of what they like as well as what they don’t.

**Call to action.** As the meeting winds down, ask members to be an advocate for the firm. This should be less about explicitly drumming up referrals and more about asking them to like the firm’s social media posts, for example.

**Networking and dinner.** The meeting should include an informal period where board members can socialize and conclude with an event, such as a dinner with wine pairings.

### Step 5. Follow up.

Reach out to board members in the weeks after the event to thank them and let them ask any follow up questions. This can help build loyalty with clients and make sure they are heard. Here are a few conversation starters:

- What did you think of the meeting? Any learnings or surprises?
- Do you have any additional thoughts on what we discussed? I really value your opinion on matters like these.
- Anything we can do to improve the experience for board members like you?

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