

# The Best Conferences To Attend (Or Not) In 2021 And The Future Of Financial Advisor Conferences



[kitces.com/blog/2021-best-financial-advisor-conferences-future-in-person-virtual-webinar-sponsors-ce](https://kitces.com/blog/2021-best-financial-advisor-conferences-future-in-person-virtual-webinar-sponsors-ce)

October 26, 2020

## Executive Summary

Reinvesting in one's education is a staple of being a professional and is embodied in both the philosophy and the actual requirement of continuing education (CE). Of course, ideally, financial advisors will want to advance their knowledge not merely to fulfill a CE obligation but for the sake of the additional knowledge and expertise itself, which can pay dividends from better strategies for clients to practice management guidance that (even if not actually CE-eligible) helps them better execute their businesses and service their clients.

However, the world of financial advisor conferences – which so many advisors attend for those continuing education and advanced learning opportunities – were substantively disrupted in 2020 by the coronavirus pandemic, which shuttered virtually all in-person advisor events after the March outbreak through the end of the year, forcing some events to be canceled, others to be delayed into 2021, and most to be pivoted to an online/virtual format with... varying degrees of success.

Starting back in 2012, we began to publish an annual list of recommended conferences for financial advisors to attend – a byproduct of the fact that I've been speaking at 50 – 70 conferences per year for more than a decade myself, and as a result, have seen and attended virtually every major advisor event, and could provide a first-hand perspective on which events really delivered on their promise of advisor education, from membership associations to broker-dealers, insurance companies to RIA custodians, trade publications, private events, and more.

But as we come up on 2021, the reality is that no one knows exactly what the options for advisor conferences will even be in the coming year, given both the uncertainty about the timing of the coronavirus vaccine, a major shift in the economics of advisor conferences as vendors have pivoted heavily to running their *own* webinar events and appear to be scaling back on the future of conferences, and limited experience for any events about how well they really deliver, or not, in a virtual environment.

As a result, this year's newest list of the "Top Financial Advisor Conferences" for 2021 takes an alternative approach, focusing instead on the 'knowns' we can control in the decision of what events to pursue, including Community Events for the advisor's platform (e.g., the advisor's broker-dealer, RIA custodian, or advisor network), Deep Learning events for

advisors looking to better specialize, immersive Practice Management events for those looking to get more efficient in (or better execute on) their businesses, and the ever-widening range of both free and paid Continuing Education on various topics.

In addition, we'll continue to maintain our new "Master Conference List" of all financial advisor conferences in 2021, with ongoing updates for which will be virtual versus in-person, as a guide for advisors to plan their own conference budgets and schedule in the coming year.

So I hope you'll find this upcoming year's 2021 financial advisor conferences list (and our new 2021 Master Conference List) to be helpful, in an environment that admittedly poses far more uncertainty in the landscape of advisor events than we've ever seen... while still recognizing that in the end, reinvesting into our own education as financial advisors is still a professional imperative.

## Key Topics:

- [Has The Coronavirus Killed The Financial Advisor Conference Model?](#)
- [The ROI Of Advisor Conferences: A Future Of Cheaper Or Much More Expensive?](#)
- [The Changing Landscape Of Financial Advisor Conferences In 2021](#)
- [What Are The Best Financial Advisor Conferences To Attend In 2021?](#)

### Best Conferences For Financial Advisors In 2021

| Deep Learning   | Community Event  |
|---|--|
| Get More Specialized  |  |
|      |           |
| Get More (Practice) Wisdom  | Continuing Education   |
|      |      |

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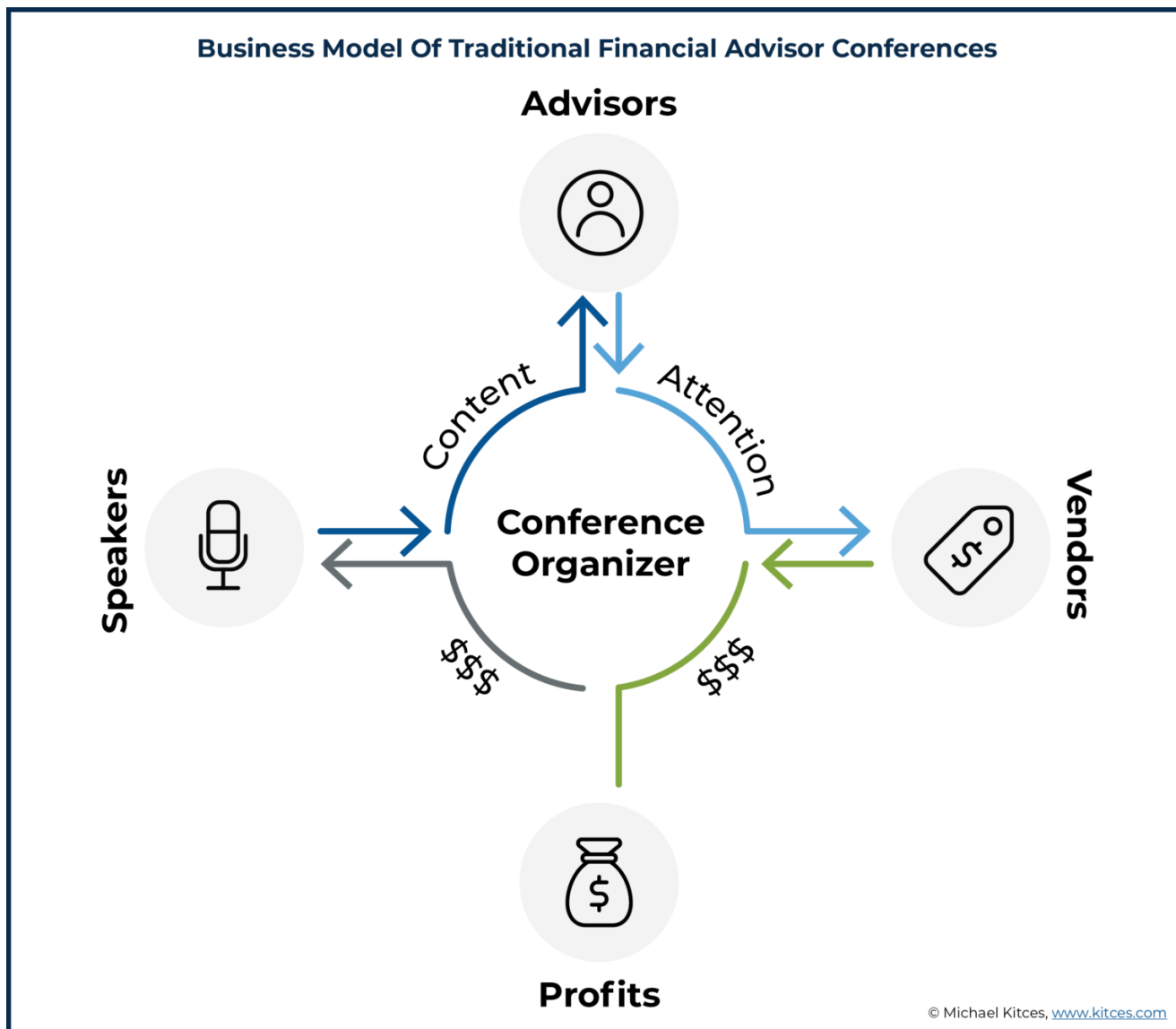
Prior Years' Best Conferences List: [2020](#) | [2019](#) | [2018](#) | [2017](#) | [2016](#) | [2015](#) | [2014](#) | [2013](#) | [2012](#) | [Master Conference List](#)

## Has The Coronavirus Killed The Financial Advisor Conference Model?

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Despite the fact that financial advisors pay a non-trivial registration fee to attend a conference – from several hundred dollars to more than \$1,000 in some cases – the reality is that the business of financial advisor conferences is not profitable on the basis of their registration fees alone. Instead, financial advisor conferences are ‘sponsor-supported’, where external vendors typically account for more than 100% of the net profits of the event. In other words, without conference sponsors, not only would most financial advisor conferences not be profitable for the conference organizer... they wouldn’t even be economically viable to operate.

Or viewed another way, the functional role of a conference organizer is to create a conference gathering that is attractive for advisors to attend – for which they (sometimes but not always) pay at least some nominal fee – and then, based on the attendance and participation of advisors, sell to sponsors the opportunity to have *visibility and access* to (i.e., the ‘attention’ of) those advisors, from branding at the conference to a booth in the exhibit hall to a session on the agenda. If the conference organizer did a good job creating an event that advisors wanted to attend and got advisors in the room that sponsors wanted to (and would pay to) access, then the conference organizer could earn a ‘cut’ (in the form of net profits for the event).



Yet while this model has been rather profitable and successful for a wide range of conference organizers, from membership associations like FPA and NAPFA, to a growing number of media organizers like Financial Advisor, Financial Planning, and Investment News, and a wide range of advisor platforms from national broker-dealer conferences to national RIA custodial gatherings, the caveat is that there's a fundamental tension between what's in the best interests of the advisor attendee, and what's in the best interests of the conference organizer that profits not by what the advisor pays to attend, but by what the sponsor pays to access the advisor attendee.

And in recent years, as the advisor conference business has become increasingly competitive, more and more advisor conferences have made a growing list of concessions to sponsors in order to secure the needed sponsorship dollars. From changing the layout of the conference (coffee and snacks in the back of the exhibit hall so the advisors have to walk by the vendors to get there!), to offering "sponsored sessions" on the conference agenda itself as vendors increasingly insist that 'just' being in the exhibit hall isn't enough to command a premier sponsorship fee.

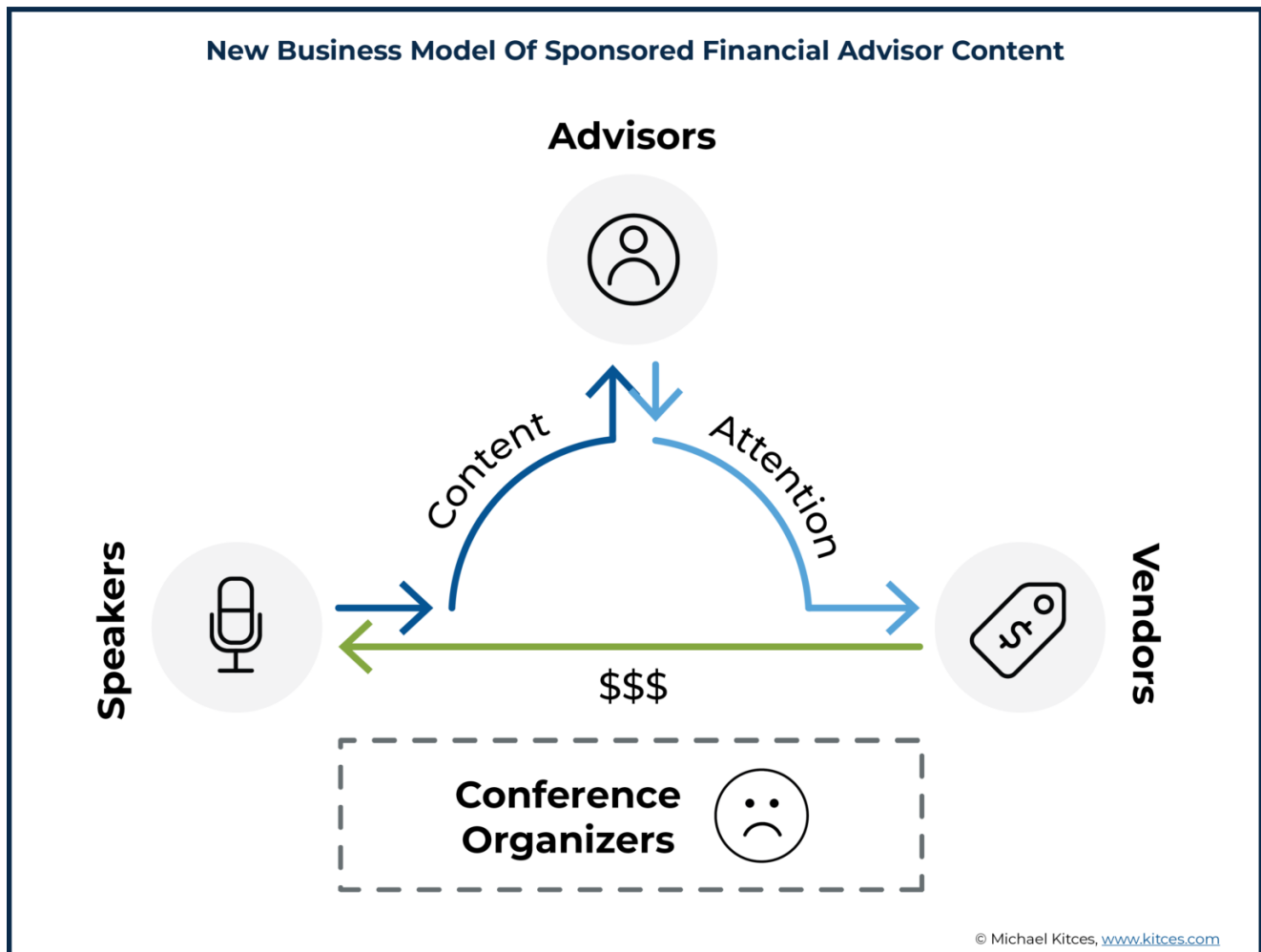
Of course, the reality is that advisors *need* solutions to operate their businesses, and so in theory there shouldn't be any conflict with sponsors wanting access to advisors and advisors being 'forced' to have sponsors in front of them. Ideally, a well-curated exhibit hall would be full of solution-providers that advisors *want* to spend time visiting with and learning about, anyway.

However, in practice, there are two types of vendors at advisor conferences: those who sell solutions *to* advisors (e.g., consultants, service providers, and AdvisorTech vendors), and those who sell solutions *through* advisors to their clients (i.e., product manufacturers, from insurance and annuity companies to asset managers). And while advisors most commonly want to talk to the former (those who provide solutions that actually help the advisor directly) exhibit halls tend to be filled with the latter (those who want a crack at the advisors' client dollars). After all, it's hard for an AdvisorTech vendor that sells software at \$29/month per advisor and generates a few million dollars a year of total revenues to compete with an asset manager that might win millions of dollars of flows from a single advisor and has hundreds of billions (or literally trillions) of AUM. Even though in practice it means the advisor spends most of their exhibit time trying to defend themselves from vendors hoping to get a piece of the advisors' clients, instead of vendors trying to provide solutions *to* the advisors themselves.

All of which came to a head when the coronavirus pandemic broke out, advisor conferences were rapidly forced to pivot to a virtual environment... and it became easier than ever for advisors to skip the often-no-longer-desired exhibit hall, leading to a rapid decline in the Return On Investment (ROI) for vendors to sponsor advisor conferences, which in turn is leading to a rapid decline in the willingness of industry vendors to sponsor virtual advisor events at all.

But with dollars already allocated to spend on marketing to advisors, most industry vendors haven't sat idly by just waiting for the return of in-person conferences. Instead, they have begun to purchase advisor email lists from providers like [Discovery Data](#) and [RIADatabase](#), and send out emails to solicit advisors to attend their *own* virtual webinars (or even coming together to host entire virtual full-day events like [AdviceTech.LIVE](#)). Which has led to a veritable explosion of advisor webinars, given the reduced cost of the virtual event. After all, sponsoring a conference is often \$5,000 to \$10,000 or more for a vendor just for the sponsorship fee alone, plus as much as \$2,000+ per person in ancillary costs (from flights and hotel accommodations for booth attendees), on top of the costs to purchase, ship, and set up the booth itself. Which means a single conference could have an all-in cost of \$10,000 to \$20,000 per event for a vendor... whereas a database of advisor contact information may cost 'just' the equivalent of 2 such conferences, and provides a full list that the vendor can repeatedly market to, and an incremental per-event cost of little more than a subscription to Zoom Webinars.

In other words, while in the past industry vendors paid conference organizers for access to their advisors, now industry vendors are using third-party mailing lists to bypass conference organizers and reach advisors directly, executing the even with their own expert resources or even spending a portion of their no-longer-an-exhibitor savings to hire speakers directly to provide compelling content that advisors will attend. Which for a vendor can still cut the cost-per-lead of their advisor marketing by as much as 90% (when you consider that many vendors would spend \$10,000 – \$20,000 per event just to get a dozen or two advisor ‘leads’ and can now run a webinar with several *hundred* advisor attendees for a similar-or-lower cost!).



Or stated more simply... the business model of advisor conferences was already in trouble, as the ROI for vendors was declining in the face of an increasingly hard-to-reach advisor audience (even when showing up to exhibit at the in-person conference), and the coronavirus pandemic has now forced vendors to find alternative non-conference channels of marketing to reach advisors, which as it turns out is often resulting in a far better marketing ROI than conference sponsorship even did. Which means not only are many advisor conferences struggling to attract vendors as sponsors... but it's not clear if many of them will *ever* be back even when the pandemic is over, because their sponsorship dollars have already been reallocated to a better marketing ROI.

## The ROI Of Advisor Conferences: A Future Of Cheaper Or Much More Expensive?

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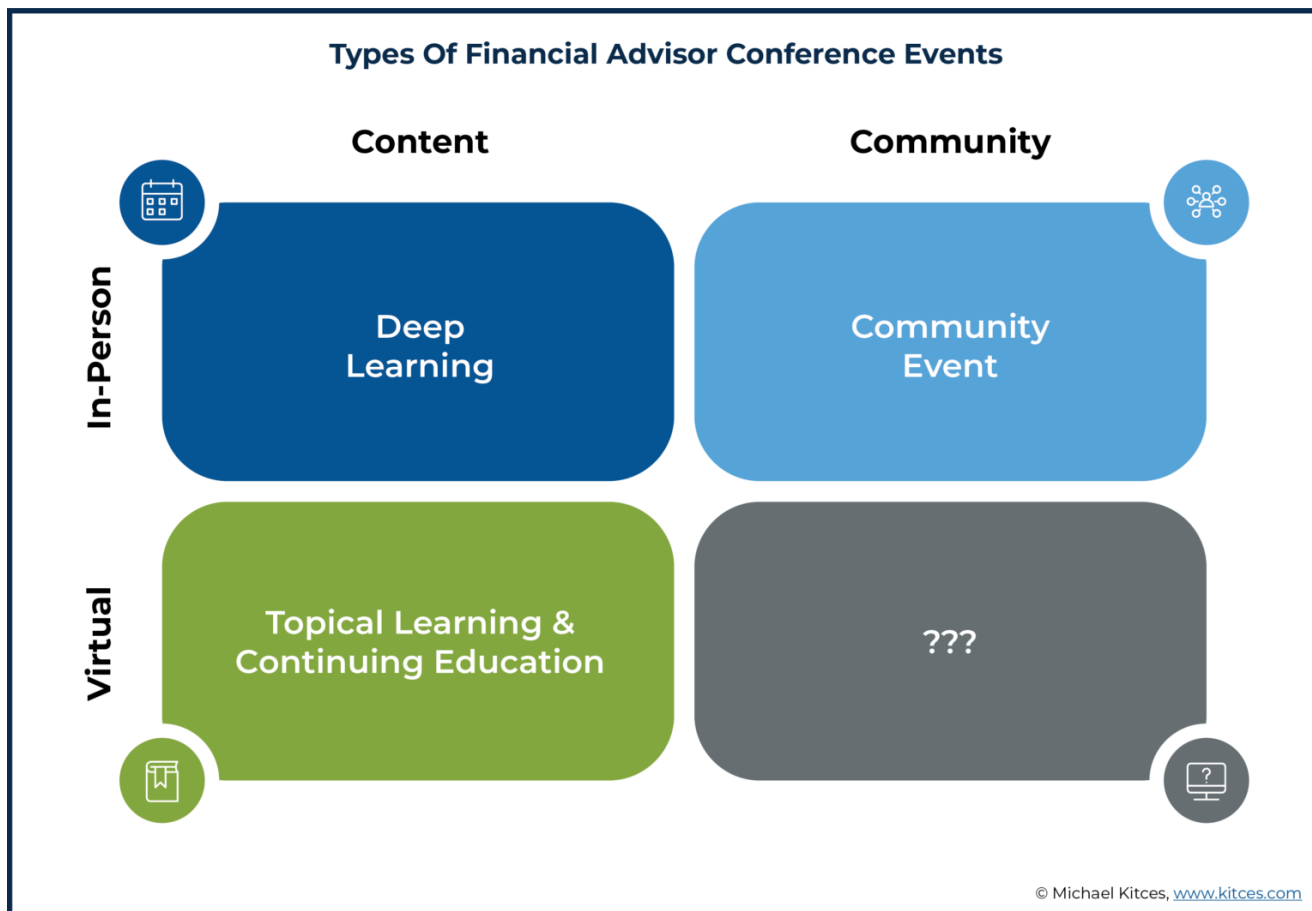
While the pandemic may have accelerated the demise of the ‘traditional’ sponsor-driven revenue model of financial advisor conferences, it won’t kill the financial advisor conference itself.

As the reality is that human beings are ‘herd’ animals. We’re hard-wired to exist in coordination with other members of the group, an aspect of our evolutionary biology that allowed us to work together to survive and thrive.

Which means, as human beings, we have an innate desire to come together with others in our community. In our local community, and in our professional community. Particularly in a chosen profession that is predicated on an advanced and ever-changing body of knowledge that requires (and rewards) continuing education and self-advancement. Or stated more simply: financial advisors will still have a need for community and content, and a natural inclination to obtain it by connecting in-person with others.

Still, though, with more conference and webinar content than ever available online in a virtual format (including a rapidly growing Members Section of advisor CE on this very blog), the question arises: what is the motivation for an advisor to get on a plane again in 2021 and beyond and travel to a conference, when the ability to ‘check the box’ for Continuing Education credits has never been easier? The answer: deeper content, or deeper community.

Of course, most advisor conferences have already said that they offer high-quality content and opportunities for networking with other advisors in the community. But the presence of virtual events effectively ‘unbundles’ the layer of traditional CE, which can now be obtained with far more ease and lower cost online, from the kinds of content and community offerings that are *unique* to an in-person conference experience... creating new opportunities for what really makes the “in-person” conference of 2021 and beyond worthwhile.



## The Four Types Of Advisor Events In The Future

In essence, the future of financial advisor events will likely feature four different types, depending on whether they are in-person or virtual, and focused on content or community:

**Deep Learning.** The in-person content-oriented event will be one of “deep learning” opportunities. Events will likely be multi-day (e.g., 2-5 days), focused on a particular area where advisors aim to go deep. This might include a full-week educational program to earn a post-CFP designation or certification (e.g., the CPWA certification), or to focus on a key practice management issue (e.g., Strategic Coach), or simply to ‘go deep’ in a particular topic area (e.g., on Planning for Executives or SRI Investing). Deep learning events will typically be hosted by education providers or specialist organizations that have the requisite in-depth subject matter expertise, and charge a ‘premium’ fee (because they are not sponsor-driven, and instead the value of the event, and the ROI for the advisor, is paying to attend in exchange for the deep knowledge obtained that allows the advisor to advance their business).

**Community Event.** While “community” is a label often used to describe the people that live near us, the reality is that “community” simply describes any group of people with some shared characteristic that binds them together. It could be geography (e.g., their neighborhood). Or their hobbies (e.g., the gamer community). Or their professional

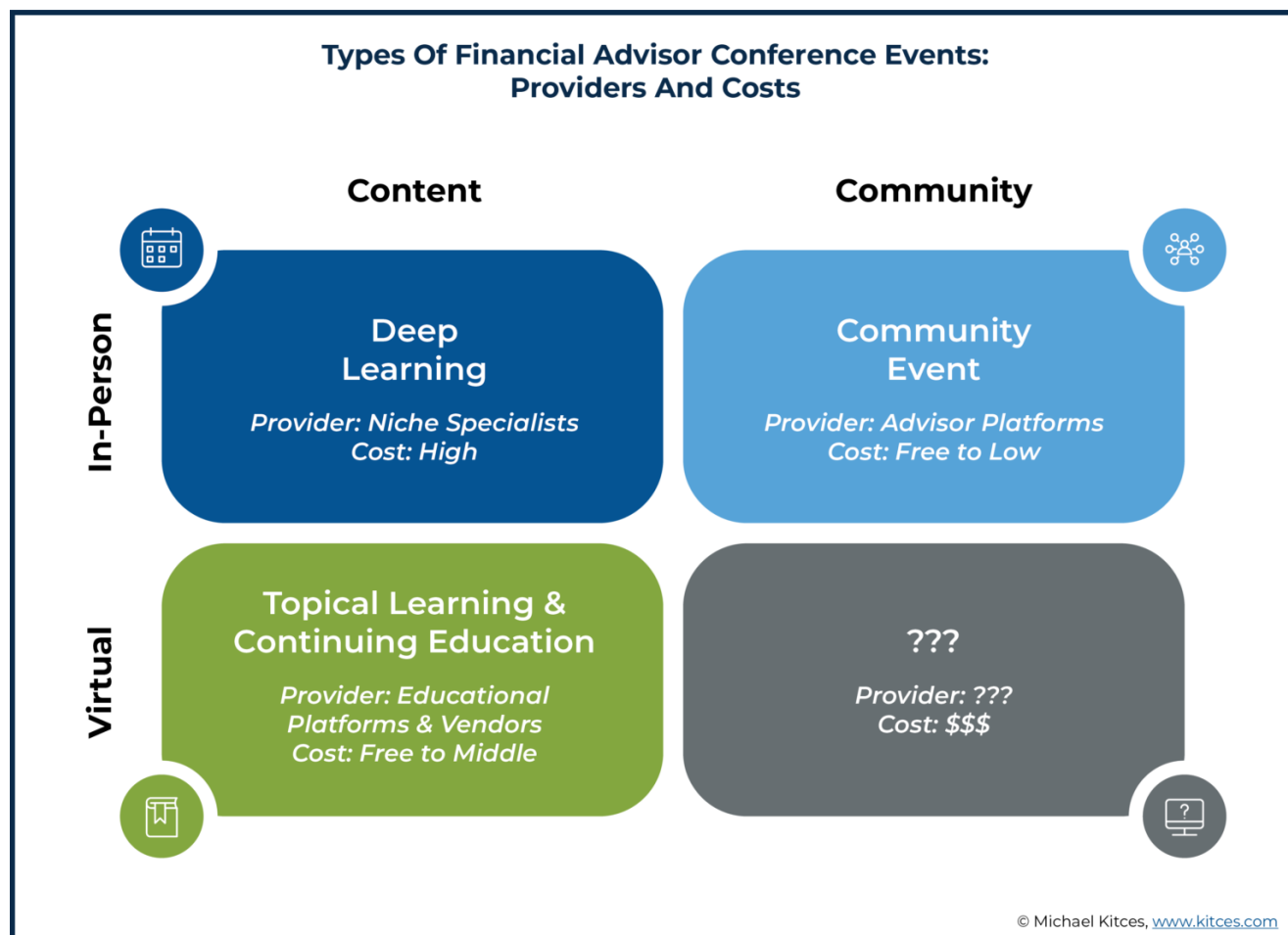


community (e.g., the colleagues on their advisor platform). We gather with our communities because those who have similar characteristics and likely to have similar experiences from whom we can learn. Whether that's from other advisors at the broker-dealer who can share how they're adapting to the latest grid changes, to other advisors at the RIA custodial who can share how they're implementing the latest technology updates on the platform, to other advisors in the association or network who can share how they're navigating the challenges of marketing in a pandemic environment given their particular business/fee model. Community events will typically be hosted *by* the community (or the platform/organization around which the community is built, such as a broker-dealer, RIA custodian, or advisor network/association), and will likely be very low cost or even free (as the business model is usually not for the community to profit from the event, but simply to make the community itself more successful because that propagates the success of the platform around which the community is built in the first place).

**Topical Learning & CE.** Offering continuing education (CE) has long been a staple of advisor events, but the shift to the virtual world means advisors have never had access to more plentiful or higher quality CE that they do today... without ever leaving their home or office, and either for free or at a very affordable rate (given that a year's worth of online advisor CE is at most only about 1/10<sup>th</sup> the cost to attend a single in-person advisor event!). As a result, the shift to the virtual world is likely to result in a bifurcation *between* CE and other topical content available online, and extended deep learning or community events that will remain predominantly in-person. In other words, a multi-day course is still difficult in a virtual online (hello Zoom fatigue!) and more conducive to a deep learning in-person event with fellow students, while a 1-hour CE course (or even a 3-hour Summit on a focused practice management topic like marketing) becomes an efficient and easy way to earn (and learn from) the requisite CE. In the future, primarily online CE will likely be the domain of education providers (who charge a nominal fee for higher-quality CE), and industry vendors (who offer CE credits for free in exchange for the opportunity to get their brand in front of advisors and connect with them for follow-up marketing purposes).

**Virtual Community Engagement???** The wild-card of the future of advisor events will be the existence of "virtual community" events. As witnessed by the rapid and forced transition to virtual events in 2020 as a result of the pandemic, in practice most conferences have had far more success figuring out how to broadcast virtual *content* than they have how to build virtual *community*, a result of both technology limitations (how do you re-create a cocktail party with an ongoing rotation of side conversations when everyone appears in one giant Zoom gallery!?), the limitations of communication in a virtual environment (where group dynamics are especially challenging), fatigue with online events in general, and an advisor base that is accustomed to relationship-building in person. Notably, there are certain other industries and channels that are built heavily in a virtual environment – for instance, large swaths of the gamer community that exists almost solely in a virtual format, with platforms from Twitch to Discord to Slack to forums

facilitating community engagement – which may eventually find its way to the advisor world. Though in practice, virtual community engagement tends *not* to be a matter of “events”, and more a year-round series of channels (from video to audio, written or streaming, asynchronous to live-chat) where communities can communicate and engage. In practice, virtual community engagement will likely be driven almost entirely by the community organizers themselves (e.g., advisor platforms around which advisors form such communities).



In essence, then, advisor events of the future are likely to either be much *less* expensive (e.g., lower-cost online CE or focused learning events, or larger in-person community events that are still subsidized by sponsors or the organization itself that wants to build a stronger community), or alternatively will be much *more* expensive (e.g., higher-cost Deep Learning events focused on a particular topic or subject matter) but also with a more focused advisor value proposition and the potential for far greater ROI than the traditional “a little of something for everyone [but not a lot for anyone]” conference approach of the past.

## The Changing Landscape Of Financial Advisor Conferences In 2021

So given all of these ongoing shifts in the landscape of advisor conferences and education, what will be the best advisor events to plan to attend in 2021? The short answer is: we won't know, because there is truly no way to predict this year.

In part, the uncertainty about the outlook is because of the uncertainty regarding a coronavirus vaccine; when it will be available, how quickly it can be distributed, and its efficacy (one dose? multiple doses over time?) are still unknown. As realistically, if there's no widespread vaccine by the end of the year, in-person events for the first half of 2021 will likely start to be canceled or rescheduled (or never finalized in the first place). If the coronavirus vaccine is not available by the end of Q1 of 2021, events in the second half of 2021 will likely start to be called off as well (as for most conference organizers, it's too risky to wait and risk being financially overcommitted if the event has to be called off later). Notably, some events may be 'stuck' running in 2021, with hotel contracts that cannot be canceled (under the terms that allowed them to be rescheduled from 2020 in the first place); but such events, if they do occur in the face of an ongoing coronavirus challenge, will still be greatly scaled back and likely include a heavy online component.

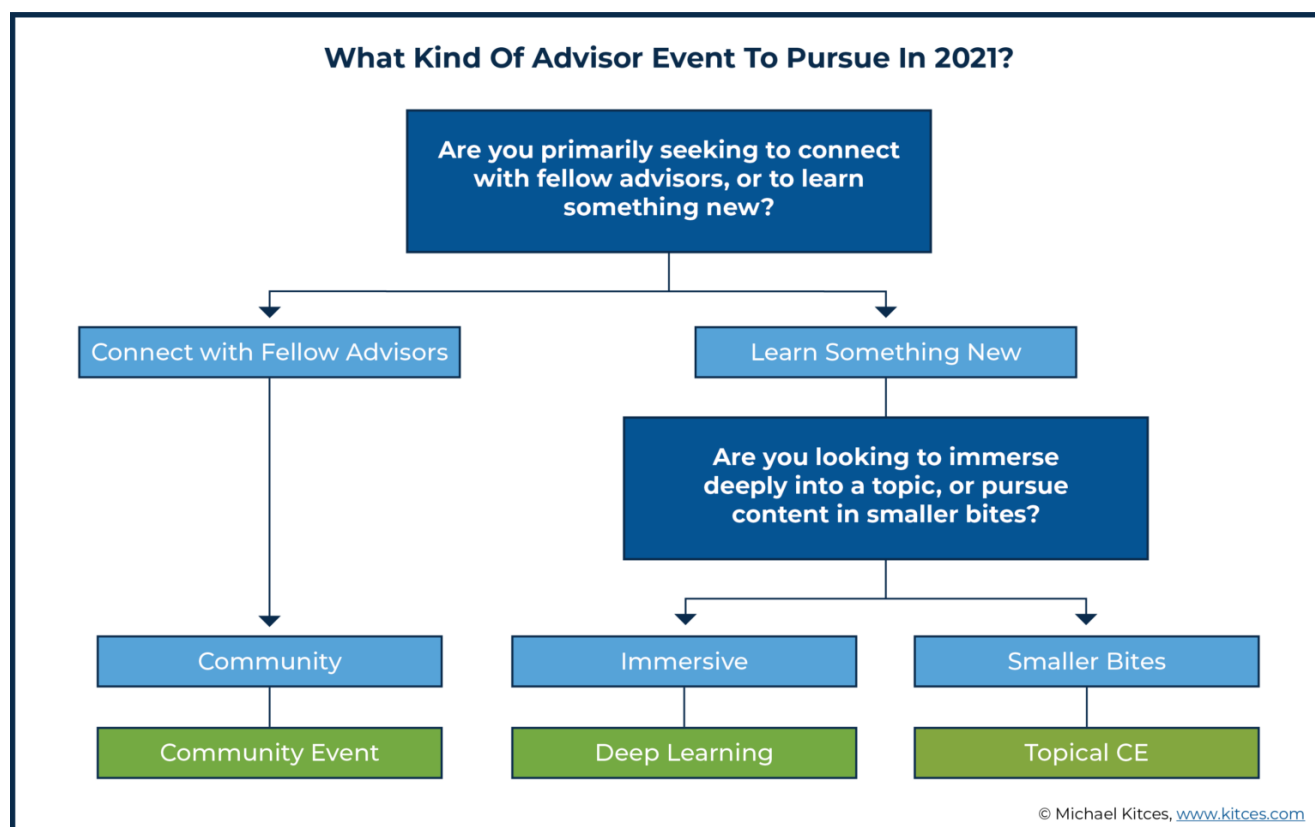
In addition, the reality is that event execution is still a big question mark for 2021. With in-person events, organizations tend to be consistent in how they operate their events, with well-run events consistently and dependably well run. But unfortunately, the rapid switch from in-person to virtual events in 2020 led to a wide range of experiences... some good, and some not. But given how unexpected the transition to virtual was, most organizations didn't have any experience executing an event virtually, didn't necessarily have the team and infrastructure in place, and at best were scrambling to find technology solutions that may or may not have been very robust to handle the needs of their online event. By 2021, though, conference organizers will have more virtual experience, platforms will have time to be vetted and tested, and new technology solutions are appearing to be able to better execute online events. Consequently, the quality (or lack thereof) when it came to execution in 2020 isn't necessarily an indicator of what will (or won't) be a well-run event in 2021.

Furthermore, advisor events may face a substantial budget restructuring in 2021, if the reality truly is that industry vendors have dialed back their sponsorship budgets and re-deployed to alternative channels. This could result in some events scaling back simply because of budget limitations, or a material change in pricing if events need to increase their registration fees to make up for the loss of sponsors (which in turn can change the ROI of whether the event is worthwhile to attend). This may be especially challenging for industry media publications, as well as broad-based associations, that don't necessarily have the focused community to command a strong Community Event turnout but also lack the technical depth to sustain a Deep Learning event format.

## **What Are The Best Financial Advisor Conferences To Attend In 2021?**

Given all of the dynamics at play, from the uncertainty of a coronavirus vaccine to the fact that nearly every advisor event is reinventing itself for a new environment where everything from sponsor budgets to advisor expectations are different, our recommendation for 2021 is not to approach the decision of what are the “best” advisor conferences based on which events have or haven’t delivered in the past... but based on how they are positioned relative to the new reality of the future where CE is virtual and plentiful but community and quality content are still at a premium.

Accordingly, the first question to ask when evaluating what kind of advisor event to pursue in 2021 is: are you seeking to connect with your fellow advisor Community, are you looking to ‘Go Deep’ in a particular technical area, or are you simply trying to fulfill CE requirements or otherwise ‘touch up’ on a specific technical or practice management topic?



## Go Home: Find Your Advisor Community Or Form Your Own

For those advisors who want to ‘find their community’ – engage with other similar advisors with whom they can commiserate and from whom they can learn and be inspired – the most straightforward place to go is the main conference/event *for* their community: the annual broker-dealer, custodian, or association’s national conference.

As in practice, major organizations – from Schwab’s IMPACT to LPL Focus, NAPFA National to XYPN LIVE – have continued to run their events despite the pandemic, and anticipated to do so for the foreseeable future. Whether the event actually turns out to be an in-person event in 2021 or a virtual event, remains to be seen – dependent largely on

the timeline for a coronavirus vaccine – but even if the events must be online again in 2021, except these Community Events to have a heavy focus *on* community, and finding ways to bring together like-minded advisors.

Advisor platforms are a natural focal point for community-based advisor events, as the commonality of the RIA model, or the broker-dealer model, or the fee-for-service model, or the fee-only approach, naturally results in advisors who tend to have at least a somewhat similar business model, service model, and approach to working with clients, which can often be further refined (for even better peer-style connections) by the organizations themselves. And they'll all have a commonality of the shared challenges and opportunities of the platform itself – e.g., how to navigate the latest technology update from the advisor platform, or how best to manage certain situations with home office staff – which provides an additional basis for community sharing and connection.

Alternatively, for those advisors looking for a community connection who don't feel one with their “home” advisor platform community, consider forming your own study or “mastermind” group of peers with whom you *can* share more deeply and commiserate. Most commonly, mastermind groups are formed of advisors who all have a similar business model and practice size – e.g., successful high-income solo advisors, or experienced founders looking to establish succession plans over the next 10 years, or owners of \$1B+ advisory firms looking to share best practices and how they tackle the challenges of running complex \$10M+ revenue organizations. Some mastermind groups prefer to meet periodically in person (e.g., 1x or 2x per year), while others operate partially or entirely virtually (from quarterly to monthly to even weekly check-in calls, depending on the preferences of the group). Ultimately, though, it just takes one advisor to declare that they want to create the group, reach out to like-minded peers, establish a simple agenda, and get started with their newfound community.

## **Go Deep: Get Specialized Or Get (Practice) Wisdom**

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For advisors looking to 2021 as an opportunity to take their ‘game’ to the next level – whether it's with respect to their own (increasingly specialized) knowledge, or gaining wisdom about how to better run their advisory business – the key will be to find advisor events that go *deep* into a specific knowledge domain.

At a high level, the category of “Deep Learning” advisor conferences can be broken into two subcategories: those that focus on the more technical knowledge (e.g., traditional advisor specialization), and those that are more practice management-oriented about how to run a more efficient advisor practice or a more scaled advisory business.

## **Getting More Specialized**

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When it comes to “specialized” advisor events, recent years have witnessed a growing range of deep-learning conferences focused on a particular topic. Key examples include the [Heckerling Institute’s conference on advanced Estate Planning](#), [Fi360’s fiduciary training events](#), [myStockOption’s 2-day conference on financial planning for corporate executives](#), the [Investments & Wealth Institute’s retirement conference](#), and the [SRI Conference for advisors focused on sustainable and responsible investing](#).

However, given that the domain of advisors becoming hyper-specialized is still relatively new, in practice most subject matter domains only have one primary advisor conference that serves them. The good news from the advisor perspective, though, is that means the choice of which event to attend is rather straightforward: choose the one event that directly aligns with the kind of specialized knowledge the advisor wishes to pursue!

In practice, the following are a list of the key Deep Learning events for advisors in particular topical areas:

- **Estate Planning** – [55th Annual Heckerling Institute on Estate Planning](#), May 3 – 6, 2021
- **Fiduciary Specialization For Retirement Planning** – [Fi360 Conference](#), 2021 dates are TBD
- **Executive Compensation And Stock Option Planning** – [Financial Planning For Public Company Executives & Employees](#), 2021 dates are TBD
- **Retirement Planning** – [Retirement Management Forum](#), 2021 dates are TBD, but their 2020 conference will be held virtually on December 8, 2020
- **SRI/ESG Investing** – [SRI Conference](#), 2021 dates are TBD, as are their 2020 dates (originally November 9-11), which are being rescheduled due to COVID-19

Of course, with the status of the coronavirus still up in the air, it remains uncertain which deep learning events in 2021 will actually *be* in-person or not. However, advisors can reference the individual conference websites for (likely to be changing and evolving) conference registration information, and Kitces.com also aims to maintain an updated list of each event and its virtual-or-not status for the coming year with our [Master Advisor Conference List for 2021](#).

## Getting More (Practice) Wisdom

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For most of our history as financial advisors, the business model was primarily or solely based on commissions. Which meant advisors woke up at the start of every year with little or no revenue (short of a small amount of trails) and had to go out and find new clients to bring in new revenue. As a result, teams were small and lean with little more than an administrative assistant to handle basic servicing needs of existing clients (advisors don’t commit to much staff salary when the overhead means they’d have to start every year in the

hole!), and “practice management” advice was almost entirely focused on either sales techniques to close more business or how to be more efficient with the advisor’s time (in order *to* be able to close more new business!).

However, as advisory firms have transitioned from commissions to fees – and more specifically, from transactional one-time revenue to ongoing recurring revenue business models – the size and staff infrastructure of advisory firms have been able to grow, resulting in larger teams, more scaled businesses... and a whole new host of problems and challenges that arise when the role of the advisory firm founder shifts from “lead advisor” to “leader of the advisory firm” (which for many advisors, actually reduces their happiness as it puts them largely into a management role and takes them away from the client work they enjoyed the most!).

Fortunately, though, this shift in the advisory business model, and the size and scale of advisory businesses, is in turn leading to a growing number of deep-dive programs designed specifically to help advisors be more effective business owners and leaders... for whatever type of firm it is that they wish to run. Which means in practice there are some programs for larger firms, and others for smaller firms. There are some for founders, and others for next-generation/successor owners. There are some for those who want to scale beyond being a lifestyle practice, and others for those resolutely focused on *staying* a lifestyle practice.

What’s unique about deep-dive practice management programs, though, is that improving the results of the business over time means being involved in the program *over time*. In other words, it’s not about attending a single one-hour program, or even a half-day or full-day workshop, but instead immersing in what is often a year-long experience with ongoing (in-person or virtual) meetings, group work, coaching, and a lot of self-reflection and time to make changes and see how it goes. With, notably, a price tag commensurate with a year-long coaching and development program... potentially adding up to \$3,000, \$5,000, \$10,000, or sometimes even more. Though for the opportunity to transform an advisory firm, saving substantial time, gaining new focus, or growing and scaling the business, such deep-dive practice management offerings often provide some of the *best* ROI of any professional development programs for advisors.

Accordingly, the following are ‘deep dive’ practice management programs worth considering in 2021:

**For Solo Practitioners Looking To Get More Focused And Efficient: Strategic Coach.**

Dan Sullivan's Strategic Coach program has long been popular amongst financial advisors looking to get more focused and efficient. At its core, the Strategic Coach is a year-long coaching program, with quarterly meetings and a group of fellow entrepreneurs (not specific to the financial advisor industry, though very popular amongst financial advisors), that helps advisors focus on everything from shifting your role to work less in the business and more on the business, how to better manage your time and energy to be most productive, the ways to drive more strategic growth in the business, and how best to leverage yourself within the business. For the pandemic environment, the Strategic Coach has implemented both in-person and virtual options.



**For Solo Practitioners Looking To Optimize Their Lifestyle Practices: Limitless Adviser.**

One of the most common challenges of financial advisors after they reach 10+ years of experience is that they hit a capacity wall, where there are so many cumulative clients that just servicing clients takes up all the available time... which means at best, growth ceases, and at worst, the advisor begins to feel like they're drowning in their own service work. Yet some advisors manage to break through that barrier and live highly scaled lifestyle practices where they can drive \$1M+ of revenue and still take off 100 days per year. The Limitless Adviser Coaching Program is built to help financial advisors make both the business and mindset changes necessary to focus their businesses to achieve similar results, from implementing Meeting Surges to structuring and systematizing key elements of the business. It is particularly well suited to advisors trying to regain a new balance within their practice.



**For Next Generation (G2) Leaders Of Mid-To-Large-Sized Advisory Firms: G2 Leadership Institute.**

One of the unique challenges of mid-to-large-sized advisory firms is that the founders who built





the firm ultimately must transition it to next-generation leaders who may have never had the opportunity to build their own firm from scratch (as they chose instead the employee path in the founder's firm)... creating a void where the future leaders of the firm have limited leadership experience. To fill the void, practice management consultant Philip Palaveev of the Ensemble Practice created the "G2 Leadership Institute", a deep-dive program for rising next-generation leaders in advisory firms to learn about the key elements of what it takes to really lead a business, tackling hypothetical case scenarios that real advisory businesses face, from the turnover of advisors to operational scaling challenges and more, in a group setting with other next-generation leaders navigating the same challenges. (Notably, advisors at RIAs with Charles Schwab can access a similar Schwab Executive Leadership Program.)

### **For Financial Advisors Looking To Systematize Their Business**

**Development: Bachrach's Advisor Roadmap.** The growth of various fee-for-service business models, where advisors



charge ongoing (and especially non-AUM) fees for financial advice, has for many advisors put a newfound focus on figuring out exactly how to talk about the value they provide and why their (now transparent and highly salient) fees are "worth it" to the client. For more than 20 years, Bill Bachrach has trained a popular approach of "Values-Based Financial Planning" to position in the client's mind the value of financial advice, with guidance on the exact conversations to *have* with clients in the initial sales process to explain their value. Now converting into a virtual program, Bachrach's "Advisor Roadmap" is the cumulative training he's developed for advisors that are looking to better communicate the value of their advice and get clients on board with the fees that they're charging.

**For Financial Advisors Looking To Market To HNW Clients: Oechsli Institute.** Founded by Matt Oechsli, the Oechsli Institute conducts original research



on high-net-worth investors and what they really want and need from financial advisors... and then teaches and trains financial advisors how to better communicate and position themselves to attract and retain those HNW investors. In practice, the Oechsli Institute offers a series of Coaching programs and Online Courses (as well as an annual Retreat) to help advisors learn what they need to do and communicate if they want to move further "upmarket" into working with a more affluent clientele.

### **Continue Your Education (And Get CE)**

When it comes to continuing education, financial advisors have long had a wide range of choices, from trade publications that often offer CE credits for free at the back of the magazine, to association events that offer CE credits to their members via webinars and

live events, advisor platforms that make CE available to their own base of advisors, independent education providers that offer CE opportunities, and a wide range of industry product manufacturers and distributors that conduct in-person and virtual CE events for marketing purposes and/or to promote their own solutions.

The emergence of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, and the elimination of in-person events, has rapidly accelerated what was already an ongoing shift of advisor continuing education to the online/virtual world, from industry vendors that increased their virtual webinar CE offerings as an alternative marketing strategy for no-longer-available conference sponsorships, to existing advisor events that have pivoted to a virtual environment, and more. (In point of fact, Kitces.com's own Members Section for advisor CE has grown by more than 50% this year!)

In practice, this rise of ever-more advisor CE opportunities in an online/virtual world is leading to a bifurcation of offerings for advisors: free events offered by advisor platforms (to make up for their canceled in-person events) and industry vendors (for their own marketing purposes); and paid CE (primarily from industry associations and independent education providers).

Which solutions advisors choose will of course be up to the advisor. For those who simply want and need to “check the box” on their annual CE requirements, a wide range of free CE offerings remain available.

For those who want to go deeper and reinvest further into their education, though, advisors have a number of choices:

**AICPA PFP.** The AICPA's Personal Financial Planning (PFP) section offers a wide range of advanced CE topics (also eligible for CPE for accountants), in addition to their annual AICPA ENGAGE conference (which now records its sessions and makes them available virtually). For advisors willing to spend dollars on ‘premium’ advanced CE, the AICPA's PFP content continues to be popular.



**Kitces.com Members Section.** Readers of this Nerd's Eye View blog may be aware that the Kitces.com Members Section also provides continuing education (CE) credits for the technical articles published on the blog, in addition to an ongoing series of monthly advanced planning webinars. With a focus on Advancing Knowledge in Financial



Planning, Kitces.com CE is specifically targeted to more experienced advisors looking for advanced content (and cross-eligibility for multi-designation advisors in particular, with credit for CFP, CPA, Enrolled Agents, CPWA and CIMA designations, and other advisor designations that accept self-reported CE credits).

**Investments & Wealth Institute.** The

IWI (formerly known as IMCA) is a membership association primarily for advisors who earn their advanced designations, including the CIMA (Certified Investment Management Analyst), the CPWA (Certified Private Wealth Advisor), and the RMA (Retirement Management Advisor). While IWI conducts 3 annual conferences (nominally targeting one for each of the respective designations), many advisors pursue one of the IWI's post-CFP designations as their Continuing Education for the year (though notably, the IWI's programs are typically structured to be completed in a single year, even though they provide more hours of CE than advisors are obligated to earn in a single year). Of course, earning advanced designations is significantly more expensive than “just” purchasing standalone CE credits. But for those who find it appealing to “double-dip” and actually earn a bona fide designation as a part of fulfilling their annual CE obligation, the IWI's programs may be very appealing.



**American College.** The American College was the original provider of advanced continuing education in the financial services industry, having first created the CLU (Chartered Life Underwriter) program for life insurance professionals nearly 100 years ago. Today, the American College offers not only the CLU, but a number of other advanced post-CFP degrees and designations



for financial advisors including the RICP (Retirement Income Certified Professional), the CAP (Chartered Advisor in Philanthropy), the AEP (Accredited Estate Planner), and the ChSNC (Chartered Special Needs Consultant), as well as a Master's degree in Financial Services. Unlike the IWI's programs, though – which are typically built to be completed in a single program over the span of a single year – the American College's designations are more modular, typically comprised of 3-7 different courses that can be taken incrementally over time, making it easier for advisors to complete ‘just’ 1-2 courses per year to fulfill their annual CE requirements (and over the span of several years, to cumulatively earn another quality advisor designation).

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Ultimately, it remains to be seen how 2021 will play out, as a coronavirus vaccine (hopefully!) goes into wide release but on an unknown timeline (that may or may not

curtail in-person advisor conferences in either the first half or all of the coming year), the economics of the conference business shift (as vendors increasingly execute their own virtual marketing events instead of sponsoring others), conference organizers adopt new tools and technology to better facilitate virtual advisor events (or not), and advisors seek out the kind of content and conferences that are most meaningful for them.

Hopefully, this year's guide to financial advisor conferences will be helpful in the midst of this uncertainty. Given the dynamic nature of the 2021 conference calendar, Nerd's Eye View will again maintain its annual "Master Conference List" for 2021, and will make updates as time passes for which events are still running (or not), and will be in-person (or not).

Still, though, don't let the uncertainty of the coronavirus pandemic slow your ability to advance your own career. Whether virtual or in-person, content, and community are still available. And arguably more important than ever, as traditional advisor gatherings have been disrupted. So whether it's trying to connect with other advisors, or reinvest in your own expertise or your advisory business, I hope you're able to find a financial advisor event that's relevant for you in the coming year!

| Best Conferences For Financial Advisors In 2021   |  |
|---|--|
| <div> <div>Deep Learning</div> <div>Get More Specialized</div> <div>      </div> <div>Get More (Practice) Wisdom</div> <div>      </div> </div> | <div> <div>Community Event</div> <div>           </div> <div>Continuing Education</div> <div>     </div> </div> |

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