RESEARCH REPORT

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The 2026 Living Legacy Report

How "Giving While Living" and Family-Wide Planning Are Rewiring Advisory Growth

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Living Legacies:

How “Giving While Living” and Family-Wide Planning Are Rewiring Advisory Growth

Nearly half of advisors say their clients plan to share part of their wealth while they’re still alive — a striking signal that “giving while living” has gone mainstream among affluent families.

That’s one of the key findings from a new survey conducted by The Compound Insights, in partnership with Wealth.com, which explores how financial advisors approach legacy and estate planning today. The results paint a clear picture of an industry in transition—and they reveal a set of emerging growth opportunities. This research offers an inside look at how client expectations, family engagement, and technology are transforming what was once a niche service for the ultra-wealthy into a core element of modern wealth management.

The study results make clear that legacy planning is no longer just about end-of-life decisions: It’s becoming one of the most powerful ways advisors can differentiate their practices, deepen client relationships, and ensure continuity across generations.

In this report, you’ll learn:

- Why legacy planning has gone mainstream, extending far beyond the ultra-high-net-worth market.
- How “giving while living” is reshaping client conversations and expectations.
- Why family-wide engagement correlates with stronger business growth.
- How advisors struggle more with the complexity of legacy planning than its value.
- How technology and automation are set to unlock the next era of efficient, scalable legacy planning.

Legacy Planning Is Now Mainstream

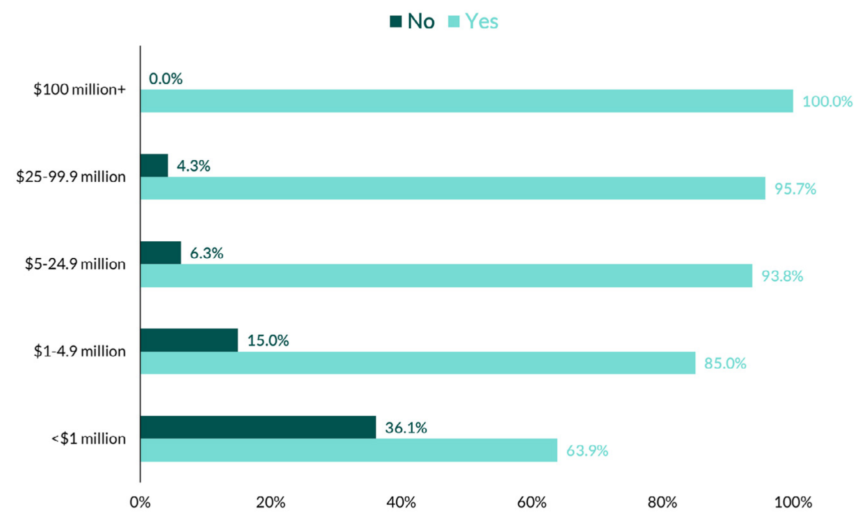
Once regarded as the domain of firms serving the country's wealthiest families, legacy planning has evolved into a mainstream service across the wealth spectrum. According to the survey, 86% of advisors now offer some form of legacy planning, whether standardized or ad hoc.

That broad adoption extends well beyond the ultra-affluent. Among advisors serving households with less than $1 million in assets, 64% already provide legacy planning, and another 22% are considering adding it. For clients with more than $5 million, the service is nearly universal: 95% of advisors in that segment offer some version of legacy planning, and 63% have built it into their standard process.

The backdrop explains why. U.S. household wealth has nearly doubled since 2010, even after adjusting for inflation. Equity values have more than quintupled. Meanwhile, a historic $124-trillion intergenerational wealth transfer is underway, according to Cerulli Associates. Baby Boomers and members of the Silent Generation are expected to pass those assets to heirs over the next two decades, in a shift with clear implications for advisory practices.

Do you offer legacy planning services?

Split by average client net worth



Source: 2026 Wealth.com's The Living Legacy Report

The Legacy Planning Demand Gap

Despite this massive opportunity, many advisors underestimate demand. Among those who don't offer legacy services, 61% said they would consider doing so with stronger client interest, while 37% of advisors evaluating the idea said they've hesitated because clients haven't asked for it. That creates a self-reinforcing feedback loop, which might be called "the legacy planning demand gap." Clients often assume estate-related help is outside their advisor's purview, while advisors wait for clients to raise the topic. As a result, both sides leave value on the table. Advisors who take the lead in raising legacy questions early can close that gap and unlock new dimensions of client engagement.

Legacy planning is no longer a niche add-on. It's becoming a baseline expectation across wealth levels, and proactive advisors are the ones capturing clients' growing interest.

"Giving While Living" Is on the Rise

The survey data reveal a major cultural and behavioral shift: Generosity during one's lifetime is overtaking the traditional posthumous giving approach. On average, advisors report that 46% of clients who plan to pass assets intend to do so while alive. Among clients with more than $25 million, that number climbs to 55%.

This "giving while living" mindset spans financial and non-financial legacies alike. The most common vehicles are education-related gifts and trusts. 529-plan contributions and college fund donations rank first among giving tools, while trust structures rank second, followed by annual exclusion gifting. Beyond money, 43% of advisors encourage clients to pass down values and stories as part of their legacy, while 41% promote shared family philanthropy.

Rising lifetime giving coincides with the affordability challenges younger generations face. Home ownership and higher education have become drastically more expensive, and the monthly cost of a mortgage has doubled in just six years. Clients recognize the emotional and practical value of helping their children and grandchildren when that help can make a profound difference. Giving while living also cultivates something money alone cannot: Client satisfaction at seeing their generosity in action, as well as cross-generational engagement as estate discussions lead into ongoing, values-based conversations.

Lifetime giving is changing the rhythm of wealth transfer. Advisors who facilitate these strategies serve clients' emotional priorities while fostering multi-generational loyalty.

Family-Wide Engagement Drives Better Outcomes

Legacy planning creates the greatest business and emotional value when it becomes a family process. In our survey, advisors who arranged regular meetings with all account holders or household partners were more likely to report higher growth or success from legacy planning activities. They cited new assets and increased referrals as key outcomes.

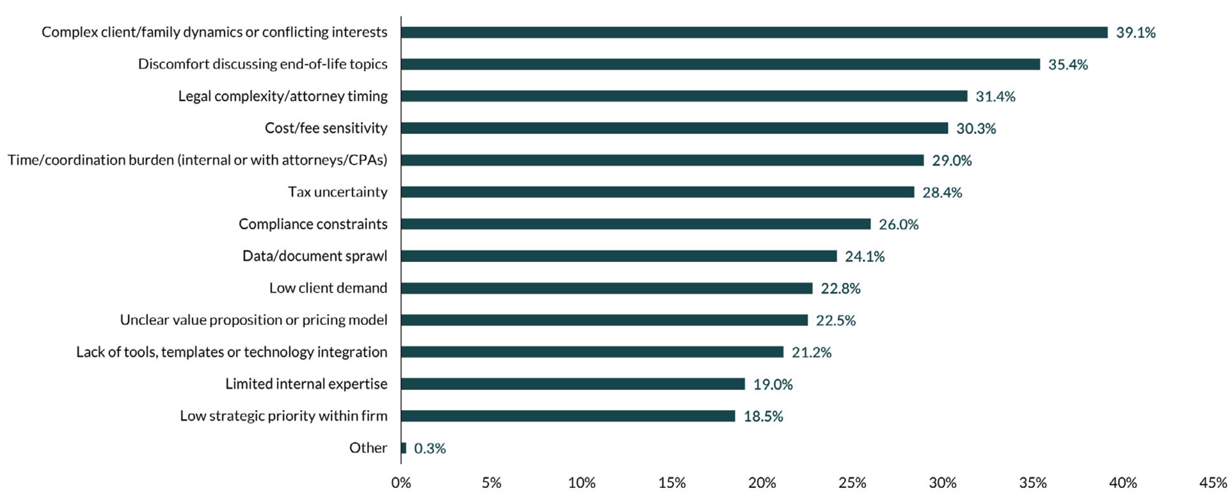
Advisors who included all account holders or household partners in legacy planning meetings were more likely to cite greater success in areas like asset growth and new referrals. And 54% of these advisors reported being “very” or “extremely” confident that they’ll be able to retain the next generation as clients. Furthermore, advisors whose books include a higher share of clients committed to passing assets during their lifetime were more likely to report measurable practice growth over the past 12 months.

Family meetings and legacy dialogues reinforce the advisor’s central role in a family’s financial ecosystem. These interactions help uncover shared values, identify potential conflicts, and ensure that wealth transitions efficiently and intentionally. Still, the human element can be challenging. Complex family dynamics were cited by 39% of advisors as a barrier to effective legacy planning, while 35% mentioned the awkwardness of discussing death and inheritance.

Legacy planning is most effective when it includes everyone with a stake in the outcome. Advisors who master family facilitation skills, or partner with tools and professionals who can help, amplify their value and strengthen long-term relationships.

What are the barriers you’ve experienced in delivering legacy planning?

Select all that apply



Source: 2026 Wealth.com’s The Living Legacy Report

Advisors Struggle with Complexity, Not Conviction

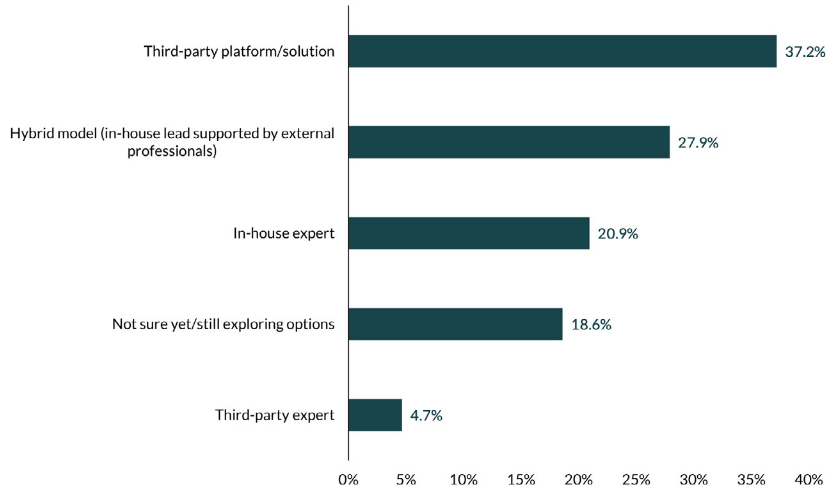
Advisors overwhelmingly believe in the importance of legacy planning. The main reason it's not universal isn't philosophical—it's operational. While 61% of surveyed advisors said they've standardized legacy planning within their offerings, 39% handle it on a case-by-case basis. What's more, tools and processes vary widely.

Among advisors providing legacy planning:

- Excel is the most commonly used software.
- 37% use a third-party legacy platform.
- 33% charge a project fee, while another 23% bundle legacy planning services within AUM-based pricing.

What type of legacy planning service are you considering?

For advisors who don't offer legacy planning services/are considering it (select all that apply)



Source: 2026 Wealth.com's The Living Legacy Report
*Sample size was 43 advisors

On average, advisors include four core services in their legacy planning stack, typically:

- Document readiness checklists (53%)
- Beneficiary designation reviews and updates (50%)
- Liquidity and tax planning (48%)
- Business succession/continuity planning (48%)

What's holding advisors back isn't lack of interest but complexity. Between navigating family emotions, legal frameworks, and coordination among outside professionals, even experienced advisors can find the process cumbersome. Simplifying workflows, through standardized processes or technology, represents the next frontier in the growth of legacy planning.

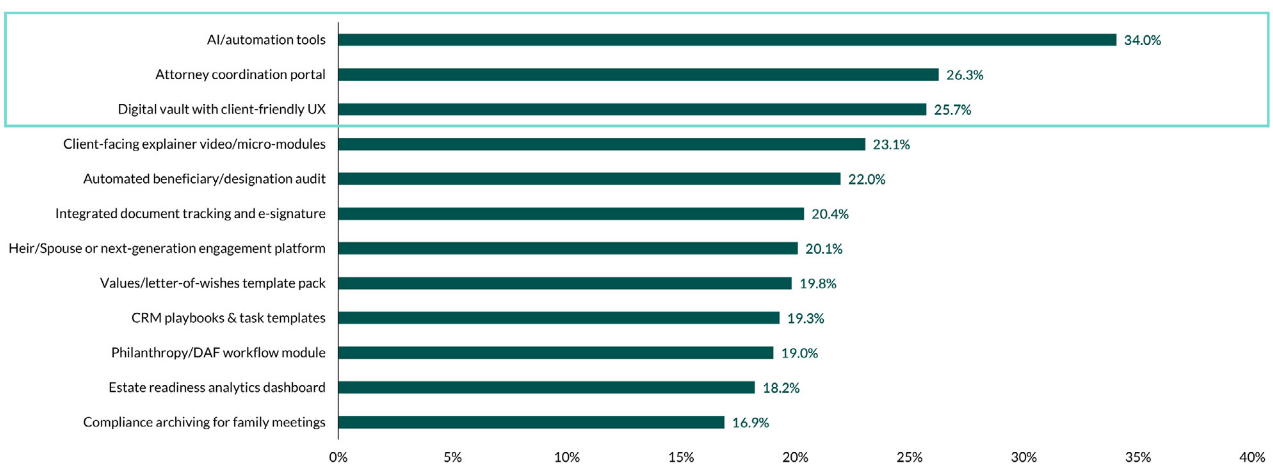
Technology, Automation, and Coordination Are the Next Unlock

The research suggests clear demand for solutions that make legacy planning simpler, more collaborative, and more scalable: Time and coordination burden as well as legal complexity ranked highly as barriers. Accordingly, 34% of advisors said they'd adopt AI/automation tools in the next 12 months. And 27% said they'd use an attorney coordination portal. These solutions don't replace human expertise but rather augment it. Digital platforms that centralize estate documents, automate reminders, and facilitate real-time collaboration among advisors, clients, and attorneys are gradually changing how the process works, creating clarity, reducing manual follow-up work, and freeing advisors to focus on sensitive conversations that clients value most.

Beyond process efficiency, legacy technology enables better storytelling: a clearer record of what the family wants to achieve, why it matters, and who will carry it forward. In an era when personalization and transparency are client expectations, that context is critical. Technology is the bridge between ambition and execution. The advisors who integrate automation, communication portals, and estate workflows will set the standard for family-centered wealth transitions tomorrow.

Which tools you would adopt in the next 12 months if available?

Respondent could select up to three



Source: 2026 Wealth.com's The Living Legacy Report

The Bottom Line on Legacy Planning

The evidence shows that advisors who treat legacy planning as a living, family-wide strategy across wealth demographics are not only serving clients better; they're also building more durable, thriving practices. As legacy planning becomes mainstream, advisory firms that close the demand gap appear likely to grow faster. And while human expertise and understanding will always remain core elements of legacy planning, advisors now have the tools available to streamline the process—serving more clients more robustly and doing well by doing good.

Methodology

The Compound Insights conducted an online survey of 434 financial advisors between November 26 and December 21, 2025. Participants were asked multiple-choice questions about their demographics, thoughts about legacy planning and conversations with clients.

The respondent sample size was originally 468 advisors, but we removed 34 respondents who self-identified as family office advisors due to data discrepancies.

320 respondents were paid through a third-party platform for their participation. 114 were offered the chance to win a $100 Amazon gift card.

While we strive to keep all our surveys as objective and unbiased as possible, there's always a risk of self-selection bias. The advisors who chose to participate in this survey are likely more inclined to have legacy planning practices or be interested in legacy planning.

About the Study Partners

THE COMPOUND INSIGHTS

The Compound Insights

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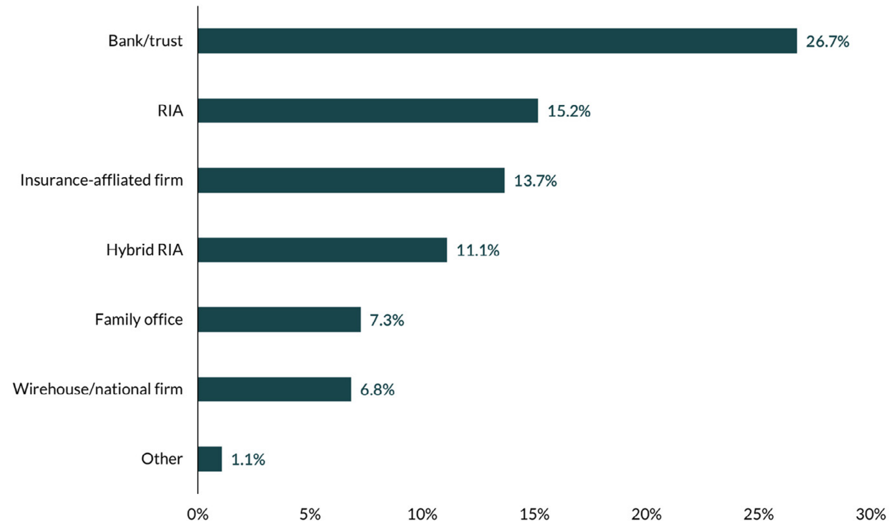
Wealth.com is the industry's leading estate and tax planning platform, empowering thousands of wealth management firms to modernize how planning guidance is delivered to clients. As the only tech-led, end-to-end platform built specifically for financial institutions, Wealth.com enables firms to drive scale, efficiency, and measurable client impact across estate and tax planning.

Trusted by some of the largest names in finance, Wealth.com combines proprietary AI, enterprise-grade security, and deep legal and tax expertise to serve the full range of client needs, from foundational estate plans to advanced estate and tax reporting. With the introduction of Wealth.com Tax Planning, firms can deliver more integrated, proactive planning through a single platform. Wealth.com has been widely recognized for innovation and leadership, earning Top Estate Planning Technology and Top Estate Planning Implementation at the 2025 WealthManagement.com Industry Awards and #1 estate planning market share in the 2025 Kitces AdvisorTech Study.

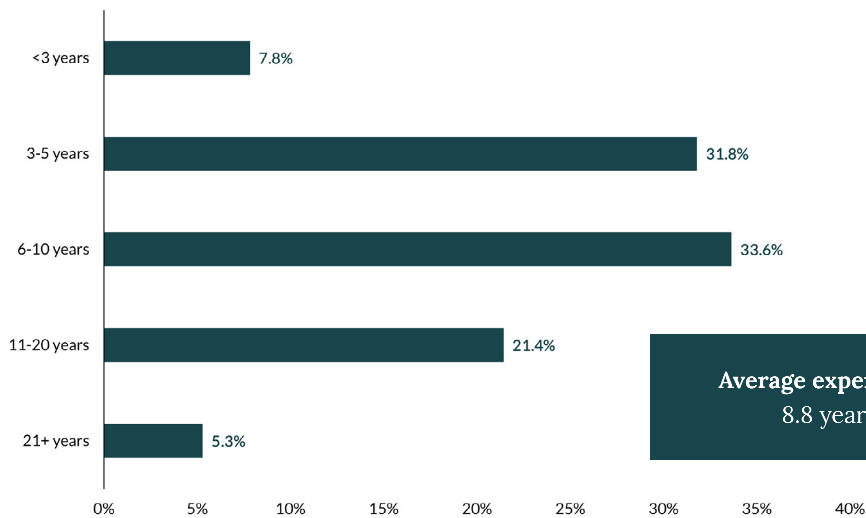
Appendix

Type of firm



Source: 2026 Wealth.com's The Living Legacy Report
*Family office was included as an answer choice, yet the 34 respondents who picked "family office" were excluded from the final results due to data discrepancies.

Years of experience advising clients

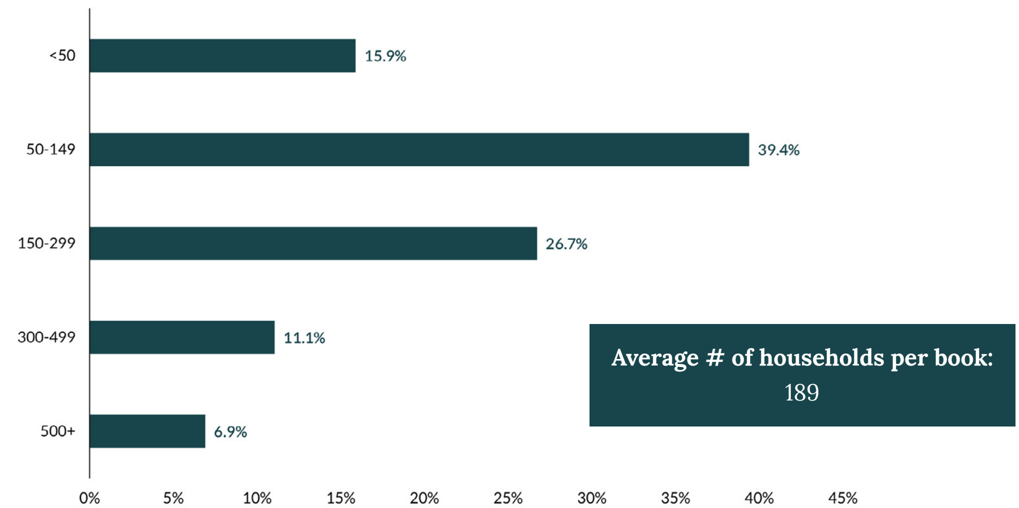


Average experience:
8.8 years

Source: 2026 Wealth.com's The Living Legacy Report

Appendix

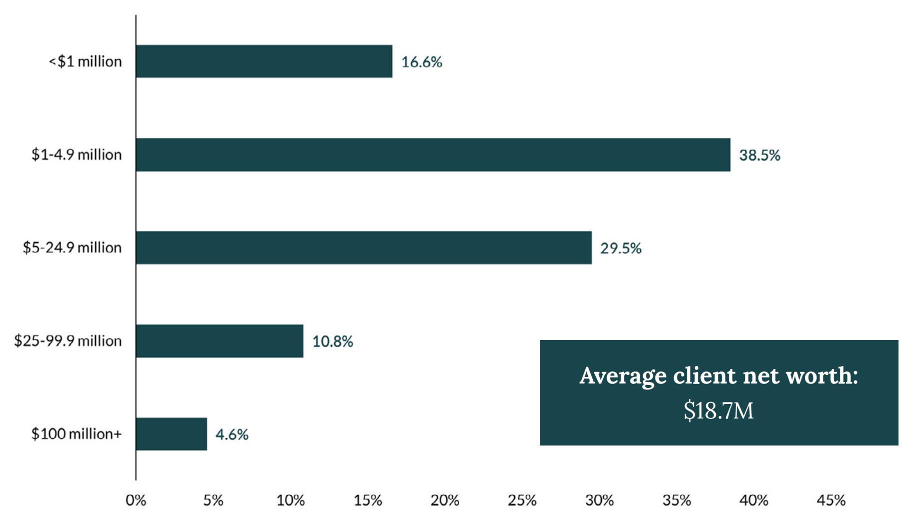
Number of households served



Source: 2026 Wealth.com's The Living Legacy Report

Typical client's net worth

Excluding primary residence



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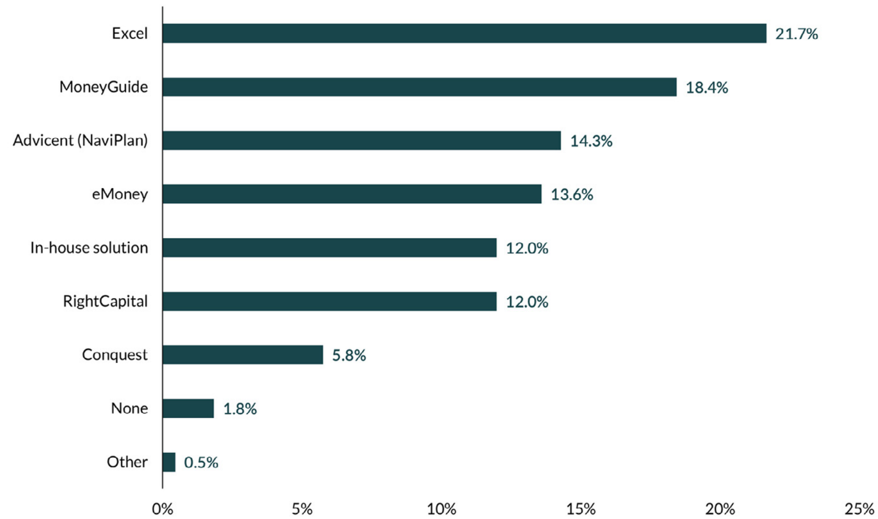
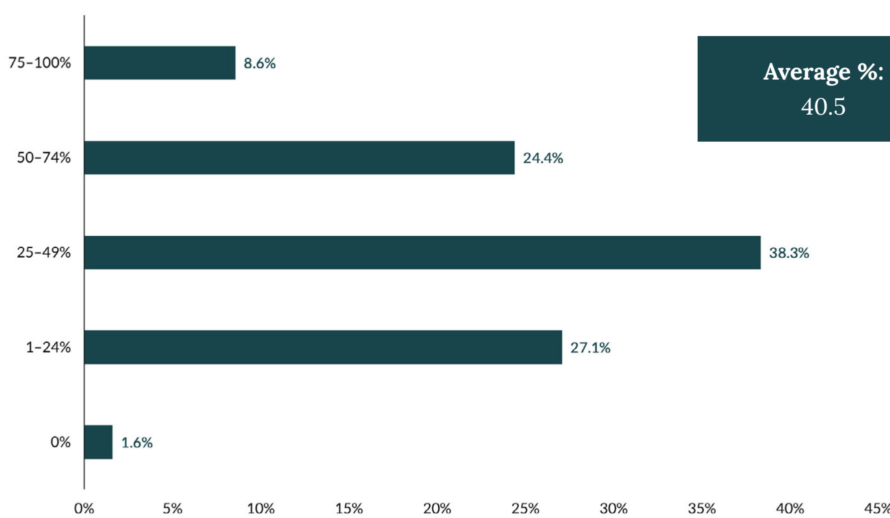
Planning software used



Source: 2026 Wealth.com's The Living Legacy Report

What % of your households have had at least one meeting with both partners or all account owners?

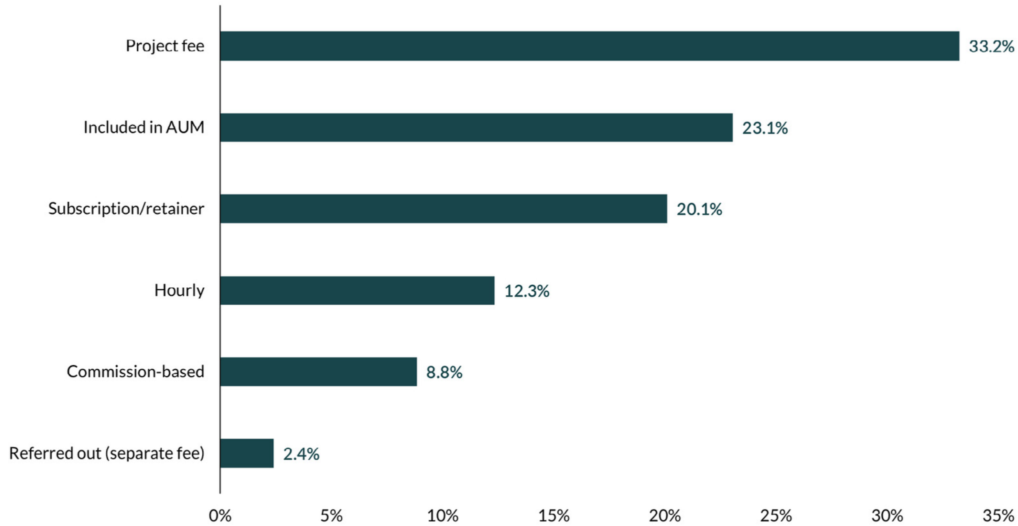


Average %:
40.5

Source: 2026 Wealth.com's The Living Legacy Report

Appendix

How do you price your legacy planning services?



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