



# RECRUITING

GAMA  
FOUNDATION  
eBRIEFS  
PRACTICAL IDEAS  
FOR TODAY'S  
FIELD LEADERS



Volume Three

## Recruiting Through Community Involvement

A Guide for the Insurance and Financial Services Industry

# Recruiting Through Community Involvement

A Guide for the Insurance and Financial Services Industry

**“You get consistent quality from community involvement.  
If you work with leaders in the community and they know  
who you are looking for, you get better referrals.”**

**Dan Buehrle**  
The Principal Financial Group

Research funded by the GAMA Foundation for Education and Research  
Conducted by Association Laboratory

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# About Us

## **The GAMA Foundation for Education and Research**

GAMA Foundation for Education and Research is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to conducting and promoting research and education to enhance the profitability and productivity of field leaders in the insurance and financial services industry.

Since its creation in 1990, the GAMA Foundation has funded major studies on key leadership topics, including future trends for firms and advisors, attracting high-quality prospects, recruiting and selecting new associates, launching new associates, retaining successful associates, mentoring and coaching practices, effective local marketing, building successful advisor teams, developing high-performing leadership teams, and launching new frontline (sales) managers.

## **Our Contributors**

*Recruiting Through Community Involvement* was made possible through the dedicated support of the GAMA Foundation's contributors. To contribute in support of our work, please visit us at [gamafoundation.org](http://gamafoundation.org) or contact us at [support@gamafoundation.org](mailto:support@gamafoundation.org).

## **Association Laboratory**

The GAMA Foundation contracted with Association Laboratory Inc., a consultancy specializing in association management strategy and research, to develop the content for this publication.

The principal author is Cecilia Sepp, who has more than 20 years of experience in association management, research, and writing.

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# Introduction

How did you meet the people who have become your firm's top advisors? Was it through mutual acquaintances or perhaps through the referral network you've built? Give the question serious thought, and you'll undoubtedly see a web of personal and professional relationships underpinning your recruitment of top performers. After all, this industry is all about relationships, with advisors as well as with clients.

People are more likely to decide to work for your firm when they feel they know you, can trust you, and can rely on you for support. Getting involved in local organizations gives you opportunities to demonstrate those characteristics — plus others, such as leadership, visionary, and organizational skills — not only to potential recruits but also the community at large. When you belong to professional and social clubs, participate in local events, and support schools, charities, and neighborhood groups, you and your firm become known quantities.


The familiarity and name recognition that build through community involvement can play a significant role in recruiting. According to a GAMA member survey, the overwhelming majority of respondents — 92 percent — believe community involvement is important to their recruiting process.

The survey, conducted as part of this research project, also emphasizes the many forms that community involvement can take.

| FROM THE MEMBER SURVEY   |                  |
|--|------------------|
| In what ways are you currently involved in your community?                   | Response Percent |
| Individual Centers of Influence  | 87%              |
| Membership in a financial services association (trade or professional group) | 65%              |
| Participation in a charity/philanthropic organization                        | 57%              |
| Membership in the Chamber of Commerce  | 54%              |
| Membership in a country club or other social club                            | 43%              |
| Involvement with an educational institution                                  | 41%              |
| Affinity relationship with a business or association                         | 24%              |
| Serving on the board of a local business                                     | 21%              |
| Membership in a fraternal organization, such as Rotary Club                  | 20%              |
| None   | 2%               |

Additional responses included supporting youth athletics, being involved at church, and participating in community networking events.

As beneficial as it can be for recruitment, however, community involvement does not flow from the simple need to hire new advisors. Instead, meeting and getting to know potential prospects are among the bonuses of putting your personal and professional beliefs into practice. Your vision, values, and passion—for people, a project, or the community in which you live—should drive your involvement. And that involvement shouldn't be taken lightly: It needs to be something you can commit time and effort to over the long term.



**“You need to be seen in the community a number of times so others see your involvement and longevity in the organizations. It’s not something that happens quickly. It takes time and repetition before the doors start to open.”**

**Lisa Rinehart**  
The Principal Financial Group

## How We Collected Our Data

Our researcher interviewed 14 members of the industry in locations ranging from field offices to corporate headquarters. The interviewees — each of whom had between eight and 35 years of experience in the industry — were regional directors, full-time recruiters, field leaders, and home office executives. Several interviewees have since moved up to head agencies or field offices or have moved into roles at the corporate level.

In addition to the interviews, the GAMA Foundation for Education and Research conducted an online survey of GAMA International members to provide a snapshot of how community involvement supports recruiting efforts.



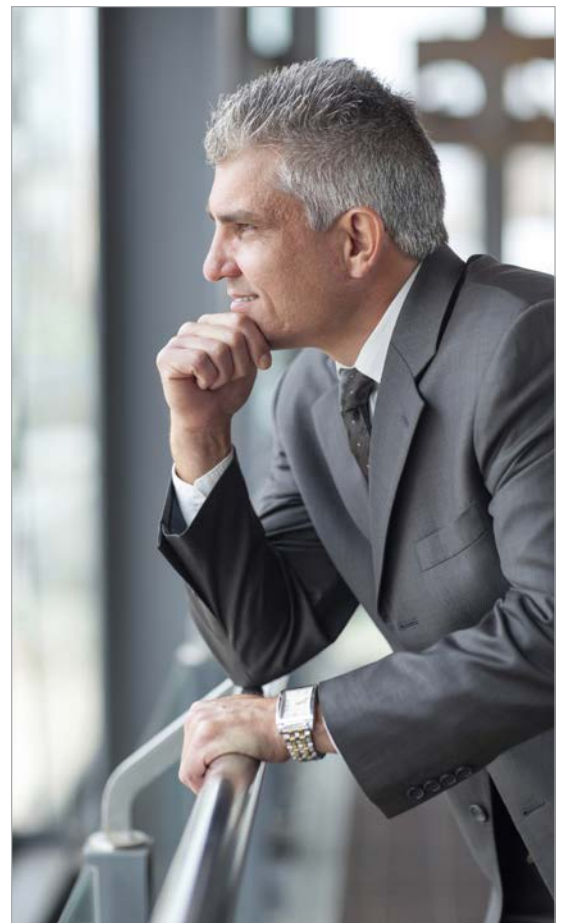
# 1

## Connecting with Your Community

Beyond building your business, what are you passionate about? Maybe you care deeply about improving education or enhancing community development — or preserving local history or developing young leaders. A motivation that comes from the heart will lead you to other people with a similar passion and commitment.

Whatever your passion, use that as a starting point for community involvement. That focus will help you balance your commitments. Otherwise, you may find yourself pulled in many directions as different organizations and causes vie for your time and attention.

Some firms provide a lot of public support for particular charities and foster a culture that encourages their advisors to support similar causes. Others encourage involvement in the local community but leave the choice of organizations and activities up to individual advisors. The key is to make a conscious effort to get involved — because the community connections you build will, over time, lead to more widespread recognition of your firm and broaden your pool of prospects.



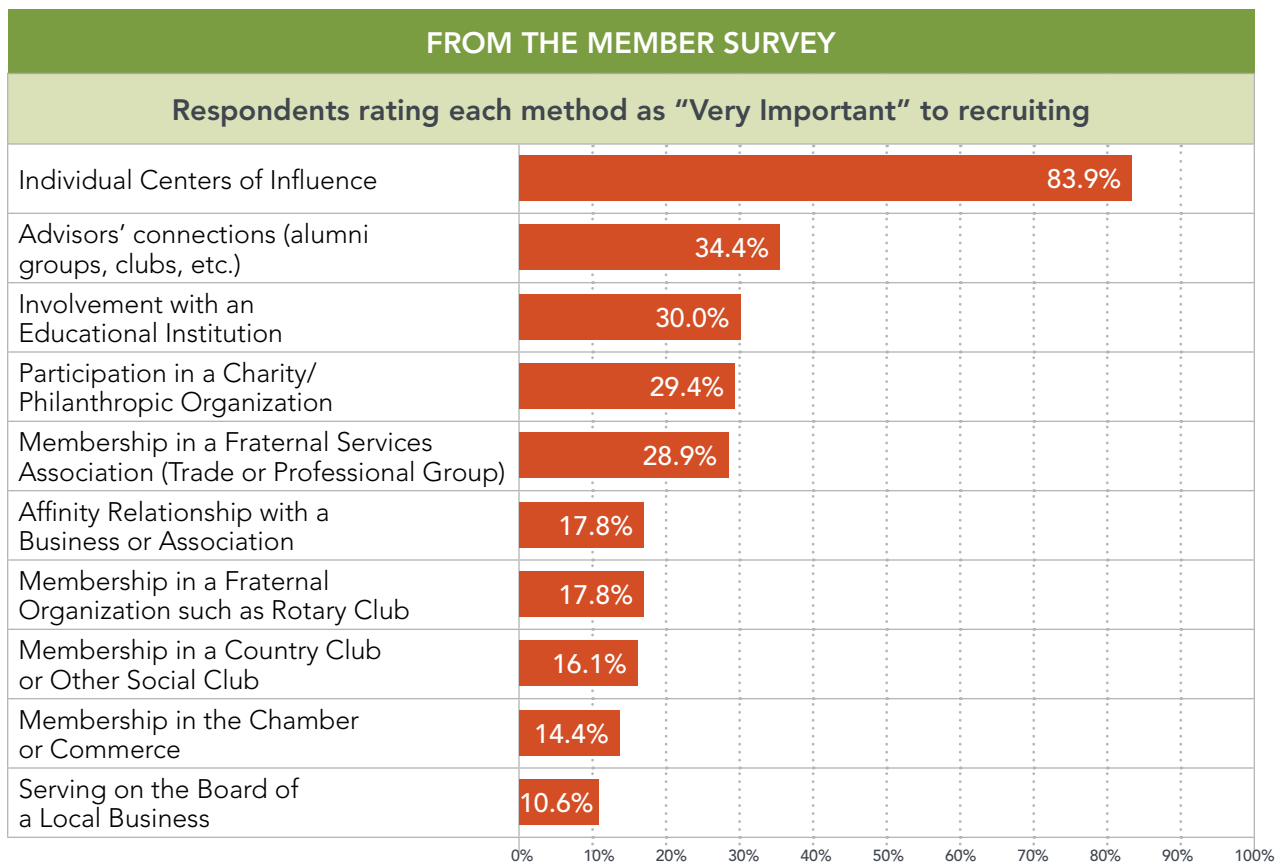
**“Our [community] activity wasn’t directed from a recruiting standpoint. It happens from developing centers of influence and mingling with others involved in the activities or the event.”**

**Lawrence E. Reelitz**  
The Principal Financial Group

While certainly important, building brand awareness and promoting the value of your firm take a back seat to making a real contribution to the community. Literally rolling up your sleeves to work on behalf of a group or organization demonstrates the positive impact that your firm and its advisors can have. The relationships you develop with and through those organizations will eventually build your recruiting pipeline as others in the community come to know and trust you.

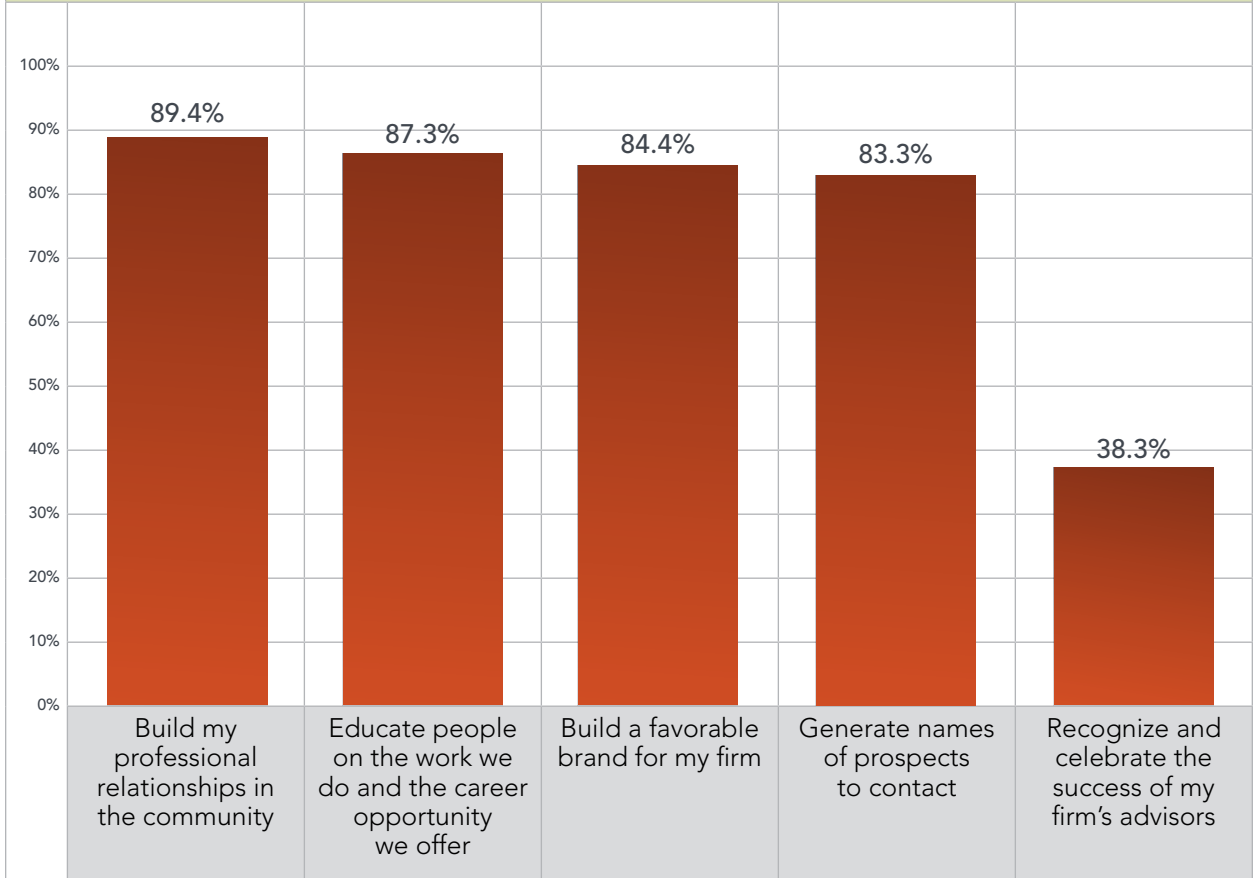
By far, financial services firms rate individual centers of influence as their most important type of community involvement from a recruiting perspective, according to the GAMA survey. Advisors' connections, such as clubs and alumni groups, come in a distant second, rated as "somewhat important," followed closely by membership in a financial services association and participation in a charity or philanthropic organization.

For the activities they consider "very important" to recruiting, the vast majority of field leaders (greater than 83 percent) use such community involvement to build professional relationships, educate people about the work they do, build their firm's brand, and generate names of prospects. In other words, community involvement contributes significantly to the development of centers of influence, which in turn greatly influence the recruiting process.



## FROM THE MEMBER SURVEY

For those methods that you rated as "Very Important", please indicate how they are used in your recruiting process. (Check all that apply.)



**"Get involved in an already established networking group, like BNI or the local Chamber of Commerce, that is turnkey — you can typically just join. Also look at your own personal interests; for example, if you are interested in basketball, you may want to get together with leaders in the basketball community. Do something that shows your intelligence about the topic or activity first and foremost."**

**Christopher Mizell  
COUNTRY Financial**

## Making Your Picks

Given the sheer number of organizations, churches, schools, and networking groups in the community, deciding where and how to get involved can be a bit daunting. Consider “going deep” rather than wide so you don’t risk diluting either your brand or your commitment level through nominal involvement.

Here are some options to consider:

**Join business organizations.** The local chamber of commerce and business networks provide a professional focus as well as opportunities to work with others to make the community better. Such groups provide a built-in introduction to decision makers and influencers — the people who get things done on their own but also work effectively with elected officials to enhance the area’s economic and physical development. Those influencers typically have large networks to which they can introduce you. Once you have developed a good relationship, they will keep their eyes open for potential referrals.

**Look close to home.** Serving as a coach, leader, or mentor opens many avenues for connecting with people. If you have children, find out how you might support their activities, such as sports or music programs, drama or book clubs, scouting, the school’s PTA, and so forth. Becoming more active in your family’s faith community — whether singing in a choir, leading a fundraising initiative, or helping to organize charity events — helps you meet likeminded individuals and enables them to get to know you. When you build such friendships, you can easily educate your contacts about the industry while doing something that provides personal fulfillment.

**Build on common interests.** Groups or teams you belong to “for fun” or personal development offer excellent networking opportunities. You and your teammates or fellow hobbyists already share a common interest: Why not learn about their professional activities and needs as well? You could all help each other with business advice, connections, and recruiting. Just think: Joining a group of 12 people automatically multiplies your potential reach by all of the contacts within their individual networks.

**Create your own referral group.** Within your existing network, pull together five to 10 business people with referral needs of their own. Meet once a month or so to talk about your staffing needs and recruiting strategies; you can even invite community leaders to serve as guest speakers. Just be sure to set some ground rules regarding attendance and membership. Make a point of helping other people with their businesses, and they will help you, too.

**Consider service on a board of directors.** A governing board can have a high profile within the community, firmly establishing you or your firm as a leader and proponent of the organization’s cause or mission. Voluntary board service, however, should not be taken lightly; it typically requires regular attendance at meetings, retreats, and special events, and it often carries the expectation of increased financial support to the organization.



## Clarifying Questions

As you contemplate deeper involvement within your community, use these three questions as a guide to decision making:

- › **What fuels your passion?** Look for causes or organizations that match your professional or personal interests. Guard against saying “yes” to something in which you have a lukewarm interest — staying motivated might become a problem.
- › **With whom would you be working?** Identify and then introduce yourself to the appropriate leaders within organizations and community groups. Get a sense of the personalities involved and determine how well you’d fit in. As your firm gains a higher profile because of your involvement, don’t be surprised when organizations start approaching you about opportunities to serve on committees, boards, and councils.
- › **What can you bring to the table?** Identify the skills, talents, and expertise you can contribute, and ensure the organization or group is both willing and able to capitalize on them.

## The Right Context

Participating in the work and activities of local organizations definitely requires a significant time commitment. During that time, however, you can still be a solid contributor to the event’s or organization’s success even while educating others on the advisor career. The activity itself provides the connection: It’s perfectly acceptable to talk with someone about career aspirations and opportunities in the context of your shared experience.

In fact, such a conversation could help someone break out of an unrewarding situation and enter a whole new world. Just be sure to:

**Have the appropriate mindset.** Involve yourself in community activities only because you are truly interested. If you participate solely for recruiting purposes — which is the biggest mistake most people make — it will backfire and you’ll lose credibility. Then you’ll not only need to start over, but you’ll also have to repair your image as being self-interested.

**Get acquainted with your community.** Review demographic data to understand who lives in your community and what they do, need, and possibly want. Examine geography, gender, age, employment, population numbers, ethnic groups, and education — anything that helps identify nominators within networks that truly reflect the community.

You might, for example, live in an area with distinct Hispanic, Asian, and Eastern European markets. Or perhaps your area has a significant population of black people who aren’t necessarily African-American, but rather from Jamaica, India, or Pakistan. Identity is deeper than skin color, so learn *who* your neighbors are, not what they look like.

**Prepare an “elevator speech.”** Develop and practice saying several sentences in which you ask for referrals or for help finding candidates. Articulate the type of prospects you seek to recruit.

**Invest in give and take.** Through personal conversations, you'll get to know people well enough that they will feel comfortable sharing their network. Talk about the type of talent you are looking for and ask if they know any good prospects — but also ask how you can help them in return. Share names and needs and build a deeper understanding of the levels of networks you can access.

**Exercise patience.** Getting a “return on relationships” in the form of referrals won't happen immediately. In fact, building lasting connections can take anywhere from six months to three years, depending on the nature of the organization and the people involved. The more time you give the relationship to grow and mature, the higher the quality and quantity of referrals. Adopt a long-term perspective: Success may not come quickly, but it will come.



**“Be sure that your personal and professional values align with the values and the vision of any potential organization. If you have beliefs and a value system that align with the organization, not only will you do better, but also something you love to do or are passionate about is easier. In recruiting you are selling something you believe in. People don't think of you as genuine unless you are passionate and believe in it to your core.”**

**Steven Bibi**  
Western & Southern Financial Group

Use your imagination for getting involved in your community. Look around, identify a need that requires filling, and then become the person who finds a way to make success happen. You might, for example, develop an apprenticeship or training program, organize activities at a retirement center, or bring together a group to beautify a neighborhood. Opportunities for community involvement abound.

Still, because your time and energy are limited, pick and choose carefully to ensure your involvement will benefit both the community and your firm. When you are active in the community and make a difference, you will get noticed and become known. Community involvement is not just good for business; it's good for **you**.



## Jump-Start Your Brainstorming

Need some ideas for where to spend your volunteer time and energy? Here's just a sampling of the types of community involvement reported by respondents to the GAMA Foundation survey.

- › Sponsor college clubs and events.
- › Work with career transition groups, career fairs, and job boards hosted by churches or nonprofits.
- › Sponsor community events that raise money for the arts.
- › Form a strategic alliance with an organization that conducts succession planning seminars.
- › Get involved in church activities.
- › Coach or sponsor a Little League team.
- › Reach out to faith-based communities to provide financial education.
- › Participate in workforce development initiatives aimed at workplace diversity and inclusion.
- › Conduct Diversity Nominator events to discuss the firm's philanthropic initiatives.
- › Serve as a speaker for community and allied professional groups.
- › Work with Hiring our Heroes and other veterans' groups.
- › Be a referee or coach for the local ice hockey league.

## Questions to Consider

1. How do your current advisors describe your firm's reputation within the community — and on what do they base their beliefs?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What types of community organizations provide a natural intersection between your passions and the types of people who could make powerful referrals to your firm?

# 2

## Strategies for Success

Paying to have your firm's name and logo on signs at an event constitutes advertising, but it's not necessarily relationship building. People may see your sign, but they won't see *you*.

Solid, trusting relationships develop when you consistently show up — preferably, in person — contribute your thoughts and efforts, and otherwise demonstrate your commitment to the cause. Share your contact information, and stay in touch with everyone you meet.

In time, referrals will flow in because you created an attraction to the financial services business, rather than “selling” people into it. People will talk to their friends and others about their positive experience interacting with you. This will lead to more conversations with more people. Referrals and business will come as you develop a reputation in the community as a leader and contributor.

Because relationship building is not a science, you won't find a set formula for forging the bonds that lead to referrals. Much will depend upon whom you are connecting with and the individuals within the particular group. Some community organizations yield referrals quickly, while others take years.



**“We don't expect results in anything less than 18 months. It has taken three years for the different things to connect — marketing, community, relationships — and have a dramatic impact.”**

**Paul Fox and Dan Brennan  
MassMutual Financial Group**



In general, however, you can develop strategies based on the type of organization and activity. Say, for example, you are working with a college placement office, providing career development advice. This activity provides opportunities to meet potential talent, so it's reasonable to tie a business goal to this type of community outreach.

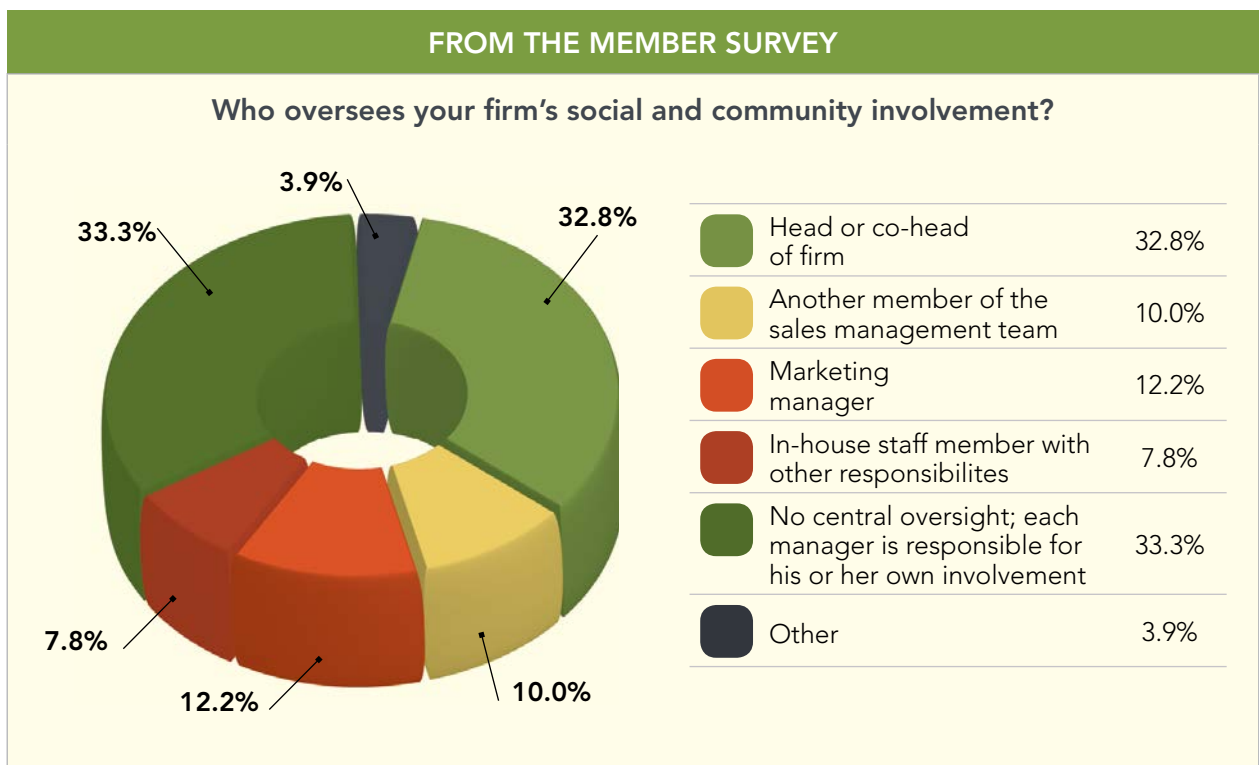
With business networking groups and chambers of commerce, "givers" gain much more than perennial "takers." When you help others in the business community find who or what they need to build their businesses and staff, they will return the favor for you.

Involvement with charitable and philanthropic groups is all about giving back to the community and society, rather than reaching business goals. Of course, you can always keep an eye out for potential recruits, getting to know them through conversations and camaraderie. But first and foremost, you are contributing your skills and time; as people see your dedication and come to know you, they will become comfortable making referrals to your firm.

## Coordinating Your Involvement

Being involved in the community takes time and energy, which must fit in with the rest of your life, such as building your firm and caring for your family. Every firm must figure out the community involvement approach that works best for its personnel and culture.

According to the GAMA survey, one-third of respondents (33%) work in firms where every manager is responsible for his or her own community involvement. An equal percentage (33%) relies on the head or co-head of the firm to oversee such activities. At least one in 10 respondents assigns oversight of community involvement to either the marketing manager or another member of the sales management team.



Whatever the management approach selected, applying the following guidelines can reduce confusion and streamline involvement:

- **Pick a paperwork coordinator.** Designate one person to handle all the administrative paperwork related to financial contributions, fundraising commitments, sponsorships, and so forth. This frees up firm managers to get out into the community and continue meeting people.
- **Integrate community involvement into your marketing plan.** Include your marketing manager in planning and promoting individual events to ensure the activities in which your firm participates support overall goals and make your marketing program more inclusive.
- **Create an internal leadership board.** This might include individuals from multiple locations, who get together once a month — in person or via phone conference — to discuss upcoming events and share ideas for community participation. Doing this also offers the opportunity for individuals in remote areas or small towns to connect with colleagues elsewhere.
- **Set your limits.** Your firm must decide how much money and time it is willing to dedicate to a short-term event or a long-term commitment. Too many community commitments can not only tax the firm's ability to serve clients, but also dilute your brand.
- **Regularly review your involvement.** Once a month, for example, add "Community Involvement" as an agenda item at firm meetings. Sharing information about events that individuals are supporting can lead to more people attending and representing the firm while helping a good cause.



**“For a program like this to work, it takes a cultural change in a firm. This requires direction and leadership from the head of the firm. It needs to be a firm initiative because the firm can be more patient than an individual producer.”**

**Paul Fox and Dan Brennan  
MassMutual Financial Group**

## Connecting With Prospects

When reaching out to the community, are you most interested in college students? Career changers? Recruits that represent your community's markets? To focus your efforts, use an Ideal Advisor Profile outlining the personal characteristics that fit your model of a successful advisor.

For example, you might define your ideal advisor as:

- Results driven
- Interested in helping people
- Having access to markets
- Active in the community
- Possessing an entrepreneurial spirit
- Wanting to be part of a team
- Having a specific skill or talent that will support the firm's success (intellectual capital)
- Exhibiting desirable personal traits, such as commitment, responsibility, integrity, and ethics
- Having success in sales and a belief in the financial services industry

Having this profile in mind will make it easier to spot talent from personal observation and to communicate clearly to nominators and centers of influence the type of referrals you'd like to receive. Referrals might include:

### Career Changers

Top-performing sales professionals in other industries already understand commission-based compensation and may be looking for a residual income base. They know how to build relationships and have a high comfort level in contacting people who are unfamiliar to them. Plus, experienced salespeople most likely have developed solid sales techniques and their own networks.

You might, for example, want to look for successful individuals in their peak career years (30 to 45 years old) who earn \$100,000 per year or more. Achieving that level of annual salary confirms they have had some career success and indicates they probably want to keep earning at that level to sustain their current lifestyle.

Recruiting career changers (other than sales professionals) is buoyed by participating in local activities such as charities or business networks. You can meet experienced people looking for a change of pace or entrepreneurs interested in a new business opportunity.

Women, especially those returning to the workforce after raising a family, represent another group of career changers. They often have professional experience and a desire to maintain flexibility to continue supporting their family's needs while enjoying a challenging and fulfilling career. (See the GAMA Foundation's *Recruiting Females to the Advisor Role* e-book for additional information.) Career changers may also include veterans and early retirees from other careers.



## Recent College Graduates

While many recruiting efforts focus on people with sales experience, don't overlook college students or recent graduates. People just beginning their careers bring energy and enthusiasm to the advisor job, and those who want to own their own business will find the benefits and opportunities attractive.

The potential for earnings often appeals to this group, especially as they come to realize other professions typically have a salary ceiling. Although recent graduates may want a steady income at first to pay off their educational debt, building a relationship over time with these potential candidates can prompt them to reconsider a career in financial services.

Ways to connect with this group include participating in job or career fairs, getting involved in programs at local colleges (sports, internships, mentoring), and teaching courses as an adjunct professor.

## Returning Residents

People moving back to their hometown usually have a local network already in place. Their motivations for returning may include wanting to make "home" a better place and helping their friends and family — an outlook that can be a good match for the financial services industry.



## Active or Passive?

Should you take an active or passive approach to recruiting through community involvement? On the one hand, you want to support and give back to the community; on the other hand, you need to support and grow your business.

It's best to look at the type of activity and determine what you wish to get out of it. Active or passive recruiting depends on the event or the atmosphere. A fundraiser, for example, where the focus is on a particular cause or goal, usually calls for a more passive approach. But at a business event geared toward networking, you are there to do business and therefore can take a more active stance.

When in doubt, read the cues around you and do what feels right in the situation. That may mean not being afraid to let people know you're looking for potential recruits — or holding off until a better time presents itself.

The key is to build sound relationships, not just ask for referrals. Consider this: How well do you know the people in your network? How well do they know you? How deep are your connections? Once you have created shared experiences and formed connections — essentially built a sense of community within your community — you're in an excellent position to ask for referrals from your business colleagues, friends, and fellow volunteers.

Active recruiting is a good fit for business networking programs or career fairs. Use these targeted events to build brand awareness and communicate your value proposition to potential recruits or

potential nominators. They tend to produce better results than broad-based activities. Local chamber of commerce events, for example, tend to draw many participants from the financial services industry, making it more difficult to stand out in the crowd. A fundraising dinner can also be a networking event, especially if you sponsor a table.

Another option for meeting potential nominators and recruits is to sponsor a booth or table at a local sporting or community event. Develop an action for attendees to do, such as completing an entry form for a prize drawing. On the form, ask if you can send follow-up information about your firm.



Having a visible presence and participation in the community, no matter what form your involvement takes, shows people that there's more to the financial services industry than sitting in an office. It also allows people to get to know you in a different way —as another soccer parent, gym member, churchgoer, and so forth.

Last, but certainly not least, community involvement can cement your reputation as someone who shares success and gives back. Providing information about the complicated area of financial services serves the community by helping individuals, couples, and families protect their financial stability. Giving back also entails offering a career path and business opportunities to motivated individuals.

**"If you are really volunteering and showing up and making a difference, it has a huge impact on a marketing and recruiting level. The more people you can meet in the community, the better off you are."**

**Dena Taylor**  
The Prudential Insurance Company of America

## Being an Effective Messenger

Whatever the community event or activity, make a commitment to meeting people face to face and starting conversations. Don't just think about the one person you are talking to at the time — consider all the people that person knows. This means getting involved in smaller events can be just as effective as large events; the former provide opportunities to have deeper conversations and, as a result, form more personal connections.

Start a conversation based on the shared activity, asking questions such as:

- How are you enjoying the event?
- Have you participated in this before?

- What do you do for a living?
- How long have you done it? Do you still enjoy it?
- Do you see yourself doing the same thing five years from now?
- What are your goals?
- Is there something I can help you with in your career (or business)?
- Would you like to have a conversation about the financial services industry? I think you may like the opportunities.

After determining the level of interest, ask if you can follow up afterward rather than going into a lot of detail at the time. Aim to call each potential prospect within a week and set a date for coffee or a meeting. When you follow up, explain why you want to get together. Mention you have a good opportunity to talk about, and ask whether someone else might be interested, too. Emphasize that the opportunity is not for everyone — only people who have certain characteristics or life experiences.

If it appears financial services can be a way for the person to achieve his or her personal goals, follow up with additional questions:

- What is important to you?
- Do you enjoy helping people?
- Do you want to increase your income?
- Have you thought about having your own business?
- If I could show you a way to help people and have a recession-proof career, would you be interested?

When you meet again in person, share a story about how you entered the financial services industry or how someone you know became an advisor. A personal story helps potential recruits see themselves in the role within the context of their lifestyle.

Next, explain how the industry trains and develops people for lifelong careers full of possibilities, again using personal stories whenever possible. Also let potential candidates know that the financial services industry helps advisors build and grow their businesses, supports training and education needs, provides guidance on marketing and business plans, and provides compliance assistance.



Be sure to mention that not everyone gets hired. The financial services industry needs people who understand that being an advisor is not a 9-to-5 job; they must be willing to stick with it over the long haul if they want to build their own business. You might conclude with an invitation: We may have a position for you; would you like to have another conversation and maybe do some prescreening?

Using similar questions, you can start a conversation with a respected leader in your community who has a large network. Acknowledge the potential nominator's role in the community and the inroads he or she could provide. Invite the person to lunch or grab a coffee, discuss the type of referrals you hope to find, and emphasize the career opportunities available to the right candidates.

To let people know you are looking for qualified candidates, you might say:

- I could really use your help for referrals . . .
- I have a great opportunity for the right person; could you keep an eye out for me?
- Who do you know who enjoys helping people?

**“There is no question that community involvement improves our recruiting and helps us find quality candidates. They are, by far, some of our best candidates.”**

**David Caccamo**  
Mutual of Omaha

## Made to Measure

Community involvement is about making your city or town a better place and building awareness of your firm. It can also boost recruiting efforts — but you won't know if that's true unless you collect data. Metrics also provide insight into where to direct resources in the future.

Track referrals as specifically and in as much detail as possible. Note where you met them, why you found them engaging, how many interactions you had before making an offer, and whether the referral came through a nominator or center of influence.

Ideally, develop a standard format for capturing information such as:

- Organization or event (for example, local or specialized chamber of commerce, networking event, alumni association program)
- Number of connections or business cards collected
- Referrals from local connections
- Referrals from internal sources
- Connections from social media (LinkedIn, Facebook)
- Number of conversations (by phone or in person)
- Number of interviews conducted
- Number of hires
- Warm or cold source
- Personal observations of a prospect

You can also use social media sites, such as LinkedIn or Facebook, to attract interest in your community-based activities and to identify and follow up with potential referrals. Recent college graduates, in particular, will look for your firm's digital presence and expect it to reflect your brand and stated mission. (See the GAMA Foundation's *Recruiting Through Social Media* e-book for additional information.)

**“We learned to put our events on Facebook [because] candidates were missing the cultural component in the interview process. We weren’t talking the same language because today’s candidates use digital language, and we talk face to face or by the phone.”**

**Nathan Moore  
AXA**

Over time, take note of what you learn through community involvement and how your relationships take shape. In addition to tracking how often your community connections lead to referrals, figure out how often you provide referrals in return.

Some firms measure success by the number of appointments they set after a community event, while others count the number of business cards they collect. Still others focus on the people they already know at an event, to see if these contacts could be a fit for the industry.

When you determine, through the interview process, that certain candidates are not quite right for your firm, convert them into advocates for the financial services industry. Once they understand the industry requirements and the personality traits you seek, they may know people who are strong candidates for recruitment. Ask them to become part of your nominator network, to maintain and strengthen the connection you have already built.

## **Questions to Consider**

1. Does your firm take a strategic approach to evaluating opportunities for community involvement and making the most of the ones you choose to pursue? How might it be improved?
  
2. Does your firm have a system in place for tracking referrals identified through community involvement? How might it be improved?



# 3

## Benefits and Bonuses

Building credibility and relationships will take you far in the financial services industry, and community involvement provides plenty of opportunities to do both.

Through participation, you meet and can have informal conversations with people who may be the right fit for the advisor role. Seeing people in action will help you determine whether they exhibit the characteristics needed to succeed in the industry and give you a glimpse into how they might work with potential clients. As you work with and get to know people, you can better evaluate their personality and interests before having a conversation about the industry.



At the same time, these potential recruits will see you in action. They'll see you apply your leadership skills to helping people and observe how well you represent your firm — and they'll know immediately if you are sincere about helping the community or got involved for the sole purpose of recruiting.

**"The more influential you become in the community from [your] involvement, the more people ask your opinion about things. This then builds your reputation in the community."**

**Dan Buehrle**  
The Principal Financial Group

Sincerity and a genuine interest in the organization or cause you are supporting will eventually reap great rewards. Once you get your name out there and news of your involvement spreads through your network, more people will learn who you are and what you do; they will have solid evidence that you don't just talk about helping people but actually do it. Then you'll be in a good position to start asking for warm referrals.

## Doing Good Fosters Goodwill

By far, the biggest benefits of community involvement are the positive image and brand awareness your firm develops through its participation in local efforts, causes, and charities.

From a business standpoint, people want to do business with — and work with — individuals they see helping others, giving back to the community, and putting core beliefs into action. When you give value, you will eventually receive value in return. This “value exchange” solidifies relationships and leads to referrals from your connections because you have demonstrated a commitment to making your community a better place.

Paid advertising may get your name out there, but it doesn’t generate goodwill the way action does. Yet, while good work in the community is inexpensive advertising, what’s more important is the platform it offers to talk about the industry, your firm, and the products and services available to help people build a secure financial future.

These interactions become personal promotions of you and your brand. The more people you can meet in the community, the wider your range of recognition and referrals. Plus, referrals who already feel they know you from your presence in the community will be pre-disposed to talking with you about potential career opportunities.

**“You generate referrals by being seen in a positive way, and you also build brand awareness and recognition. You can only do so much with paid advertising.”**

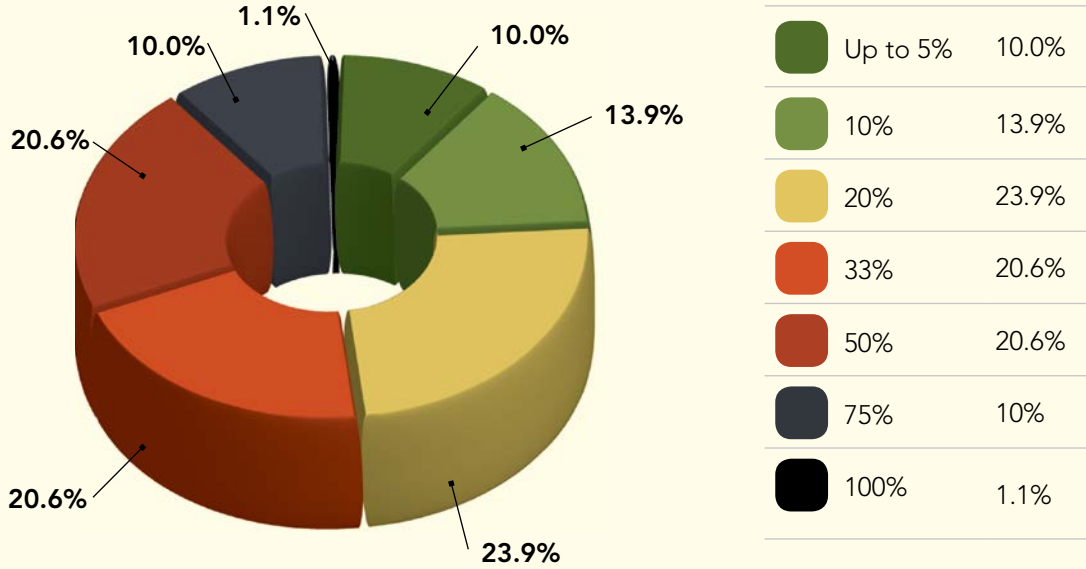
**Ben Bjerk**  
**Farm Bureau Financial Services**

Still need convincing? According to the GAMA Foundation survey, 39 percent of respondents report that they identify half or more of their prospects through community involvement — that’s at least one out of every two prospects. Many of those prospects prove a good fit for the advisor career: In the last 12 months alone, nearly one-third of survey respondents (32%) say 50 percent or more of their new hires have come through the community pipeline.

In addition, survey respondents describe the impact of community involvement on their recruiting as “significant,” “critical to the overall success of our recruiting efforts,” and “vital to our organization.” As one respondent notes, “Without being involved in our community, we would really not recruit at all. It is our lifeblood. We don’t like to get cool resumes, so recruiting by being involved is how we operate.”

FROM THE MEMBER SURVEY

Approximately what percent of your firm's hires in the past 12 months came about through social and community involvement?



The results of recruiting through community involvement are overwhelmingly positive. Not only do you make your community a better place, help those who need it, and offer career opportunities to those seeking a different path, you also find a higher quality of recruit. You may not see the quantity of referrals generated through other means, but you'll see quality.

In fact, many of the survey respondents express sentiments similar to the observation of one firm manager: "The candidates are stronger and very aware of the type of business we do, and they have a better understanding of how our business works."

Recruits from warm referrals tend to stay longer and perform better over time than cold sourcing. And when those warm referrals are already connected to community leaders and organizations, they have a built-in network for developing a clientele. They know your firm's reputation, they know you or another respected leader in the area, and they know others in the community, making them well-prepared to hit the ground running.

**"Community involvement recruits are a higher quality because you get to see them in action. You don't need as many names to get a hire as you do with other sources."**

**Heidi Kennedy**  
The Baltimore Life Companies

## A Team Effort

The benefits continue once you welcome community referrals into your firm as advisors. People recruited through community involvement will expect such participation to continue, so you'll have more advocates and volunteers for additional activities. Your firm's brand awareness and community connections will expand even more.

Here's the bonus you might not anticipate: Community involvement deepens employee engagement by giving everyone something to get excited about internally. Several studies have confirmed that both community involvement and deeper employee engagement lead to more satisfied employees.

- A 2009 study conducted by the Hidden Brain Drain Task Force revealed that the majority of respondents desired a workplace that offered flexible work arrangements and the opportunity to give back to society.
- According to the *Harvard Business Review*, 85 percent of Baby Boomers and 86 percent of Millennials place a high importance on work that involves "giving back."
- *Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement*, a 2013 survey by the Society for Human Resource Management, found 31 percent of respondents rating their organization's commitment to corporate social responsibility as "very important." Only 21 percent of respondents, however, were "very satisfied" with their employers' efforts in that area.
- Compared to employees who consider themselves disengaged, those who are committed to their organizations expend 57 percent more effort when on the job, according to a 2010 study by the Corporate Executive Board. The same study also found that more committed employees are 87 percent less likely to resign from the organization.
- Exercising corporate responsibility, by harnessing shared values, inspires and motivates employees, notes PricewaterhouseCoopers in its 2014 report *The Keys to Corporate Responsibility Employee Engagement*. The more engaged employees are, the more likely they are to stay with the organization another 12 months, be passionate about providing exceptional customer service, and recommend the company to friends and family as a great place to work.

Working together on an event or activity fosters a sense of inclusion, enhances team building, and instills the pride that comes from the satisfaction of helping others. Everyone coming together for a cause, from different levels within the firm, makes your team stronger. It also supports professional development, as firm members build self-esteem, take on more responsibilities, and learn new skills through new experiences.

**"When an office or firm gets together as a group and gives back to the community, it raises the employees' satisfaction with what they do and in being part of the organization. Nothing makes people feel better than being involved in the community — that is the biggest dividend we get."**

**Peter Nejad**  
MetLife Premium Client Group

“Fun runs” and walk-a-thons supporting medical research or charities can bring together your team and show that your firm wants to make the community a happier, healthier place to live. Most communities have local chapters or affiliates of national organizations that sponsor such events, including the March of Dimes, the American Cancer Society, and the American Heart Association. Other ideas for involving your whole team include the following activities:

- Answer phones for a telethon in support of a charity such as the Variety Club.
- Provide logistical support for Special Olympics competitions and tournaments.
- Distribute bikes to disadvantaged children.
- Collect and share Thanksgiving meals with needy families.
- Host a golf tournament to raise money for a designated philanthropy.
- Help low-income people with their taxes.
- Raise money by assembling a team for a 5K charity walk or race.
- Serve as a drop-off location for Toys for Tots.
- Sponsor a blood drive for the American Red Cross.
- Organize a farmers’ market showcasing local products.
- Bring financial education to the middle market through community workshops and seminars.
- Support a local film festival.
- Spend a day working on a Habitat for Humanity house.
- Conduct a food drive for a local or regional food shelf.

Community involvement is good for personal development and business development. It enables you to differentiate your firm within the ever-crowded marketplace. Ultimately, you can achieve the goal of not being seen as a financial services organization but as a locally based business involved in the community. This shift in perception will contribute to continued growth of your brand and reputation.

## Questions to Consider

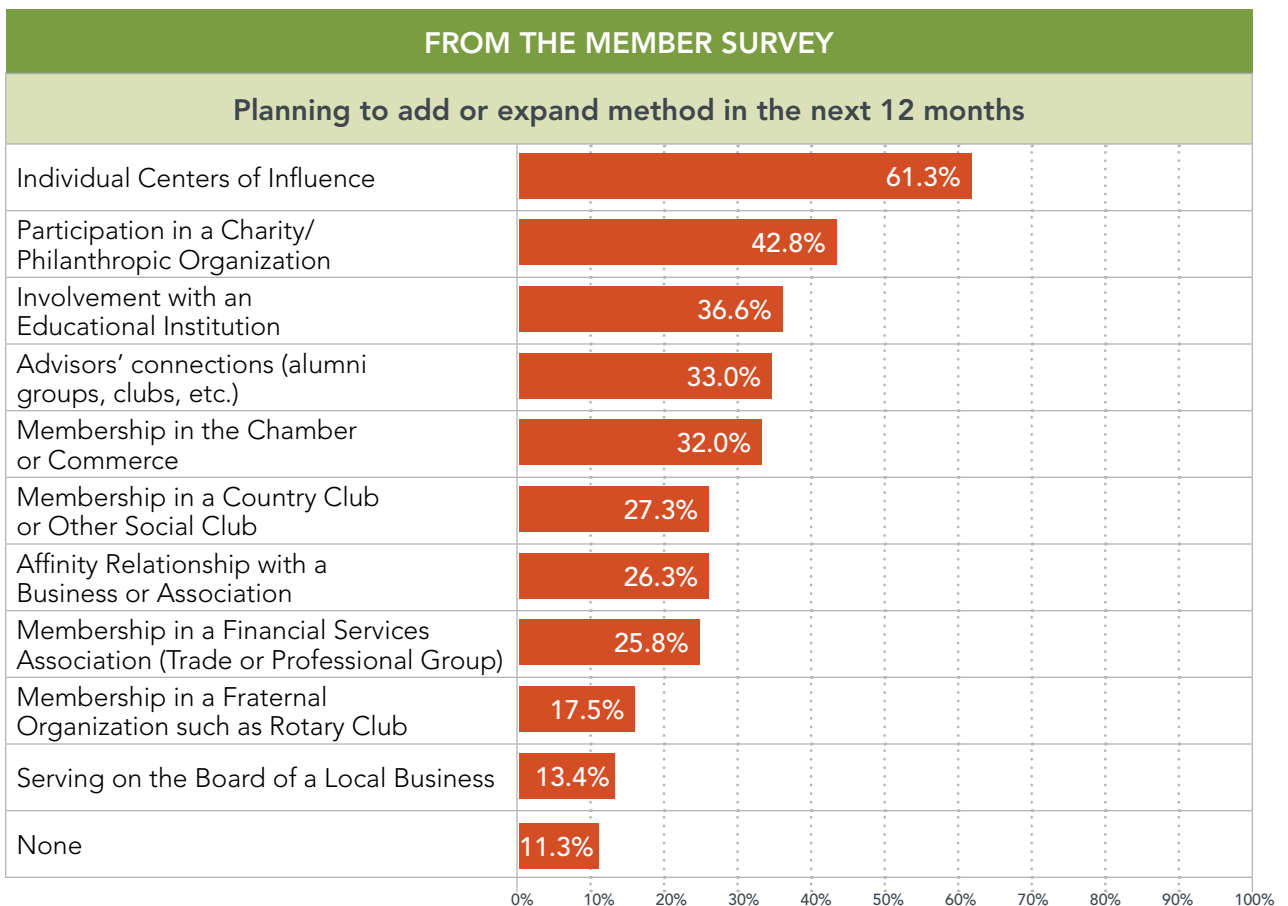
1. Do the individuals who participate in community-based activities feel more committed to your firm? Are they among your top performers?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Historically, which nominator networks have produced the highest quality of potential recruits? Based on firm needs, in what other areas should you cultivate nominators?

# 4

## Moving Forward

Recruiting is a 24/7 opportunity because you meet people in all kinds of places and situations, from softball games to gala dinners, from PTA meetings to church festivals. Just being out and about in your community will give you a good feel for the most effective ways to be involved, but it helps to have a strategy to stay focused.

In the next 12 months, for example, the majority of respondents to the GAMA Foundation survey plan to do more of what they already know works: Sixty-one percent say they'll work on expanding individual centers of influence, the type of involvement they rate as most important to the recruiting process. Other top-ranked plans call for more participation in a charity or philanthropic organization (43%) and involvement with an educational institution (37%).



**“People’s natural curiosity will lead them to discover what you do for a living, but they will want to do business with you or refer you because they like you and your integrity.”**

**Christopher Mizell  
COUNTRY FINANCIAL**

As you craft your own community involvement plan for the next 12 months, these suggestions can help boost your success rate.

- **Learn from others.** Network with a mentor, manager, or someone who has been in the area a long time to help identify the community’s top priorities, organizations, and decision makers.
- **Lead with your heart.** Have a genuine interest in the particular cause and in helping the community; don’t become involved in something solely to recruit.
- **Manage your expectations.** Your plan for community involvement doesn’t have to be complex; it’s better to keep it simple and not bite off more than you can chew. Remain realistic about the results you hope to achieve — although it may take some time, referrals will happen.
- **Clarify your firm’s story.** Know how to effectively describe your firm’s mission and core values and what sets it apart from other businesses. Keeping your values at the forefront will help you focus on activities that mesh with your firm’s culture and not become sidetracked by too many community commitments.
- **Polish your pitch.** Prepare what you will say when you meet a potential recruit or nominator. Practice articulating your message again and again before using it.
- **Go deep.** Instead of spreading your valuable time and energy too thin, focus on two or three organizations related to causes you are passionate about. Participate in activities you’d choose to do even if you weren’t getting the recruiting benefit.
- **Harness the power of social media.** Use Facebook to promote your firm’s community activities, showcase the advisors who participated, and share photos. LinkedIn also gives you access to people and special interest groups, providing another way to educate them about the industry.
- **Make the organization’s best interest your priority.** Then, you can share your intentions while helping the organization and meeting people. In turn, they get the chance to learn about the financial services industry.
- **Don’t go in with guns blazing.** Give relationships the time and opportunity to grow, enabling mutual trust and respect to develop. Over time, these relationships will become a strong source of referrals and expanded connections.



Lastly, when measuring the success of your firm's community involvement, don't focus on the number of recruits you get. Instead, measure success by the good deeds you do for the community.

## Questions to Consider

1. What reputation would your firm like to have within the community? What are some ways you can develop or strengthen that reputation?

2. How can your firm make greater use of social media to support its community involvement?





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# Acknowledgments

## The GAMA Foundation thanks the following individuals for contributing to this research:

David F. Bavero, Managing Director,  
Financial Advisor, and Investment Specialist,  
Planto Roe Financial Services  
(San Antonio, TX)

Steven M. Bibi, Agency Manager, Western &  
Southern Financial Group (South Bend, IN)

Ben Bjerck, Recruiting Manager, Farm Bureau  
Financial Services (West Des Moines, IA)

Daniel J. Brennan, CLU, Chief Marketing  
Officer, MassMutual Financial Group  
(Cleveland, OH)

Dan Buehrle, Regional Managing Director,  
The Principal Financial Group  
(Milwaukee, WI)

David W. Caccamo, CLF, General Manager,  
Mutual of Omaha/Companion Life Ins.,  
Greater New York City Division Office  
(Hauppauge, NY)

Josh Conner, CFFM, CLF, FIC, Regional  
Director, Modern Woodmen of America  
(Mt. Juliet, TN)

Paul A. Fox, General Agent, MassMutual  
Financial Group (Cleveland, OH)

Heidi S. Kennedy, LUTCF, Agency Team  
Manager, The Baltimore Life Companies  
(Altoona, PA)

Christopher D. Mizell, LUTCF, Agency  
Manager, COUNTRY Financial (Central Iowa)

Nathan L. Moore, Divisional Executive Vice  
President, AXA (Jacksonville, FL)

Peter Nejad, Senior Vice President–Central  
Region, MetLife Premier Client Group  
(Neshanic Station, NJ)

Lawrence E. Reelitz, CLF, Regional Managing  
Director, Midwest Region Business Center,  
The Principal Financial Group (West Des  
Moines, IA)

Lisa Rinehart, Recruiting Director, Bay  
Area and Central California, The Principal  
Financial Group (Fresno, CA)

Dena Taylor, Director of Recruiting and  
Diversity, The Prudential Insurance Company  
of America (Charlotte, NC)