NAPFA File — Promoting Fee-Only Financial Planning

Governance questions arising from the September 24, 2026 webinar and reported statements by NAPFA leadership

Prepared November 5, 2026 • Discussion summary • For member review

Overview

NAPFA's 1984 Articles of Incorporation identify promotion of public awareness of financial planning and the alternative of fee-only assistance as an organizational purpose. This file examines whether NAPFA's leadership has given that purpose sufficient attention, based on remarks by former Board Chair Natalie Pine and a separately reported account of former CEO Kathryn Dattomo's comments. The evidence raises questions for the Board but does not, on its own, establish a breach of legal duty.

What NAPFA was established to do

The 1984 Articles of Incorporation identify four purposes: fostering comprehensive, fee-only financial planning; increasing members' skills and knowledge; promoting public awareness of financial planning and the alternative of fee-only assistance; and setting and enforcing membership criteria related to the sale of financial products. The exact current legal status of these provisions should be confirmed against any amendments.

What Natalie Pine said publicly

Promoting the message is difficult (17:21–18:51)

Pine said many members spend time debating terminology rather than communicating NAPFA's high standards. She described limited public relations resources and said the enthusiasm of the founders has not been replicated consistently across the membership.

The media story has become less distinctive (20:08–20:53)

Pine said consumer media previously found fee-only planning novel, but now show less interest. She attributed this partly to brokerages adopting similar language and to other organizations promoting fiduciary standards.

Organizational relationships constrain criticism (29:17–30:57)

Pine explained that NAPFA's ties with the CFP Board and FPA help it pursue broader policy objectives but make public criticism of competing standards more difficult. She distinguished the institution's caution from the freedom of individual members to speak directly.

Compensation remains important (25:55–26:45; 39:52–41:02)

Pine described consumers confused by brokerage firms offering a "fee-only service." She advocated distinguishing product sellers from advisors and disclosing all compensation. She recognized that fee-only and fiduciary are connected but not identical.

Selected brief quotations

- “We absolutely have to be bold.” (29:28)
- “It’s harder to punch somebody and say, ‘Hey, your standard isn’t good enough.’” (30:18–30:26)
- “We just haven’t seen that level of desire to spread the message.” (18:33–18:45)
- “I think NAPFA has to be careful, but people like me and the individual members don’t.” (30:31–30:43)

Reported statements by former CEO Kathryn Dattomo

According to a participant’s account of a separate Institute for the Fiduciary Standard Zoom discussion, Kathryn Dattomo said some NAPFA directors viewed explaining the consumer benefits of fee-only planning as “too hard” and considered fee-only not to be NAPFA members’ only differentiator. This account has not been independently verified against a recording, minutes, or transcript. The available webinar transcript does not establish that marketing consultants recommended abandoning fee-only messaging.

Why this matters

A statement that fee-only is not the only differentiator can coexist with NAPFA’s founding purposes: the association may explain fiduciary conduct, competence, and comprehensive planning in addition to compensation. The governance concern would arise if the Board chose to substantially de-emphasize its public-awareness purpose without documenting how its alternative communications strategy advances that purpose.

Moral, ethical, and legal responsibilities

Moral: Directors are stewards of an institution established to advance a distinctive model of financial planning. Ethical: They should be transparent about strategic choices, attentive to the mission, and accountable for outcomes. Legal: Nonprofit directors generally owe duties of care and loyalty and must govern within the organization’s applicable purposes and governing documents. They ordinarily have discretion over tactics and budgets. A poor marketing outcome or a consultant’s opinion does not by itself establish a legal violation. Indiana nonprofit counsel should review current articles, amendments, incorporation status, bylaws, board records, and applicable law before any legal assertion is made.

Questions the Board should answer

1. Does the Board affirm that the original public-awareness purpose remains operative?
2. What consumer education objectives, activities, spending, and outcome measures specifically promote comprehensive, fee-only planning?
3. Did outside marketing advisers recommend reducing fee-only emphasis? What evidence and alternatives did they present?
4. What did directors decide after considering these recommendations, and how was the decision connected to the Articles of Incorporation?
5. How does NAPFA balance relationships with other professional organizations against its independent fee-only identity?
6. How will the Board distinguish fee-only compensation, comprehensive planning, and legal fiduciary duties in public communications?

Documents to request

- Marketing consultant proposals, findings, presentations, and fee-only messaging recommendations.
- Board or committee agendas, minutes, and decision materials concerning fee-only positioning and the fiduciary communications strategy, subject to lawful disclosure and privilege limits.
- Budgets, campaign plans, consumer research, and performance reports for public education about fee-only planning.
- Current Articles of Incorporation, amendments, and applicable bylaws.

Evidence and interpretation

Verified within supplied source: Pine's recorded webinar remarks as represented in the supplied transcript. Reported but not corroborated here: Dattomo's separate Zoom statements and any marketing consultants' advice. Interpretation: the potential tension between institutional relationships, fiduciary branding, and advocacy for the original fee-only public-awareness purpose. Undetermined: whether the Board has failed to perform an enforceable legal obligation.

Sources

1. "Differentiating Fiduciary in the Marketplace," Institute for the Fiduciary Standard, webinar held September 24, 2026 (published October 12, 2026); user-supplied transcript, with timestamps above. Automated transcript appears to contain occasional transcription errors in names and acronyms.

2. NAPFA 1984 Articles of Incorporation, Article II, as described in the discussion; the operative text and amendments should be independently checked before public/legal use.

3. Participant-reported account of Kathryn Dattomo's Institute for the Fiduciary Standard Zoom remarks; no independent recording or transcript supplied in this file.