



THE \$5-30 MILLION GAP: WHY SUB-ULTRA HIGH-NET-WORTH CLIENTS ARE UNDERSERVED

Luke A Palmer, CFP®, AAMS®, CRPS®, AWMA®, Owner and CEO | 7 January 2026

Understanding the unique challenges facing families whose wealth has outgrown traditional advisory services but doesn't meet the threshold for traditional family offices.

If your investable assets fall between \$5 million and \$30 million, you occupy a challenging position in the **wealth planning** landscape, what industry professionals increasingly call the **sub-ultra high-net-worth** segment. Your **financial situation** has grown too complex for standard advisory approaches, yet traditional family offices remain financially out of reach. This gap affects millions of successful families seeking sophisticated **financial planning** to achieve lasting **financial success**, often without their realizing that better solutions exist.

The numbers reveal a compelling story. According to McKinsey's 2025 research, revenues from fee-based advisory relationships grew from approximately \$150 billion in 2015 to \$260 billion in 2024, reflecting a 6.4% compound annual growth rate.¹ Yet this growth masks a structural problem: **wealth management firms** have bifurcated into solutions designed for mass-affluent clients on one end and ultra-wealthy families on the other, leaving those in the middle with limited options tailored to their specific **financial goals**.

This article examines why sub-ultra high-net-worth families face distinct challenges, how these challenges manifest in everyday decisions about **investment portfolios**, **alternative investments**, and **wealth transfer**, and what coordinated wealth strategies may help bridge the gap to secure your **financial future**.

WHAT EXACTLY IS SUB-ULTRA HIGH-NET-WORTH?

Sub-ultra high-net-worth refers to individuals or families with investable assets typically ranging from \$5 million to \$30 million. This segment sits between high-net-worth individuals (generally defined as those with \$1 million or more in liquid assets) and ultra-high-net-worth individuals (those with \$30 million or more in investable assets).²

The distinction matters because each tier faces fundamentally different **wealth planning** challenges and has access to different levels of service from a **wealth advisor** or **wealth manager**:

- **High-net-worth (\$1–5 million):** Standard wealth management platforms and **financial planners** typically serve this segment well, offering diversified **investment portfolios**, retirement planning, and basic estate planning coordination.
- **Sub-ultra high-net-worth (\$5–30 million):** Needs have grown complex enough to require sophisticated multi-disciplinary coordination addressing **federal estate tax** implications, **alternative investments**, and **wealth transfer** strategies, yet asset levels don't justify the cost of dedicated family office infrastructure.
- **Ultra-high-net-worth (\$30 million+):** Can economically support single-family office operations with dedicated staff for investment management across multiple **investment accounts**, tax planning, estate administration, and concierge services.

Families in the sub-ultra high-net-worth range often include successful business owners, medical professionals, corporate executives with concentrated stock positions, and inheritors of family wealth. Their **financial situation** shares common characteristics: multiple income sources, business ownership complexities, concentrated positions, multi-generational planning needs, and exposure to risks that standard portfolio management doesn't adequately address. Achieving **financial success** at this level requires more than investment returns; it demands comprehensive coordination.

WHY DOES THE WEALTH PLANNING GAP EXIST?

The service gap facing sub-ultra high-net-worth families stems from fundamental economics that most **wealth management firms** cannot overcome. Traditional single-family offices require substantial infrastructure to operate effectively. According to J.P. Morgan's 2024 Global Family Office Report, the median annual operating cost for family offices supervising \$50 million to \$500 million was \$400,000, with many spending significantly more.³ Industry research suggests that a minimum of \$100 million in assets is typically needed to make a dedicated single-family office economically viable.⁴

Consider the personnel costs alone. Operating even a modest family office requires investment management expertise for overseeing **investment portfolios** and **alternative investments**, tax planning capabilities, estate coordination, and administrative support. Chief Investment Officers at family offices command median compensation exceeding \$300,000 annually at smaller offices and more than \$800,000 at larger operations.⁵ Add legal, accounting, technology, and operational overhead, and annual costs can quickly exceed \$1–2 million.

For a family with \$10 million in assets, dedicating \$500,000 annually to office operations would consume 5% of their wealth, an unsustainable drain on resources that should be generating returns and building their **financial future**, not funding administrative infrastructure. The mathematics simply don't work until asset levels reach well into the nine-figure range.

Meanwhile, traditional **financial planners** and advisory firms often structure their services around standardized solutions that don't scale well to increased complexity. A family with a \$15 million portfolio spread across multiple **investment accounts**, ownership in an operating business, concentrated stock from a former employer, rental real estate, and charitable giving goals through a **donor-advised fund** requires coordination across multiple domains, **financial planning**, **federal estate tax** mitigation, **wealth transfer** structuring, that most advisory relationships aren't designed to deliver.

THE COMPLEXITY CHALLENGE: WHERE STANDARD FINANCIAL PLANNING FALLS SHORT

Sub-ultra high-net-worth families face what we might call the coordination problem. They have engaged competent professionals across various domains, a **wealth advisor** overseeing their **investment portfolios**, an accountant handling tax preparation, an estate attorney drafting documents, perhaps a business advisor supporting their operating company. Each professional executes their responsibilities well within their scope. Yet no one owns the intersections where true **financial success** is often determined.

Consider a scenario we encounter frequently: a successful entrepreneur has built a manufacturing business worth \$12 million. Their accountant focuses on minimizing current-year taxes. Their **wealth manager** manages separate **investment accounts** containing liquid assets. Their estate attorney drafted documents years ago that haven't been updated to reflect changed circumstances or current **federal estate tax** thresholds. Each professional provides excellent service in isolation, but no one is asking the strategic questions that span multiple domains:

- How does the business succession timeline affect retirement income needs and **investment portfolios** allocation across various **investment accounts**?
- What entity restructuring might reduce both current taxes and eventual **federal estate tax** liability during **wealth transfer**?
- How should charitable giving through a **donor-advised fund** be coordinated with concentrated stock diversification to maximize both philanthropic impact and tax efficiency?
- Are insurance and risk management strategies aligned with updated estate documents and business valuations to protect the family's **financial future**?
- Should a portion of liquid assets be allocated to **alternative investments** such as private equity or real estate funds to enhance diversification?

These integration questions require a **wealth advisor** who sees the complete picture of the family's **financial situation** and can facilitate conversations among professionals who otherwise operate independently. As we explored in our analysis of [why estate plans often fail to protect legacies](#), the documents themselves are rarely the problem. The challenge lies in ensuring all elements of a financial life work together toward coherent **financial goals**.

TRADITIONAL ADVISORY VS. COORDINATED WEALTH PLANNING: A STRATEGIC COMPARISON

Understanding the difference between fragmented and coordinated approaches helps illustrate what sub-ultra high-net-worth families may be missing in their **wealth planning** strategy:

Traditional Fragmented Approach:

- Multiple **financial planners** and professionals work independently with limited communication about **financial goals**
- Tax planning occurs annually at filing time, primarily backward-looking
- **Investment accounts** managed with focus primarily on returns rather than total wealth picture
- Estate documents drafted but rarely integrated with **financial planning** or updated for current **federal estate tax law**
- **Alternative investments** considered in isolation from overall asset allocation
- **Wealth transfer** and charitable giving through **donor-advised funds** treated as distant future concerns

Coordinated Wealth Planning Approach:

- A lead **wealth advisor** orchestrates communication among all professionals around unified **financial goals**
- Tax planning is proactive and integrated with investment and **federal estate tax** strategies
- **Investment portfolios** across all **investment accounts** managed considering after-tax returns, liquidity needs, and total **financial situation**
- **Alternative investments** evaluated within context of complete asset allocation and risk tolerance
- Charitable strategies including **donor-advised funds** integrated with tax planning and **wealth transfer** objectives
- Business succession and personal **wealth planning** coordinated to support long-term **financial success**

The coordinated approach doesn't necessarily require more professionals or higher aggregate fees. Rather, it requires a different organizational structure, a **wealth advisor** responsible for ensuring all pieces work together and identifying opportunities at the intersections.

HOW DOES A VIRTUAL FAMILY OFFICE BRIDGE THE GAP FOR YOUR FINANCIAL FUTURE?

The **virtual family office** model has emerged as a solution for sub-ultra high-net-worth families seeking coordinated service without the overhead of dedicated infrastructure. Unlike traditional single-family offices requiring full-time staff, virtual family offices leverage networks of specialists, **financial planners**, tax professionals, estate attorneys, and investment specialists, who collaborate on behalf of client families under the coordination of a lead **wealth advisor**.

This approach provides access to sophisticated **wealth planning** strategies, tax optimization, **federal estate tax** mitigation, **wealth transfer** structuring through vehicles like **donor-advised funds**, business succession planning, risk management, **alternative investments** evaluation, and **investment portfolios** coordination, at cost structures appropriate for families with \$5–30 million in assets. Industry data suggests that multi-family office and virtual arrangements typically charge between 0.4% and 0.7% of assets under management annually for families in this range,⁶ compared to the 1%+ effective cost when a dedicated single-family office is spread across smaller asset bases.

We have explored the mechanics and benefits of this approach in depth in our piece on [the Virtual Family Office revolution](#). The key insight is that coordination and integration matter more than having all specialists under one roof. What sub-ultra high-net-worth families need isn't necessarily more services from **wealth management firms**; it's better orchestration of the services they already have or should have to achieve their **financial goals** and lasting **financial success**.

WHAT QUESTIONS SHOULD YOU ASK ABOUT YOUR CURRENT FINANCIAL SITUATION?

If you suspect your wealth management approach may have coordination gaps affecting your **wealth planning**, consider these diagnostic questions:

1. **When did your tax advisor, wealth advisor, and estate attorney last meet together?** If the answer is "never" or "years ago," you may be missing optimization opportunities at the intersections of their domains, particularly around **federal estate tax** planning and **wealth transfer** strategies.

2. **Do your investment portfolios across all investment accounts reflect your total balance sheet?** This includes business interests, real estate, **alternative investments**, concentrated positions, human capital, and pension values, not just your managed portfolio.
3. **Who is responsible for asking the “what if” questions about your financial future?** What if interest rates change? What if you sell your business earlier than planned? What if a key employee leaves? What if long-term care becomes necessary?
4. **Are your estate documents aligned with your current financial situation?** Changes in family structure, **federal estate tax law**, or asset composition can render carefully drafted documents ineffective for **wealth transfer**.
5. **Have you explored tax-efficient charitable giving strategies?** Tools like a **donor-advised fund** can provide immediate tax deductions while allowing you to recommend grants to charities over time, coordinated with your overall **financial planning**.
6. **Do you have a clear picture of your comprehensive risk exposure?** This encompasses market risk affecting **investment accounts**, business risk, liability risk, key person risk, and health-related risks across your family.

These questions don't have objectively right answers, but families who can't answer them with confidence may benefit from exploring more integrated approaches with a qualified **wealth advisor**. Strategic **financial planning**, as we discussed in our piece on [how strategic planning transforms financial outcomes](#), begins with understanding where you stand today relative to your **financial goals**.

HOW ARE WEALTH MANAGEMENT FIRMS EVOLVING TO ADDRESS THIS GAP?

Several trends suggest the industry recognizes the underserved nature of the sub-ultra high-net-worth segment. According to McKinsey, an estimated 38% of **financial planners** and advisors, approximately 110,000 professionals, may retire by 2034, creating both challenges and opportunities for how **wealth management firms** deliver comprehensive **wealth planning** services.⁷ Meanwhile, technology platforms now enable more efficient coordination across multiple specialists without requiring the overhead of traditional office structures.

Capgemini's World Wealth Report 2025 found that 52% of high-net-worth investors now seek more holistic advice addressing their complete **financial situation**, up from 29% in 2018.⁸ This growing demand for integrated services is pushing **wealth management firms** to develop new models that bridge traditional advisory relationships and family office capabilities, models capable of addressing **alternative investments**, **federal estate tax** planning, and sophisticated **wealth transfer** strategies.

The wealth management market is projected to exceed \$500 billion by 2030, roughly double its 2021 size.⁹ As the market expands, the most significant growth opportunities may lie in serving segments that have been historically underserved, including sub-ultra high-net-worth families who need sophisticated **wealth planning** encompassing **investment portfolios**, **alternative investments**, charitable vehicles like **donor-advised funds**, and comprehensive **financial planning**, but less than a full family office infrastructure.

KEY TAKEAWAYS: STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUB-ULTRA HIGH-NET-WORTH FAMILIES

- **The gap is structural, not a reflection of your choices:** Wealth management firms have historically organized around segments above and below your asset level. Recognizing this can help you seek solutions designed for your actual **financial situation** rather than adapting solutions built for different needs.
- **Coordination may matter more than any single service:** Many families already have access to competent **financial planners** across relevant domains. The missing element is often a lead **wealth advisor** responsible for ensuring all pieces work together toward unified **financial goals** and lasting **financial success**.
- **Virtual family office models can provide cost-effective solutions:** You don't necessarily need to fund dedicated infrastructure to access sophisticated **wealth planning** capabilities addressing **federal estate tax**, **alternative investments**, and **wealth transfer** strategies. Network-based approaches can deliver integration at sustainable cost levels.
- **Leverage tax-efficient charitable strategies:** Tools such as a **donor-advised fund** can optimize the intersection of philanthropy, tax planning, and **wealth transfer** when coordinated with your overall **financial planning**.
- **Complexity should drive service model, not just asset level:** A family with \$8 million but multiple **investment accounts**, three businesses, rental properties, and multi-generational considerations may need more sophisticated coordination than a family with \$25 million in straightforward **investment portfolios**. Choose services based on your actual complexity, not arbitrary thresholds.
- **The industry is evolving to better serve your financial future:** As demand for integrated services grows and technology enables new delivery models from **wealth management firms**, more options including **alternative investments** access and comprehensive **wealth planning** are becoming available for families in the sub-ultra high-net-worth segment.

MOVING FORWARD: BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR LASTING FINANCIAL SUCCESS

The \$5–30 million wealth range represents one of the most challenging segments for **wealth management firms** and **financial planners** to serve well, and one of the most important. Families at this level have typically worked hard to build their wealth, often through business ownership, professional achievement, or careful stewardship of inherited assets. They deserve **wealth planning** relationships that recognize their complexity without requiring them to fund infrastructure designed for significantly larger fortunes.

If you find yourself in this segment, the first step is simply recognizing that the service gaps you may have experienced aren't unique to your **financial situation**. They reflect structural characteristics of an industry that is still evolving to serve your needs effectively. Armed with that understanding, you can begin evaluating whether your current approach truly integrates all elements of your financial life, **investment portfolios** across multiple **investment accounts**, **alternative investments**, **federal estate tax** planning, **wealth transfer** strategies, charitable giving through vehicles like **donor-advised funds**, and **financial goals**, or whether working with a coordinated **wealth advisor** might help you protect and grow what you've worked so hard to build for your **financial future** and enduring **financial success**.

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