

## Introduction

Plan sponsors and other fiduciaries must make informed decisions when selecting retirement plan administration and compliance service providers. Service providers who successfully undergo independent verification to show that their firms conform to industry best practices can offer their clients a means of demonstrating due diligence in that selection process. Pension Solutions, Inc., a third party administration (TPA) firm in Oklahoma City, chose to pursue the ASPPA Service Provider Certification in order to provide this type of assurance to their clients and prospects. Pension Solutions was awarded the certification following the successful completion of the CEFEX registration process which included a thorough and independent assessment to compare the firm's practices to ASPPA's Standard of Practice.



Since 1962, the firm has been providing consulting, actuarial, and administrative services for retirement plans of all types and sizes of businesses. The firm has always focused on education and excellence, with employees earning various credentials such as Certified Pension Consultant (CPC), Qualified Plan Administrator (QPA), Qualified 401(k) Administrator (QKA), and Accredited Investment Fiduciary (AIF). Now Pension Solutions has added the prestigious firm-level certification – the ASPPA Service Provider Certification – to their list of accomplishments.

Pension Solutions services approximately 350 retirement plans, ranging in size from one participant to 2,000 participants. The firm's expertise spans the gamut of plan types and designs, with a focus on profit sharing, 401(k), ESOPs, defined benefit/cash balance plans, and multiple employer plans. Pension Solutions services a broad region, including Oklahoma, Arkansas, South Central Kansas, and North Central Texas.

## Pension Solutions' Certification Experience

Pension Solutions wants its clients to view the firm as a trusted partner, so the firm was willing to undergo independent verification to earn that trust. Since all of Pension Solution's new business comes to them through referrals - primarily from attorneys, CPAs, registered reps, and RIAs – the certification also gives the referral partners peace of mind that they are recommending a top quality firm that has demonstrated conformance with a standard of excellence. The certification criteria sets the bar high for service providers, and Pension Solutions met the challenge.

As the retirement plan industry continues to evolve, financial services firms and fiduciaries must prepare for the new "era of transparency." "In line with the new fee disclosure requirements, I believe that the more you can tell a client about your firm, the easier it is to build a personal relationship with that client and earn their trust," says Ken Culver, Founder and Vice President of Pension Solutions. Ken's statement is underscored by the firm's tag line – "Rest in our relationship. Trust in our service." Acknowledging that it might only be a matter of time until some type of oversight is required of TPA firms, Pension Solutions made the commitment to its clients to be on the leading edge of industry best practices, and they feel good about the fact that they can demonstrate to their clients that they anticipated the need for independent validation, they prepared for it, and they successfully achieved the certification – even though it was not required. "We did it because it was what was best for our clients – and it was the right thing to do," Ken adds.

Pension Solutions has a history of client loyalty demonstrated by many long-term relationships as well as employee loyalty, with many employees working at the firm more than ten years. Geoff Stallings, President and CEO of Pension Solutions, says "We've always relied on our employees' expertise to develop good procedures and we have a long history of delivering quality service. Going through the ASPPA Service Provider Certification program helped our firm memorialize and document those procedures, and the ongoing annual review process required for certification renewal is in line with our firm's philosophy of continuous process improvement."

## CEFEX

CEFEX, Centre For Fiduciary Excellence, provides independent verification of an organization's conformity with all practices and criteria that constitute a Standard applicable to a particular function involved in the management of other people's financial assets. Whether as trustees or investment committee members of foundations, endowments or retirement plan, or as an Investment Advisor, Asset Manager, Recordkeeper, Administrator or other service provider, the need to demonstrate one's trustworthiness to one's constituents or clients is becoming increasingly more important.

The ASPPA Service Provider Certification program is jointly sponsored by CEFEX and the American Society of Pension Professionals and Actuaries (ASPPA). CEFEX oversees the program in order to maintain complete independence during the registration process. An ASPPA Certification Task Force developed and continues to maintain the Standards of Practice for the program. CEFEX qualified analysts conduct assessments of the service providers and provide a detailed report including recommendation to CEFEX, which is then reviewed by the CEFEX Registration Committee. CEFEX awards the ASPPA Service Provider Certification to those firms that successfully satisfy the assessment criteria and meet the best practices. Certified service providers help fiduciaries meet their fiduciary obligations and provide increased assurance to fiduciaries that industry's best practices are in place.

Standardization is essential in achieving global acceptance of the principles of fiduciary excellence and in assuring investors of consistent, unbiased methodologies. CEFEX uses the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 19011 for performing assessments. This is a methodology employed internationally in other industries for over 30 years.

A successful CEFEX assessment for the ASPPA Service Provider Certification program, as confirmed by the CEFEX Registration Committee results in:

- CEFEX issuing the ASPPA Service Provider Certification
- Registration on CEFEX's and ASPPA's public database at [www.cefex.org](http://www.cefex.org) and [www.asppa.org](http://www.asppa.org), respectively
- Permitted use of the ASPPA "Service Provider Excellence" Certification Seal in both print and on-line form
- Issuance of a Public Certification Report suitable for distribution by the certified firm
- Issuance of a News Release to the CEFEX and ASPPA distribution lists and fi360 blog

The CEFEX Registration remains valid for 12 months and is extended through subsequent annual renewal assessments

This Certified Firm Profile is one of a series demonstrating the experience of CEFEX certified firms, a growing community of investment firms and other entities who recognize the value and importance of fiduciary conformity.



**CEFEX Centre for Fiduciary Excellence, LLC.** is an independent certification organization. CEFEX works closely with industry experts to provide comprehensive assessment programs to promote fiduciary best practices. It certifies investment stewards, advisors, fiduciary advisers (PPA), managers, ASPPA recordkeepers, ASPPA administrators, and support services firms. To learn more about CEFEX, please visit [www.cefex.org](http://www.cefex.org):

2255B Queen St. East, Suite 406 • Toronto, Ontario Canada M4E 1G3 • Tel: 416-693-9733 • e-mail: [admin@cefex.org](mailto:admin@cefex.org)